

# Visual Arts as Restorative Therapy Using Waste Materials in Abia State: A Painterly Approach

Osita Williams A. Ph.D<sup>1</sup>, Nwogu T. O<sup>2</sup> Philips J. U<sup>3</sup>, Adiele Stanley<sup>4</sup>

Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Faculty of Environmental Studies,  
Abia State University, P.M.B, 2000, Uturu, Nigeria. +2348035069888  
ositawilliamsphd@gmail.com

Corresponding author: Osita WA : ( Received: 1/5/2023 | Accepted: 1/6/2023 )

Published: 6/6/2023

**Abstract:** Many scholars have defined waste from different perspectives. Some see waste as unwanted material; to some, it is “useless” materials. The study considers waste as, useless, value-less, refuse, rejected materials, debris or garbage which are of no use to mankind. However, the study is of the view that there is “ability in disability”. Also, there is value in value-less. There could be sense in non-sense. In view of this, therefore, the study tries to position waste materials as irrelevant items or materials to man and environment which could be converted to usefulness, thereby, serving the good of the society. The aim of the study is to situate Visual Arts using painterly Approach as a Restorative therapy using waste materials in Abia State Nigeria. The objectives were achieved by means of field trips. Again, primary and secondary sources of data collation were employed including participant observation methods. Some of the findings include: waste materials could be converted to Usefulness. Creativity and technology may be inspired and promoted through Visual Arts enterprise as a Restorative Therapy using waste materials - a painterly approach. Waste could be effectively recycled to achieve a sustainable aesthetic appeal including therapeutic healings and others. These were significantly followed by conclusion and recommendations.

**Keywords:** Visual arts, Painting, Waste materials, Restoration, Therapy

GJEST

2023

## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Study

Art therapy is one of the functions performed by art to humanity. It is a form of psychotherapy that needs art media as its primary mode of communication. Visual arts can help one's emotional behavior or mental health by reflecting or interacting with the art piece(s). Merely seeing art works helps bring awareness to oneself, thereby, reducing stress and other traumatic experiences hampering human existence. To a considerable extent, painting, indeed arts, help in reactivating and calming emotions, physical and mental disorder as well as learning disabilities in the communities. Visual arts also provide enabling atmosphere and challenging environment for the youth, providing them with appropriate skills for effective entrepreneurship and

service providing acumen that may improve the society, economically, socially, and technologically.

Visual arts have economic advantage especially to the host communities, as they attract tourists and create aesthetic arenas as well as promote indigenous cultures. They provide effective pedestal for visual harmony, communication as well as recreation. The depressed can easily get some relief by beholding sculpture piece(s) that appeal to them thereby bringing back life again. Painting and or Sculpture piece(s) also help in redirecting and repositioning negative emotions, intent, as well as behavior, particularly, when such works arouse or attract extrinsic and intrinsic perceptual appeal.

Above all, visual arts promote creativity and drive individuals, particularly, youths into creative exploration and self-dependency, which may significantly galvanize and inspire innovative technology in the society. This research explores the possibilities and restorative potentials of paintings, especially the ones executed with waste materials; as well as, the influence it exerts on the perception and the day-to-day activities of individuals that come in contact with them. These constitute also to the well-being and development of the society.

The original idea about the study is consideration of sculpture as a restorative therapy using waste materials. During the study, it is observed that narrowing down the research to sculpture may be skewed and may not give the desired result. In view of this, therefore, the researchers consider it appropriate to recast the topic to effectively reflect the aim and objectives of the research, hence, "Visual Arts as Restorative Therapy Using Waste Materials: A Painterly Approach".

### Visual Arts

It must be noted that visual arts is all embracing as it touches areas of the arts including architecture, sculpture, painting and others. However, sculpture here, mostly, is monochromatic in colour, while painting is more of multi-dimensional in colour, therefore, it captures the essence of the research/study. It must be noted, also, that each colour in situ, has a message or certain specific impressions it conveys to the viewers.

The study is of the view that colour is more expensive and touches the emotion to the extent that it heals the soul. Moreso, colour redirects the emotion positively, thereby, bringing about healing and therapeutically, restoring normalcy in individuals suffering from mental and psychological disorder, thereby, justifying the recast of the topic from sculpture to visual arts. However, sculpture is more monochromatic in colour than painting which is multi-dimensional in scope. Visual arts is more embracing as it captures all aspect of the arts which includes sculpture, architecture and others. Without difficulty and iota of doubt, one could observe colossal absence of recycling industries in Uturu community, particularly, Abia State University environment and others. In view of this, therefore, solid waste constitutes a dangerous menace in the communities. In a bid to keep clean and sanitize the environment, most of the scrap metal and other solid waste are hauled out of the state as waste, sometimes, sold to some recycling industries outside the communities and states.

