

EVOLVING 21ST CENTURY ICONOGRAPHY

By

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A Thesis submitted to the Department of Industrial Art,
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology,
in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ART (CERAMICS)

Faculty of Art, College of Art and Built Environment

November 2015

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person which have been accepted for the award of any other degree at KNUST or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

The study explores money as an economic factor and discusses how it has significantly driven humankind from different locations to places where it is found in abundance. It investigates and explains how the search for wealth is responsible for all major cross border interactions between different races, nationals and ethnic cultures. Metaphorically, the cowrie shell has been used to represent ‘money’. It is used with other leading modern currency symbols, abstract and conceptual humanoid forms to describe mans desire for wealth. The concept of the iconographic pieces is premised on symbolic expositions that throw light on economic issues which affect all classes of people in modern times. Plastic clay and other allied ceramic materials such as coloured slips and manganese oxide constitute the material base of the project; and the most appropriate studio forming methods were employed in constructing the art pieces. The purpose of this study is to indicate how cultural barriers, racism, cultural identity crises and other related indigenous cultural issues are losing their significance because of money. It does this by exploring and producing design concepts that addresses cultural connectivity and the universal symbolisms in money. The 21st century iconographic pieces represent contextual ideas that promote the production of pluralistic artworks for the shared spaces on multicultural platforms.

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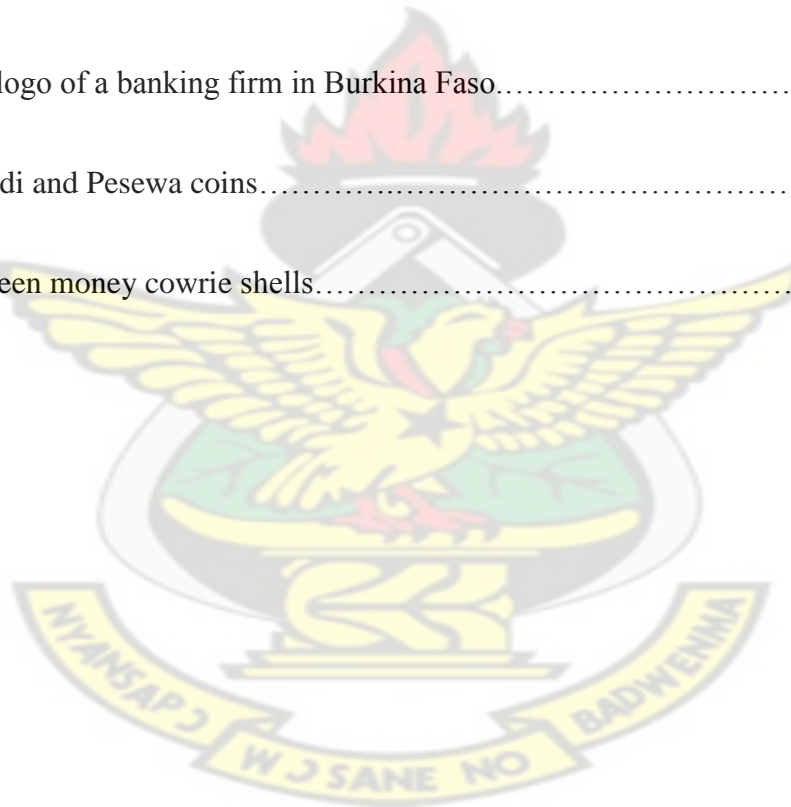
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Works of art communicate different meanings depending on the audience. Historically, some of the greatest works of art have transcended time to communicate to different generations. This could be because the impulse for creating such art works emanated from the awareness of the 'past', 'present' and the 'conceivable future'. The categories of such art works are immediately recognizable because they carry cultural codes in compact images. They are referred to as iconic works of art because of their popularity (Husley, 2005).

A search through history reveals how economic issues hold special significance to the masses of people. Money is a major symbol in economics, and it is a popular subject in the minds of people. Its popularity keeps expanding because humanity and life in general depend on it. The search for money and wealth and the acquisition of same; is responsible for widely known phenomena such as colonization, diasporization and globalization (Mensah, 2012). These situations have resulted in the formation of new cultures and lifestyles that open up people to identify with almost every culture in today's digital age.

The development of new cultural practices imprints new memories and visual impressions on the mind. Its outcome is the formation of complex people whose identity become difficult to investigate. Creating art to interpret any aspect of their lives therefore requires an expansive research on their cultural and artistic life. In his conceptualizations inquiry to art, Eisner (1998) argues that there are numerous ways of knowing that

knowledge is manufactured and not simply discovered; and that enquiry will be more complete as researchers increase the range of ways in which they can investigate, describe and interpret the world. Using art to construct an economic meaning to people living in multiple cultures requires a historical search for popular monetary symbols. Historically, the cowrie shell was a common currency used in almost every continent. Its' symbolic usage is still functional in some modern cultures and financial institutions (Van Damme, 2007). This project uses the cowry shell as a fine art idiom to describe the economic situation of humankind.

1.2 Research Statement

The 21st century comes with a digital age media which has made world citizenship possible. People have learned different national and ethnic cultures through the media. Creating art to communicate to people living in such multiple-cultures comes as a difficult task. It requires commensurate artistic concepts that would bridge the gap between different cultures and still make meaning by adhering to a particular subject matter. In all cultures, possessing “money” and “wealth” is believed to make life pleasurable. Wealth has an attractive attribute, and it makes humanity yearn for it time and again. This situation is responsible for most cross boarder interactions through trade and migration. For instance Ghanaians in the diaspora may have traveled to other countries for varied reasons, but the main mission is usually to make wealth and have a good living standards; a phenomenon that has affected almost all national cultures across the globe.