One may agree with the study, that these waste all over the place, tend to distort the beauty and aesthetic, values, awareness and beauty of the environment through proliferation of different waste along major streets and roads in the communities. The study is of the view

that any attempt to improve waste management through recovery, reuse, and recycling of these wastes and possibly convert them into usefulness or beauty may be a huge development. Creating art works with waste materials also goes a long way in relieving the society of the menace posed by lack of proper waste management that is rampant in most states in Nigeria which Abia state is not an exception. What has been considered waste or trash and irrelevant could be turned into or used to fabricate fascinating art works that will inspire and motivate people at all times.

This research, therefore, will galvanize positive change which could promote restorative therapy. It will also create room to harness the potentials and skills of turning waste materials into tangible art works, thereby, promoting self-reliance and entrepreneurship among the youth and society at large. The study shares the view that most ideas or feelings are better expressed in visual forms such as painting which is an integral part of the visual arts. Aniakor (2012) states that visual arts should serve as a counter strategy for redefining new global sites that could anchor individual and national identities and place the society within the global space.

### Problem Statement/Justification

Different projects/researches may have been carried out in sculpture and other areas of Fine and Applied Arts, no comprehensive study on painting as a restorative therapy using waste materials Abia State, hence the need for this research.

Aba and Umuahia are major cities in Abia State, heralding as the center for economic and commercial hub of the state and administrative centre and sit of power respectively. Apart from Aba and Umuahia, Uturu which houses the State University, Umudike where the University of Agriculture is located, as well as Ohafia, Omoba, among others have concentrated human population. As a result, a lot of solid wastes are generated on a daily basis. Despite the government's effort to address waste management with its agencies like ASEPA and sister agencies; it usually seems abortive.

In the view of Odoemene, et al (2016), "Aba is one of the dirtiest cities in Nigeria due to poor waste management system and poor attitude of residents". Of a truth, there are several techniques for waste management as this research will employ the use of waste materials in creating works of art and also in a way curbs the menace caused by indiscriminate disposal of waste in densely populated urban communities of Abia state. By this, different waste materials (junk) will be put to use and made alive and functionalized once again. It will amuse people to see their discarded items being turned into a beautiful art piece.

## Objectives of the Study

The following are objectives of the study;

- a. To encourage the art of recycling of solid waste in Abia State.
- b. To show that painting themes for therapeutic use could be developed from waste materials.
- c. To demonstrate that waste materials could be converted to useful artworks.
- d. To promote creativity and self-reliance in Abia State.
- e. To create aesthetic awareness and values using waste.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Visual arts comprise art forms, such as painting, drawing, design, craft, sculpture, and ceramics among others. This could be achieved effectively using waste materials. In view of this therefore, wastes in the opinion of Okeoma (2023) are usually classified as solid liquid or gaseous waste, depending on the form they are generated. It must be noted that many scholars including the study (the researchers) have defined waste as valueless, unwanted, and useless materials or items which are of no importance and useful to the person disposing them. The study shares the view that in contemporary times, what one may consider as waste, unwanted, useless or valueless may be converted to usefulness and or aesthetically appealing, thereby preserving and promoting health and environment. In support of this, Sridhar and Hammed (2014) citing Okeoma (2023) assert that waste is very much a resource, indeed it can be argued that hardly anything, with the advent of modern technology, ever becomes a waste, because someone will always find a user to another person's waste. For example, the researchers (the visual artists) have tried to explore the possibilities of using wastes to creatively arrive at something aesthetically appealing to the environment using a painterly approach.

Again Sridhar (2001) views waste as unavoidable material from domestic agricultural or livestock activities or industrial operations that have no economic demand that must be disposed off. On the other hand, Everett (2012) considers waste as anything human do not want. In the opinion of Eleje, Anienwelu and Adebayo (2017), waste is refuse, by-products, remains, debris and household garbage that is no longer needed or useful. Again, Festus and Omoboye (2015) describe wastes as materials or substances that are either spoiled, rejected or no longer required for the original purpose. However, it must be noted, according to Miller (2000); Everett (2012) 'solid waste is conventionally defined as non-liquid, non-soluble material ranging from municipal

garbage to industrial waste that contain complex and sometimes hazardous substances. Okeoma (2023) remarks that going by the definitions of waste and solid waste, it implies that as far as man continues to exist and function on earth, he is bound to generate waste. The waste he generates can come in different types, composition, forms, state, sizes and volumes depending on the activity that led to the generation of such waste. How man handles such waste determines his health status and the condition of his environment. Waste management, therefore, becomes an important issue that should attract serious attention of everyone in the communities. Aesthetic appeal and awareness here becomes significant to effective human existence as it promotes growth and sustainable development.