Hall (1990) explains that images evoke an imaginary coherence on the experience of separation from original cultures, which is the history of the diaspora. With money as the main subject matter, the challenge then, is to reconcile alienated cultures and promote worldviews through the use of universally acknowledged monetary symbols. The study therefore seeks to identify an appropriate idiom, explore design concepts and produce ceramic studio art pieces that emphasize on cultural connectivity and universal symbolism of money.

1.3 Objectives of the study

1. To explore design concepts that addresses the universal iconography of money.
2. To produce conceptualized symbolic ceramic art works that epitomizes cultural connectivity with the iconography of money.

1.4 Studio Practice Questions

The studio practice questions are as follows:

1. How best can one conceptualize design and produce artworks that can convey a worldview of meaning by adhering to a particular subject matter?
2. What is the most appropriate imagery that can depict the subject of money in the 21st century?

1.5 Scope of the study

There are numerous iconographic works of art around the world. Each of them follows different line of thoughts and subject matter. This study focuses on the connotations of money within the diaspora and globalization. It describes how the quest for money affects migration, politics and world views. The study is limited to using the cowrie symbol and other modern currency symbols to describe the conduct of man towards the acquisition of wealth. The idea is explored using ceramic studio forming methods such as slab building and press molding to produce 21st century iconographies.

1.6 Significance of the study

This project identifies money as an icon. From the perspective of the Ghanaian diaspora, the symbolic cowrie shell is used as a fine art idiom to reconcile dual cultural identities and to promote world views. The study describes increased global cooperation in the 21st century; as it outlines cultural differences and synthesis of same through the production of artworks viable for shared cultural spaces. Finally, it can be used as a point of reference to describe how man's cravings for wealth reveal the abstracted money as the best medium to appeal to universal identities.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This study is structured into five chapters:

Chapter one gives a brief description of the study; it presents the thesis statement, objectives of the study, studio practice questions, scope of the study and the significance of the study. Chapter two deals with the review of related literature for increased understanding of the main ‘hunch’ and pave the way for the conceptual framework. Chapter three presents the methodological perspectives of the study, the studio practice techniques used have been fully discussed in this chapter. Chapter four presents the detailed accounts of the results, findings and discussion of the study. Chapter five presents a summary, conclusion and recommendations of the study.



CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The chapter reviews literature on the prospects of cross boarder migration; and the state of being of the modern man in terms of cultural identity and visual culture. It also touches on art related issues like hybridity in art, semiotics, iconography, symbolism, the cowry shell, the birth of Ghana's currency and the research idiom.

2.2 Iconography

The term iconography is derived from the Greek word *eikonographein*, meaning image writing. Iconography concerns itself with the subject matter of an image or object, and by extension its meaning and interpretation. It is a descriptive discipline that gathers, and classifies images and cultural symbols. Iconography describes and presupposes a familiarity with specific themes or concepts that are transmitted through literary sources or by oral tradition (Panofsky, 1993). Using a more specific approach, he defined iconography as:

“A description and classification of images: it is limited and, as it were, ancillary study which informs us as to when and where specific themes were visualized by which specific motifs. In doing all this, iconography is the necessary basis for all further interpretation. It does not, however, attempt to work out this interpretation for itself”.

Erwin Panofsky (1993, p.57)

The word iconography appears frequently in both mainstream media as well as scholarly studies. The situation opens the word icon up to multiple definitions (Husley, 2005). According to the American heritage dictionary, icon is an image or a representation; a representation of a picture or a sacred or sanctified Christian personage traditionally used and venerated in the Eastern Church. An important and enduring symbol, one which is the object of great attention and devotion; and a picture on a screen that represents a specific file, directory, window, option, or program on a computer. Icons on computer are direct in usage, it suggests to the user the primary purpose of a program or operation even without an accompanying text. An icon defined as an enduring symbol, and an object of great devotion stands in a similar semiotic range as the biblical definition, and it fully meet the needs of this study. The two contains elements that allow timeless objects and symbols to be called icons. The iconography of the Holy Virgin Mary and her son, the Christ is a popular timeless icon in the Christian religion. The extensive use of these images keeps growing; and it seems as though, there will be no ending to their iconic use. This is because they are specific to a particular well-known religion which keeps expanding every day. Akpabio (2003) noted that, Icons are generally regarded as standings for representing something; they are culture specific, as what they communicate is based on society's history, experience and circumstances. Gyekye (1996) acknowledged that, the primary cultural context of artistic creations require the use of symbolism; meaning and ideas are given expression through symbolic art; and anytime symbolic images are used in artifacts, they communicate societal values and concepts known to the people associated with them. The study of iconography is centered on images, and these images are generated by human subjects from systems of signs so they

can be exposed to semiotic analysis. However iconographic images capitalize mainly on traditionally fixed themes and forms as subject matter, and these themes are expressed symbolically. Figure 1 has an image of the holy virgin of Smolensk.



Fig. 1: Icon of Holy Virgin of Smolensk. Bridgeman Art Library/ Kremlin Museum, Moscow, Russia. www.ahdictionary.com

Symbols do not mirror the ideas or languages they represent. Oftentimes, they mean what they mean and there is no natural relationship between them and their meanings. Accordingly, Husley (2005) noted in his study of national icons that, symbols do not denote particular objects but a general class. However, when situated in discourse, symbols acquire more specific meanings as they interact with indices and icons. An index is a sign that correlates with and implies another meaning in space or time. For instance, a thermometer is an index of temperature. Index points to a meaning but icons are capable of communicating an idea directly. He reiterated that pictures, diagrams, algebraic expressions and metaphors are icons. His position on iconography allows the metaphoric usage of popular historical and cultural objects to stand as icons. Thus depending on how

humankind has experienced such objects and their enduring dynamics when considered in relation to time and space.

Iconography is a key to decoding the definitive meaning of a work of art, and it relies on the elusive underlying cultural principles of representation. One topic that resurfaces in the search for meaning of art forms is the location of the work. Taylor (2008) explains that, a works location may tell us something about how it was to be used and how it could have been used. Obviously, Taylor's opinion about the location or origin of a work of art conflates with its functions to generate meaningful interpretational discussions among critics. Another aspect of location that helps to grasp meanings in iconographic images is the origin of the artist. Artist often refer back to the memory of earlier places they had migrated from in their quest to produce art works. Images from places of origin reflect in their works, regardless of the theme of the art piece. Essentially, Panofsky (1993) indicates that, the intellect is still another segment of the human where images are stored. Therefore, it could be argued that such occurrence is only a situation of images on the subconscious mind registering at the epiphanic stage of the conceptualization process. The researcher shares in the view that, the concepts for creating cultural artworks are usually premised on the traditional culture of the artist. Though it is possible to investigate and interpret iconographic themes of cultures that have little or no textual records, choosing an easier approach requires expanding the perspectives of comprehending visual images. The work of Serafini (2011), establishes a multimodal approach to comprehending visual images. According to him, a multimodal means incorporating a variety of modes, including visual images, hypertext and graphic design elements along with written text as a means of comprehending visual images. This

approach is by far a step beyond the traditional intellectual strategies often used for understanding art. As cited by Serafini, Unsworth and Wheeler (2002) asserted that if readers are to understand how images represent and construct meaning, they need knowledge of the various visual sign systems (e.g., photography, diagrams, graphs, typography, illustrations) used in their production and interpretation. Another major approach to understanding icons is using the linguistic based medium. Husley (2005) explained that icons function properly when given names; and the names invoke the icon's presence even without the visage of an image.

Entirely, all cultures have sign systems, these systems determine the ways in which meaning and information is communicated and received (Geertz, 1983). Art, like literature, is a system of meaning, and we must “consider that there are facts, principles, rules, and ways of making and understanding art that are learned through an education system and or a social structure that determines how a culture sees and experiences the world” (Chanda, 2004). Like all arts and literature, icons also have principles that aids in understanding what they stand for. The key to understanding iconic images lies in the perceptive senses, but more especially, the sense of sight. The gaze according to Husley (2005) is the basis for acknowledging an object as an icon. He explains that, the gaze of iconic images must gain mass exposure and recognition; and that iconography is a product of public awareness. Therefore, even unpopular objects and people could be hyped on mass media platforms or can be rendered in any of the visual arts; like painting, photography, sculpture, and film to make them popular.

Undoubtedly, iconography relies on fame and publicity to reveal their kind. The change of objects and people from anonymity to popularity could depend on how wide that

object is experienced by the masses. The concept of iconography itself can be built on individual and era sensitive excellence, and fame. It can be used to address traditional, cultural, national, international and global circumstances. However, the symbolisms ascribed to iconic images and objects must certainly have some direct reflection in the icon so as to allow easy identification by audiences or spectators. Iconography often uses direct communication in the form of images; they must however have a semiotic dimension that makes them stand for a linguistic sign but not the objects, images or personality presented (Husley, 2005).

2.3 Icons in 21st century visual culture

The definitive boundary of 21st century visual culture contains many 'icons'; and the word icon could be applied to a wide range of people and objects. Attempting to define icon as a component of visual culture; the Collins English dictionary defined icons as a person or thing regarded as a symbol of a belief, nation, community or cultural movement. Relatively, the concise oxford dictionary tenth edition, also defines icons as a person or a thing regarded as a representative symbol or as worthy of veneration. The two definitions embody both fame and respect for symbolic people and objects. This situation is responsible for the influx of icons in current visual cultures. Modern icons consist of presidents, billionaires, soccer stars, music stars, movie stars, and the clergy. The range of objects in iconography may comprise of iconic landmarks, currency symbols and metaphorical ideas that represent cultural values such as wealth, poverty, beauty,

authority, strength, power, love, liberty and so on. A typical example of an iconic landmark is shown in Figure 2.



Fig. 2: Statue of liberty, New York City, USA
The Statue of Liberty, since 1924 a national monument, is recognized as a universal symbol of freedom and democracy. www.nationsonline.org

The popular images broadcast by the current 21st century visual technologies reveal certain characteristics. From critical observation, it is clear that, visual technology screens often advertise ‘the rich and powerful’ people of the age. The key assumption to this circumstance is that, money rules this epoch. In the journal of the Numismatic Association of Australia (2006), Reynolds Barrie explains that, money affects all aspects of our lives and activities. Without it, modern society could not function. We use money in our purchases; we use it to value our goods and services and our property. Money still plays valuable social, ritual and ceremonial roles in contemporary times just as it did in the past. Accordingly, the quest for money grows stronger and stronger everyday in this epoch. This is due to the flamboyant, luxurious, beautiful and sophisticated attributes that characterizes 21st century visual culture.

2.4 Visual Culture

As history has it, the phrase ‘visual culture’ has proven both usefully and confusingly versatile, this could be attributed to the ever changing and expansive nature of both ‘visuals’ and ‘culture’. Visual culture is a philosophical and epistemological stance that acknowledges visuality as essential to the formation of the world. Visuality is the way in which certain means of seeing the world are created, and how these creations are powerful because they affect the manner we interpret the things we see (Gillian, 2007).

Research on visual culture revolves around three major concepts: thus representation, meaning and culture. According to Mirzoeff (1998, p. 42) seeing is a great deal more than believing in recent times. As he indicates, embedded in the word ‘see’ are the circumstances that take centre stage and generate the most heated debates in the world over. Mirzoeff, reiterated that visual culture is not just part of your everyday life, but it is your everyday life’. He explains further that, visual reality can be confusing. Because observing the visual demands of a culture is not the same as understanding it; and that the gap between the wealth of visual experience in modern culture, and how to understand what is observed marks both the opportunity and the need for visual culture as a field of study.