Art influences society by changing opinions, instilling values and translating experiences across space and time and painting as part of it are often considered to be repository of a society's collective memory. Researchers have long been interested in the relationship between art and the human brain. For example, in 2003, researchers from Newcastle University found that viewing contemporary visual arts has positive effects on the personal lives of nursing home-bound elders, (Reference 2019). As such should be recognized and properly placed in the society as a restorative therapy. Aniakor (2012) in *"Africa and the Politics of Postcoloniality"*, supports visual arts as a viable means of restorative therapy. Ayakoroma and Ojewuyi, (2011), Ekpo (2008), Azeez (2001) all situate visual arts as a restorative therapy that may heal psychological and emotional discomfort.

In the opinion of Fatima (2019), Eco-artists are, nowadays, transforming old, recycled and reused object into amazing pieces of contemporary art. The trend started gaining prominence in 1980s when museums and galleries in the Western world opened their doors for such innovation and creativity. Also, in recent years, many artists in the Middle East has started expressing their support for recycling and sustainability through artworks where they merge traditional tone with contemporary themes, creating attractive installation arts that express local cultural heritage in the larger public interests. Artists are expressing their emotions and ideas through a wide range of recyclables glass, cans, plastics, CDs, PET bottles etc.

Also, Eric (2019) was of the view that, if one considers the artistic history of man as a whole, one may realize, it is only very recently that profound changes have taken place. From the days of the caveman to the 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Art was closely linked either to beliefs and religions, or to political authorities. He went on to assert that 'the artist, his imagination and his talent, were their servants. The artist enjoyed a certain creative freedom but within limits, restricted at different times by dictated themes and by aesthetics of the day. The French Revolution and the advent of the industrial age changed

the firmest foundations of Art. During that period, there was shift from an art based on a socio-religious creator to an art of a mere individual inspiration. This revolution led to different art movements that led to the “modern” art of today. The so called “modern” art was both a break and continuation in the sense that it was an answer to well-defined creative problems. The use of debris or waste in Art today is not by chance, but rather a long evolution of artistic and social history. But this evolution only explains the possible appearance of waste in Art, and not, the reason for its use in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Eric, 2019).

In further research, Gillian (2011) addresses current problem with obsolescence and suggests that waste is “an adjunct of luxury. Junk, trash, garbage, rubbish, refuse – whatever you call it – is dependent on economic wealth and excess production. Industrialized hi-tech urban cultures produce and thrive on the market for new and disposable goods,” and that our society is currently facing how to deal with the overwhelming immensity of space taken up by domestic and industrial production of rubbish. The reason space for landfills and dumping grounds continues to expand with waste has to do with human perception of what makes garbage. From a consumerist view of shelf life once and inanimate object no longer fills its original purpose for the perceived needs – or if something more efficient, prettier, newer, shinier comes along – the object is named trash in comparison to its previous useful life.

Furthermore, Mears (2018) noted that ‘our everyday experience with the specific functions of manufactured objects creates a lens through which we conceive and react to salvaged objects. A disconnect occurs during contextual shifts when the object seen ruptures preconceived assumptions of that object’s utility’. When an object becomes art, the usefulness of the final form not only has a monetary value as a cultural item, but also an aesthetic value as a transformative item. In other words, a creation of recycled art maintains value as a tool for participating in critical engagement and having an aesthetic experience. Aristotle is of the view, according to Adams (1996) that visual arts could improve on environment or nature by various means such as idealization and stylization. In the contemporary world waste materials could be converted to usefulness or resourcefulness thereby improving on nature or environment. In the view of Adams (1996) Aristotle believes that truth and beauty are contained in the forms, and structures of visual arts particularly, sculptures.

On the other hand, Plato holds a contrary view and believes that visual arts is a total deviation from the truth. Osita (2017) states that this total deviation, gives impetus and direction to the rise, growth and development of major art movements in the contemporary times known as Abstraction, Constructivism, Cubism, Dadaism, Conceptualism, Assemblage, Expressionism and others which are significant lubricants that have motivated and inspired this research “Sculpture as Restorative Therapy Using Waste Materials”. However, these art movement in

recent times have added to knowledge, creativity, advanced development, promoted diverse cultures and in the end have paved way for a suitable playground for the development of the environment aesthetically, culturally, intellectually, as well as creatively inspiring the individuals and communities at large.