According to Campbell and Schroeder (2011), visual culture as a term, refers to both visual culture as a visual aspect of culture and to visual culture as a scholarly discipline. Visual culture as a discipline highlights the basic importance of image in cultural life. Images hold a pervasive power that makes them stronger tools for representing societal issues. Owing to the fast pace of technological developments in the digital age, visual

images and artifacts ranging from what we wear to what we watch are now responsible for the global transformation of culture. We live in an increasingly image-saturated world where television and internet usage has overcome the ancient barriers of time and distance to control a person's knowledge about current events. Visual culture is now widespread and it reflects, as well as influences, general cultural changes.

2.5 Cultural Identity

The Oxford dictionary defines culture as, the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively. Culture is noted as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. With the development of anthropological science, the definition becomes complex every day. The word “culture” is now an intricate term that is used to describe every circumstance in the world today. Though facts about human society, particular places and time still forms the bedrock of its definition; the effects of global economic struggles, political and technological evolutions overshadow and relegate its basics into the shadows. Every culture has a heritage that defines the events of specific periods. These heritages are usually transferred from one generation to the other. As cited by Jokilehto (2005), UNESCO has defined ‘cultural heritage’ in its Draft Medium Plan 1990-1995, it states that, cultural heritage is the entire corpus of material signs – either artistic or symbolic-handed on by the past to each culture and, therefore, to the whole of humankind. As a constituent part of the affirmation and enrichment of cultural identities and as a legacy belonging to all humankind, the

cultural heritage gives each particular place its recognizable features and is the storehouse of human experience.

The UNESCO's definition to cultural heritage, gives a strong indication that historical heritages, in the form of objects, either artistic or symbolic do not die out. This is because humanity identifies with such objects and transfers them from one generation to the other. According to Belich and Wevers (2008), cultural identity is the software of large human groups – it is what makes them self-aware groups, it is not simply a matter of shared artistic culture, but of shared language, customs, habits, values, and practices, and of shared identifiers, icons and symbols. Hall (1990) explains that 'Cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, and have histories. Therefore, popular cultures always have a way of appealing to the future just as it did in the past.

Cross-cultural interaction exposes individuals to different indigenous cultural heritages, and the situation creates identity crises due to the exposure to new cultural objects. However, anthropological studies has shown that, the original culture of an individual holds special significance in their lives no matter the number of transnational cultural interaction he or she is exposed to. Skulj (2000) posited that, the validity of cultural identity cannot be equivalent to the measure of originality in an inherent national subjectivity. His argument could mean that, in spite of the complex issues that characterize the identification of people living in adopted cultures, the possibility to capture their identity with specific subject matter through imagery in art still exists. The diaspora's susceptibility to identity change is only temporal to allow adaptability and

conformity to new environments and status quos. Levitt (2001), espoused this view in her study on the United States immigrants when she noted that, immigrants do not learn monolithic cultures; they adopt some values and practices but not others, thus depending on the circumstances. They may exhibit structural assimilation without cultural assimilation, or they may assimilate into different segments of society. They may often use their identities symbolically or instrumentally, tailoring them to fit into particular settings.

The cultural identity of immigrants changes with time depending on the situations people encounter in new societies of residence. Cultural boundaries are being broken down every day to give room for increasing blends that give great prospects for global cooperation. Cultural identity in global context now constitutes many similarities and significant differences; this phenomena explains ‘what a people really are’ and ‘what they have become’ in terms of history and modernity. However, exposure to different modern cultures hardly changes the complete original self-identity of an individual. The situation therefore, creates the opportunity for artist to use both past and present artistic objects to communicate meaning in 21st century art works.

2.6 Conservation of Cultural Objects

According to Bal (2003), Visual culture study is grounded in the specificity of its object domain; lack of clarity on what that object domain is remains a challenge in understanding its meaning. The media is international, and it holds the most current cultural images of the times. However, indigenous images still remain within local

traditions. Current image theories despite their claim to universal validity, usually represents Western traditions of thinking. The search for origin becomes easier, when delimited to specific cultures across the globe. Searching through historical transitions in culture and its accompanied visuals is essential for tracing images and object origins.

Chirekure (2013) indicates that, with varying degrees of effectiveness, African countries have legal frameworks for conserving heritage. Such laws have created administrative structures responsible for heritage protection in its various forms. For example, the Antiquities Department of Tanzania, the South African Heritage Resources Agency and the National Museums and Monuments Board of Ghana are mandated with heritage protection in their countries. Similarly, artistic images and objects of most cultures are kept in national museums for protection and conservation of national heritages. In a broader scope therefore, much could be said about the visual culture of past generations just as the visual culture of contemporary times. Notwithstanding, modern trends broadcast the iconography of money and its associated symbolisms than any other cultural icons.

2.7 Symbolism

The use of symbols in communication is a phenomenon that is used in almost every discipline: and this application is also prevalent in art. Symbols are standings that are used to represent something else. Artistic images are symbolic by nature and according to Hudson and Morrissey (2002), symbolism can be overt or hidden. The overt symbolism is readily understood while the meaning of the hidden symbolism is not as obvious.

Understanding the meaning of a work of art is the main task of the viewer who looks at the work. However, the process requires deep contemplation that takes note of every feature of the work. As an element of art language, the artistic image in every work of art is unique: it arouses various feelings and thoughts. Sometimes, it creates the sensation of time and events that gives the viewer multidimensional clues about its meaning. However, the change of an image to symbol bears a deep linguistic approach; and the original symbol is compared to global ideological contents to reveal its meaning.

2.8 Hybridity in Art

Hybrid refers to mixing species; it entered the scientific vocabulary in the 19th century biology and botany. In the 19th century ethnology it acquired the racial anxieties that characterize it (Young, 1995). Counts (2006), define hybridity as the creation of transcultural forms in zones of contact that reject specificity and at the same time promote their own ambivalence. Munos (1999) writes that ‘hybrid catches the fragmentary subject formation of people whose identities traverse different race, sexuality, and gender identifications’. The definitions above clearly depict a situation of merging fragmented identities. Consequently, the diaspora becomes an important conceptual tool in hybridity because the multiple standpoints of migration and exile are highlighted in the definitions. Dwelling on Stuart Halls’ issue on cultural identity and diaspora, Mathews (2002) explains how diasporans are compelled to reflect on their culture and identity and how these reflections generate creative ideas for producing cultural artefacts. She further argues that hybridity demonstrates how cultural identities

are not essentially based on ethnicity but are premised on the effect of history and culture forged through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth.

Hybridity explains the merger of ideas, concepts, and themes that emphasize and contradict each other. It bears a risky attribute in one sense because; it could stir up misperception rather than the supposed meaning that it is meant to convey. The varied and sometimes contradictory nature of its use points to the emptiness of employing hybridity as a universal description of culture. However, the cultural dynamics of globalization presents a new challenge to isolated cultural models which turns out to be static and out of place with time, especially when used on transcultural platforms. As a symbolic concept of the 21st century, hybridity embraces the life force of the age to outline cultural differences and the synthesis of same.

Hybridity in art emphasizes the foreseeable transformation of all cultures in the phase of globalization. Pragmatic studies have shown that, hybridity refers mostly to culture but often retains residual meanings related to three interconnected realms of race, language and ethnicity. It encompasses the blend of two or more relatively distinct forms, styles, identities, and cross-cultural contacts in transnational and transcultural spheres of life. Bhabha (1994), posits that cultural hybridity is a viable alternative to the 'exotism of multiculturalism', and opens a way towards 'conceptualizing a genuinely international culture'. Obviously, hybridity in art has the attribute of bridging the gaps between peculiar cultures and offers multiple contacts zones to observers. However, it seems as though hybridity celebrates the euphoria of catch-all concepts without engaging itself sufficiently with specific cultural differences.

One argument that the hybridity discussion often brings to the forefront is the question about whether any artist can affirm that his or her practice is pure of all influences. As cited by Brault (2006), Guston emphatically stated; “I cannot speak on behalf of other artists but I certainly believe that pristine originality only exists as an utopist thought”. Brault added that hybridity relies on some known objects and images that pertain to specific situations. The context of this discussion goes to affirm the fact that, to a certain degree; all art is as a result of some kind of hybridity.

Central to the discussion about hybridity in art however, is the ‘use of images’. According to Otto (1999), in art history, it is possible to take an art object that has knocked around the world, nameless and masterless, and issue a relatively precise birth certificate for it. Errors and misjudgments quite often occur, but this does not seriously compromise the value of the techniques employed. Responding to Otto’s arguments, Morss (2004) explains that, images do not float in isolation; they move in and out of contexts, after being freed from their provenance. Nonetheless, the manner images are used in modern days makes it difficult to know their origin. An image can be found anywhere around the world, and this makes it promiscuous by nature. Crucial to Morss’ argument is that, the origin of images should precede hybridity which in her view represents the democratic political potential of visual culture.

Hybridity in art is viewed as a tool that commences and consolidates the position of new realities in the history of art. Its attribute is to appeal to different cultures instead of a single culture. Hybridity creates the platform for artist to hybridize culture specific objects and images in iconic artworks that celebrates central themes understood by all. As it were, post modern hybridity in art uses symbolic concepts that have a worldview of

acceptance and understanding; and it has a way of identifying with the 21st century man who is inescapably nurtured by diverse cultures.

2.9 Semiotics

The word 'Semiotics' holds special significance in the search for meaning. Chandler (1994) defines semiotics as "the study or theory of signs". It involves the study of not only what we refer to as 'signs' in everyday speech, but of anything which 'stands for' something else. Semiotics transcends simple analytical approaches to explore fascinating philosophical issues. Danesi and Perron (1999) and Chandler (2003) identified culture as a major factor in producing and interpreting signs. Berger (1982) indicated in his study that Semiotics is the "science of signs" and of the codes used to understand them, is an "imperialistic" science, one which has applicability to many different areas of life. Berger's thought provides a link between semiotics and culture. Ernest Cassirer (1923) defined cultural semiotics as that sub discipline of semiotics which has culture as its subject. According to Cassirer it has two main tasks; the foremost is the study of science symbols in a culture and the latter is the study of cultures as sign systems with respect to the advantages and disadvantages which an individual experiences in belonging to a specific culture.

From a more subjective approach, the semiotic concepts of art could be developed from specific cultures; and later broadened to relatively meet the objective demands connected to multicultural platforms. The relativity attached to the objective aspects of communicating an ascribed meaning goes to confirm the fact that, the concept of

semiotics is dependent on something else. However, that thing could be an object or an idea uncommon to all possible audiences. The researcher's idea of creating symbolic forms and patterns to elucidate meaning in a 21st century iconography is therefore applicable.

2.10 The Cowrie Shell

The cowrie is simply a type of shell that is portable, durable, divisible, easily recognized and hard to counterfeit. It appears to have been used as money on almost every continent; thus America, Asia, Africa, Europe and Australia. Cowrie is believed to have been the first universal money. It has lasted longer than any other currency in human history. It possesses additional features that make it valuable. It has been used for decorations, charms, divinations, and indigenous costumes in several cultures. There are over 250 species of cowrie shells. However, only a few of the species have been used as currency across the globe. Prior to been distributed globally on a large scale, it was a scarce item. Therefore, imitations of this shell have been produced in wood, stone, jade, bone, bronze and even silver and gold. Historically, cowries were caught with nets, dried in the sun allowing the inner flesh to rot, piled in heaps and then transported to its principal places of usage.