Visual art creates a colossal environment for art therapy, which is a form of psychotherapy that needs art media as its primary mode of communication. For example, for migration victims, sculpture gardens can help such victim’s emotional behavior or mental health by reflecting or interacting with the images in these art works or the images in the sculpture gardens. Osita (2014) shares the view that merely viewing or seeing the art works in the gardens help bring awareness to oneself, thereby, reducing stress and other traumatic experiences. However, it must be noted that visual arts, particularly, sculpture gardens help in reactivating and calming down emotions and other physical, mental and psychological disorders in humans.

Also, it must be noted that visual art galleries or sculpture gardens serve as therapeutic centres for people with learning disabilities, behavioral or social problems in the communities. Silently or subconsciously, these works, according to Osita, (2015) check, reduce, control or remove on the long run, such emotional or mental disorders that naturally oppress the mind. Also, there is a feeling that emanates from the works in the various studios, galleries or sculpture gardens, particularly, when such works are viewed objectively. Such feelings become very intrinsic and such intrinsic perceptual appeal results to emotional healing, psychological healing and remedies to other human disorders.

## Methodology

Different procedures for data collation abound as there are different research designs. For this study, participant observation method, field trips including primary and secondary sources of data collation are employed to achieve the objectives of the study.

Again, the study is executed through the use of fieldworks/fieldtrips where the researchers employ the use of informal and unstructured interviews to draw information from key informants. The study entails the researchers adopting technique of going into the study area of study and participating in the activities thereby engaging the key informants through informal and unstructured interviews to reduce or minimize bias and undiluted information which aids in achieving the objectives of the study. The researchers also, during fieldtrips, draw sketches, take photographs as exemplified in figures 1 – 3 which assist in effectively achieving the objectives of the study.

The study is also executed through primary and secondary sources of data collation. Primary data are collated during fieldtrips through interviews, observations,

sketches and photographs, while secondary data is drawn from library research, journal, exhibition catalogues, conference papers proposals, seminar papers and others. These make the method diachronic and thus help in achieving balance in the analysis. Every study is said to build on existing knowledge and from the known, one may proceed to the unknown. To this effect, the study is executed against the framework of some visual arts theories like structural functionalism and formalism, icons and iconography.

major reason drawing is considered a huge global phenomenon that may underscore and facilitate technological advancement in modern societies or countries today. Also, drawing and sketches are significantly important in most creative and artistic creations; hence the sketches and paintings below are used to drive home the study's objectives. Some examples of drawings and or sketches are as exemplified below in figures 1 and 2;

### Development of Practical Work

Drawing inspires creativity and innovative technology within and outside the country. This is the



**Figure 1:**Sketch of Traditional Dancer I'  
ABSU: © Osita, Williams A.



**Figure 2:**'Sketch of Traditional Dancer II'  
ABSU: © Osita, Williams A.



**Figure 3:** 'Traditional Dancer I'  
executed using Waste Materials  
ABSU: © Osita, Williams A



**Figure 4:** 'Traditional Dancer II'  
executed using Waste Materials  
ABSU: © Osita, Williams A

### Results (Expected Output)

S/N	Activity	Expected Output
1.	Locating/Visits to waste disposal sites in various communities in Abia State	Identification of waste materials that can be recycled
2.	Selection and assembling of relevant metals and other relevant discarded materials	The waste materials are characterized based on suitability for manipulation
3.	Examination of selected materials	Durability classification is done on the selected materials
4.	Stretching, washing and polishing of sourced materials	The materials are polished for manipulation and art creation
5.	Production of art work	Creation of art work (painting) with the selected/polished waste materials
6.	Mounting of work	A painting is erected

## Work Plan/Time Frame

S/N	Activity	Months											
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
1.	Trips to communities and towns in Abia State comprising Aba, Umuahia, Ohafia among others	X	X										
2.	Identification of waste and gathering of waste materials			X	X	X							
3.	Characterization of waste materials						X						
4.	Production of Painting with waste materials							X	X				
5.	Mounting of the Painting										X		
6.	Writing and submission of final report												X

**Total number of months = 10**

## CONCLUSION

The study observes that waste could be converted to usefulness. Waste materials also, could also inspire creativity and promote technology.

Conclusively, the study share the views of Sridhar (2001) who sees waste as unavoidable material from domestic, agricultural or livestock activities, or industrial operations that have no economic demand, that must be disposed off. Everette (2012) considers waste as anything human do not want. Some scholars also see it as by-products, remains, debris, refuse and garbage that are no longer needed or useful. In all of these, the creative artists see everything in the environment as useful hence converting waste into sustainable aesthetic appeal and creative paradigm thereby, changing the narrative of waste as entirely nuisance and useless materials to a massive means of creative exploration and Restorative Therapy in the Society.

environment which could peradventure proffer emotional healing to patients.