Ingrid Van Damme (2007), a member of the museum staff; the Museum of National Bank of Belgium indicated that, the bank has a stock of coins and banknotes, yet it also possesses a nice collection of primitive means of payments, within this category of traditional money, the cowrie shell is one, and the most renowned representative. He

indicates that, historically, the cowrie shell was known as an instrument of payment and a symbol of wealth and power. Critical observations of the shells used as money indicates that the species called *Cypraea moneta* and *Cypraea annulus* were the beloved means of payment and eventually in some cases became huge competitors with metal currencies. Counting them was not always necessary as weighing often sufficed because it has similar shape and size.

The cowrie, indigenous to the warm waters of the Indian and Pacific Oceans travelled by land and by sea, gradually spreading out its realm. It became the most commonly used means of payment among the trading nations of the old world; and it was accepted in large parts of Asia, Africa, Oceania and in some scattered parts of Europe. Several archeological findings across the continents including the oldest Chinese bronze objects dating back to the 13th century B.C., informs us about this monetary usage. Among the northeast trade route, Arab traders introduced the cowrie in the African inland, but it was the Portuguese, English, French, and Dutch who promoted the cowrie as currency for commercial transactions, especially in slave trade, gold and other goods. Van Damme gives a further indication that; India had to deal with serious shortages with time. This however caused the 17th century local African currencies to lose their values, disappearing completely in favour of the cowries. The cowrie continued to play its monetary role until the 20th century; however its memory is still kept alive by the financial world and museums dedicated to money. Figure 3 shows an image of Chinese shell money of 16th-18th century.



Fig. 3: Chinese shell money, 16th-18th century. www.en.wikipedia.org

The extensive usage of the cowrie shell, in the past and present, makes it easier for any cultural jurisdiction to identify with its symbolisms. The use of the cowrie to symbolize money and wealth is still an existing phenomenon in modern times. Figure 4, 5 and 6 are typical example of a modern day financial institution using the cowrie shell as their logo.



Fig. 4: A logo of United Kingdom based financial institution in the 21st century. www.firstderivatives.com



Fig. 5: A logo of a Banking firm in Ghana. 21st century. www.myjoyonline.com



Fig. 6: A logo of a Banking firm in Burkina Faso. www.echosdufaso.com

2.11 The Birth of Ghana's Currency

Prior to the independence of Ghana, the issuance of currency was the responsibility of the West African Currency Board (WACB). The West African pounds, shillings and pence constituted currency issued by the board and it was in circulation in Ghana until July 1958. However a new monetary authority, the Bank of Ghana, issued its form of Ghana

pounds, shillings and pence after independence on 14th July, 1958. The second issue of currency by the bank of Ghana marked the birth of the ‘cedi’ and ‘pesewa’ when Ghana decided to leave the British colonial monetary system and adopted the widely accepted decimal system. The ‘cedi’ was derived from the word ‘sedie’ meaning cowrie, the shell money which gained popularity and wider circulation in the later part of the 19th century. Images of the cedi and pesewa coins are shown in figure 6. The ‘pesewa’ represented the smallest denomination quantity of the gold dust currency regime. This name was chosen to replace the British colonial penny (www.bog.gov.gh)



Fig. 7: Cedi and Pesewa coins. www.en.wikipedia.org

2.12 The Ghanaian Diaspora

Ghanaians are migratory by nature. Historically, before colonization, inter-regional movement within the West African sub-region and Africa as a whole was customary. Migration from Ghana to the western world was started by precious mineral trade, slave trade and colonization. Migration increased steadily after independence in 1957. The number of people migrating from Ghana to foreign lands increased significantly during

the 1980's and 1990's. The core aim for migration was to seek greener pastures, business opportunities, specialized experience and training (Mensah, 2012).

The term Diaspora is from the Greek verb *Speiro*, meaning to 'sow' and the preposition *dia* meaning 'over', signifying 'dispersion of seeds'. Diaspora is an old concept whose use and meanings have undergone dramatic change. Originally the concept referred to the historic experience of Jews and Armenians. It was later extended to religious minorities in Europe. However, its use has encountered many applications and interpretations since the late 1970's. The term under discussion can be categorized into three characteristics. The foremost characteristic relates to the causes of migration. This refers to forced dispersal which is rooted in the experience of the Jews; the second relates to cross-border experiences with homeland and destination countries, it implies possible return to origin countries due to homeland oriented projects influenced from destination countries; the third characteristic concerns the integration of migrants into adopted countries, this outlines how migrants do not fully integrate socially in countries of settlement (Baubock and Faist, 2010).

As cited by Plaza and Ratha (2011), The U.S state department defines diaspora as migrants with the following features; dispersion, whether voluntary or involuntary, across socio-cultural grounds with at least one political boarder; a collective memory and myth about the homeland; a commitment to keeping the homeland alive through symbolic and direct action and the presence of issue of return, though not necessarily a commitment to do so. Fernandez (2009) explains that in all the varying categories and definitions to diaspora, the common premise that girds the issues of diaspora involves the concept of identity and belongingness.

As an acclaimed worldview, the search for money has evaded and adulterated many aspects of traditional cultural values and standards across the globe. It is an inevitable situation that has permeated the expectations of humanity in the 21st century. This phenomenon has greatly influenced the diaspora and globalization as a whole. The resulting effect is countries that have become cosmopolitan; with people whose identities are predisposed to different cultures. Fernandez (2009) explains that, a significant characteristic of the diaspora is minority communities with “partly-alienated” attitudes to the host-country against the back-drop of their enduring loyalties both materially and emotionally to the “ancestral homeland”.