However, below is the final work on “Visual Arts as Restorative Therapy Using Waste Materials: A Painterly Approach”.

## Recommendations

The following recommend ion were made

i. Visual Arts should be appreciated and encouraged in the society.

ii. Visual Arts inspires creativity, technology and should not be relegated to the background.

iii. Visual Arts should be encouraged in the society, because it helps to promote and preserve cultural heritage which some are already facing extinction.

iv. Commissioned Art works such as paintings should be used to beautify strategic points in the society. Health centres and hospitals should consult artists for production of inspiring art works for decoration of



**Figure 5: 'Cheerleader'**  
 executed using waste materials  
 Size: 244cm X 122cm  
 Year: 2023

## REFERENCES

- Adams, L. S. (1996) *The Methodologies of Art: An Introduction*, Oxford: West view Press Publishers
- Aniakor, C. C. (2012) "Knowledge, its Production Commodification and the Music of Violence" *Africa and The politics of postcoloniality*, Enugu: The Pan-African Circle of Artist publishers.
- Ayakoroma, B. F. (2011) *Arts, Culture, Language and National Integration*, Abuja: National Institute for cultural orientation.
- Azeez, A. (2001) "Art/culture and the Politics of Identity in Africa" *A Discursive Bazaar*, Enugu: The Pan-African circle of Artists Publishers' (2001) 44-45
- Cultural Policy of Nigeria, Lagos: Federal Government Printing Press (1988)
- Ekpo, E. (2008) *From Shrine to Showcase Masterpiece of Nigerian Art*, Abuja: The Ministry of Information and Communication press. P. 33-34
- Eleje, E. O. Anienwelu, P. C. and Adenbayo, G. O. (2017), Financial and Economic Implications of Solid Waste Management in Nigeria, *Journal of Research in National Development*. 15 (1) 330-340. Retrieved on August 27, 2020 from <https://www.ajol.info/index.p>
- Encyclopedia of Art (2019) "The Art of Sculpture" [www.visual-arts-cork.com/sculpture.htm](http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/sculpture.htm)



- Eric B. (2019) "Waste Materials in Art" <https://www.ericbossard.com/gb/plus/les-dechets-dans-lart/> Accessed: 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020.
- Fatima A. (2019) Echoing Sustainability in MENA (EcoMENA). [www.ecomena.org/recycling-art/](http://www.ecomena.org/recycling-art/) Accessed: 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2020.
- Mears, E. (2018) "Recycling as Creativity: An Environmental Approach to Twentieth – Century American Art". *American Studies Journal* 64. DOI 10.18422/64-05
- Odoemene, U. D., Ofodu J. C. (2016) "Solid Wastes Management in Aba Metropolis". *International Journal of Advanced Academic Research/Sciences, Technology & Engineering*.
- Ojewuyi, O. (2011) *Katanfuru: The illogic of Culture-Nomics in Nigeria Cultural Administration*, Abuja: National Institute for Cultural orientation.
- Okeoma, I. O. (2023) "Analysis of Urban Mining Activities in Selected Areas of Imo State Nigeria. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis presented to the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, ABSU, Uturu.
- Osita, W. A. (2015) *Sculpture Gardens Experiences As Total Therapy*. *Journal of Visual Dialectics*, 1, No 2, Abraka: Society of non-fiction Authors of Nigeria Publishers.
- Osita, W. A. (2017) "Drawing As Veritable Tool For Environmental Growth and Housing Development. Abia State University, Uturu Example". *Contemporary Issues in the Nigerian Built Environment, Owerri: Flyann Ltd.*
- Osita, W. A. (2017) "Visual Arts and the Artists' Perspectives in Housing and Environmental Development" *Contemporary Issues in the Nigerian Built Environment, Owerri: Flyann Ltd.*
- Osita, W. A. and Adiele, Stanley (2020) "Visual Arts as Restorative Therapy Using Waste Materials for Sustainable Development" *International Journal of Arts and Humanities, Spring Journals* vol. 8(1): pp. 001 – 006
- Sridhar, M. K. C. (2001) *Waste Management: Potentials and Constraints*. A Paper Presented at a one day advocacy meeting with policy makers from Lagos and Oyo States on Waste Management, February 15, 2001 at Lafia Hotel, Ibadan Nigeria.
- Sridhar, M. K. C. and Hammed, T. B. (2014) *Turning Waste to Wealth in Nigeria: An Overview*. *Journal of Human Ecology*, 46(2) 195-203