There is an argument on the cultural identity of the diaspora; thus which side of the cultural divide they belong to; whether homeland or host land. The argument is same for all acclaimed diasporans irrespective of their gender, race and colour. As cited by Fernandez (2009), Mishra (2006) sustains that diasporans have been represented as class-neutral, gender-neutral and generational-neutral ethnic blocs that project home and host countries as uniform cultural entities. Perhaps, the “shared spaces of diasporans” does a lot in bridging the gaps of cultural differences. These shared spaces could rightly be defined as multicultural platform where cultures are celebrated for the purposes of fusion of differences across diverse orders and a merger to create distinctive syncretic cultures.

As indicated in this study, it could be argued that one of the main factors of today’s globalization started with the diasporization. The birth of the digital age is also a factor; it comes with the new media such as the internet, television and telephones. People can now be in different places and relate to different cultures without any means of transportation. The 21st century is marked with myriad of creative ideas, inventions and

technologies that have the potential to create more wealth on daily basis. The major icons are now the billionaires and celebrities who rule the world with their wealth and fame. This condition is responsible for the current struggle of the social classes; as both the poor and the rich are making efforts to acquire wealth and significance. The situation has made ‘money’ popular and positioned it at the centre of all events, especially in cross border interactions.

2.13 The Research Idiom

Creative art works entails thinking through images and ideas. It begins from concepts; and concepts are images of fantasy or memory that appears in a person’s mind by means of remembrance and imagination. The transitional position from image to concept requires the use of semantic analogy that allows the definition of an image as a perceptive statement about the world. This analogy allows the use of visual readings and languages in the analysis of art. The combination of conceived images and philosophies forms the conceptual framework of creative art works.

The motivation for this study is “the passion to acquire wealth in the 21st century”. The main symbolic object used as an idiom in this research work is the cowrie shell. The choice of the cowrie as a research idiom is premised on its historical usage as currency and the fact that it holds special significance to the researchers’ national currency. The cowrie shell is combined with other symbolic images, designs and art objects to make it an eligible idiom for 21st century usage.

CHAPTER THREE

MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the specific research methods and studio practice techniques used in executing the project. The blend of concepts and idea developments that have been used in executing the project is also outlined in this chapter. Much more, the chapter gives account of the organized approaches applied from epiphanies to the final execution of the iconographic pieces.

3.2 Epiphanies

Epiphany is from the Greek word '*epiphaneia*', meaning manifestation or striking appearances. Unrath and Nordlund (2009), McDonald, (2008) and Jarvis (1997) defined epiphany as sudden discontinuous change, leading to profound, positive, and enduring transformation through reconfiguration of an individual's most deeply held beliefs about self and the world. Generally the term is used to describe a deep moment of reflection which leads to break-through and discoveries. However it can be applied to any situation in which an enlightening realization allows a problem or situation to be understood from a new and deeper perspective. Epiphanies follows a process of significant thought about a problem. Often triggered by a key piece of idea or information; understanding it requires prior knowledge about the issue of concern. In art epiphany is the context the artist visualizes intuitively in an attempt to create something unique. Its occurrence usually

involves the combined focus of the body, the heart and the soul to see an old thing in a new way.

In a general sense, epiphany can be likened to inspiration. Okai (2013) explains that, the idea comes in a blink of a moment, and after accessing other visually inspiring ideas that broaden the scope of the concept, the artist gets the drive to create. Visualizing an idea for phenomenon's like the diaspora, cultural exchange, international relations and globalization as a whole could be very difficult and nerve racking. This is because the visual demands of these phenomena are very broad: and one cannot be sure whether to use national landmarks, cultural heritages or racial differences to conceptualize an idea, especially in an attempt to create artworks whose meaning could easily be captured by people from different cultures and nationalities. In order to avoid all the complexities, the epiphany or inspiration for this studio based research was realized by forming a mental image of two individuals hugging each other on a floor filled with money. The money was visualized in the form of cowrie shells. The epiphany therefore, is simply an image of two people hugging in the middle of cowries. This idea is supported with other symbolic additions formed during idea development to complete the 21st century iconographic piece with focus on the diaspora and global experiences. Figure 8 shows an image of cowrie shells; and it gives a clear picture of the researchers' epiphanies.



Fig. 8: Green money cowrie shells. www.blujay.com

Oftentimes, thinking about how to acquire money comes with grin facial expressions. Other ideas were realized at the epiphanic stage with the facial expressions of humans thinking and dreaming about money in the form of mural. Conceptually, the faces appeared with connective directional lines that depict the thoughts of a people in an era where everything seems to be about money. The epiphanic stage employed hybridity as an artistic tool to forge concepts premised on the effects of history and culture.

3.3 Idea Development

Artists are inspired by multiple sources, but ultimately, it is the synthesis of influence, discovery, passion and events that determine the outcome of their works. For most artists images captured in memory are drawn on paper for further development otherwise the ideas remains vague. This is the approach the artist applied in developing his ideas for the 21st century iconographic pieces.

The central theme for the pieces was cowries and human beings. Thumbnail sketches were done to arrive at the abstracted humanoid forms. The humanoid forms were then

drawn in a composition with cowrie shells. The compositions were given specific symbolic details to emphasize the main subject matter. As a preliminary means of exploring concepts, the process entails the drawing of three dimensional concepts on two dimensional surfaces. This activity gave the artist a fore knowledge of how all the art pieces will look like in the round and in relief. The best designs were chosen for further detail pencil work. The plates 1,2,3 and 4 below show how the artist came by the final designs.

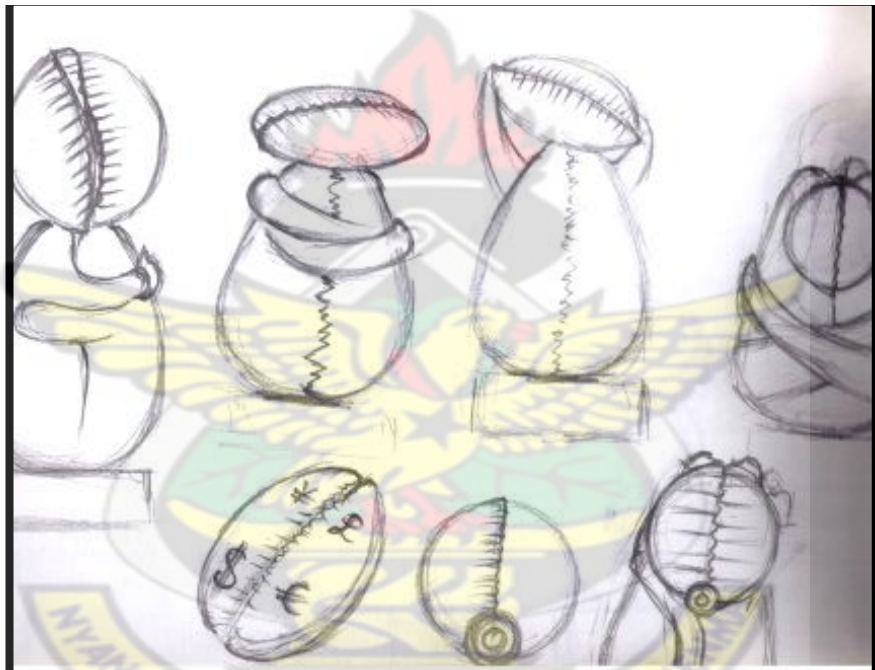


Plate 1: Thumbnail sketches for three dimensional piece



Plate 2: Final sketches for the project

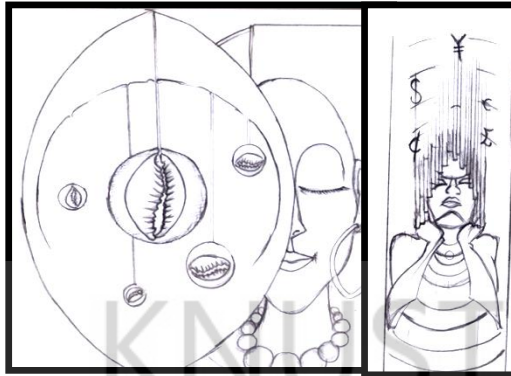


Plate 3: Thumbnail sketches for the mural



Plate 4: Final sketch for the mural

3.4 Clay Preparation

Mfensi clay was soaked overnight with water after which it was pug-milled. The pug mill mechanically mixes the clay mass and pushes it through a cylindrical nozzle. The clay came out as homogenous cylindrical bars. The clay bars were then packed into polythene

sheets to prevent them from drying and to allow them some time to age. The image of the pug mill and the processed clay bars are shown in plate 5 and 6 respectively.



Plate 5: Processing clay with Pug mill



Plate 6: Processed clay

3.5 Constructing the Abstract Human Figure

Bars of clay were kneaded thoroughly to remove air bubbles and other noticeable foreign materials. The kneaded clays were shaped into rectangular mass; they were placed on sack board and two guide sticks were placed at the sides. A rolling pin was used to spread the clay evenly to be levelled with the guide sticks. The guide sticks determined the

thickness of the clay slab. Several slabs were rolled and allowed to harden on a flat floor till it reached the leather-hard state. The slabs were shaped into size with a knife.

Leather-hard slabs measuring 21"×13" was used for the base of the sculpture piece, plate 7 shows the image of the constructed base. Premised on the developed design, the work was built up by joining slabs to the middle section, where a seat was created for the upper section of the abstract piece. The image of the lower section is shown in plate 8. The sculpture piece was built into two sections because, it was approximately six feet in height (6ft); and that is about two times the height of the inside perimeter of the available kiln.

The slabs were joined till the envisaged height at the shoulder level was attained. The heads and arms were joined to complete the figure. The image in plate 9 shows the full figure at the leather-hard state. Hands and feet designs were incised on the work as decorations to emphasize the theme. Finally, the piece was painted with white and red slip to create some contrast and again to elaborate on the subject matter. Plate 10 shows an image of the painting process.



Plate 7: Forming the base of the human figure



Plate 8: First half of the figure

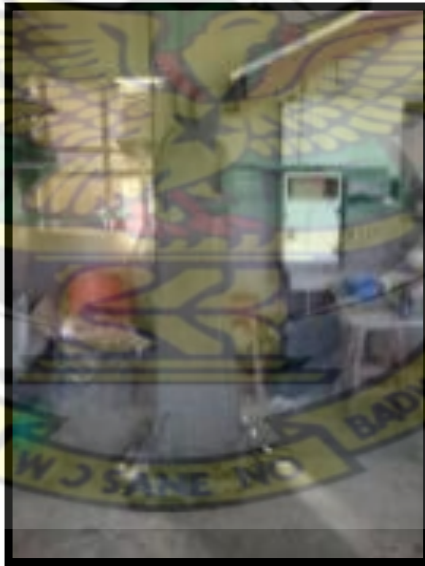


Plate 9: The full figure



Plate 10: Painting the figure

3.6 Forming the Cowrie Shells

Six different sizes of cowrie shells were modelled in clay. The models were used to produce press moulds from Plaster of Paris (P.O.P). Plate 11 shows a line up of the different sizes of the press moulds. Thin slabs were rolled, pressed into the moulds and were allowed to harden to the leather-hard state. An image of the pressing process is given in plate 12. The resulting halves were joined together at the leather-hard state to form the cowrie. Several pieces were made from each mould, after which they were coated with white and brown slips. Plate 13 is an image of some of the white slip coated clay cowries. Some of the slip coated forms were decorated with the shape of hand and some currency symbols using the sgraffito technique. The pieces were allowed to dry gradually under room temperature to the bone dried state. An image of the drying process of the figure and cowries is shown in plate 14.



Plate 11: Different sizes of P.O.P Moulds used



Plate 12: Pressing clay into mould



Plate 13: 200 pressed shells coated with white slip

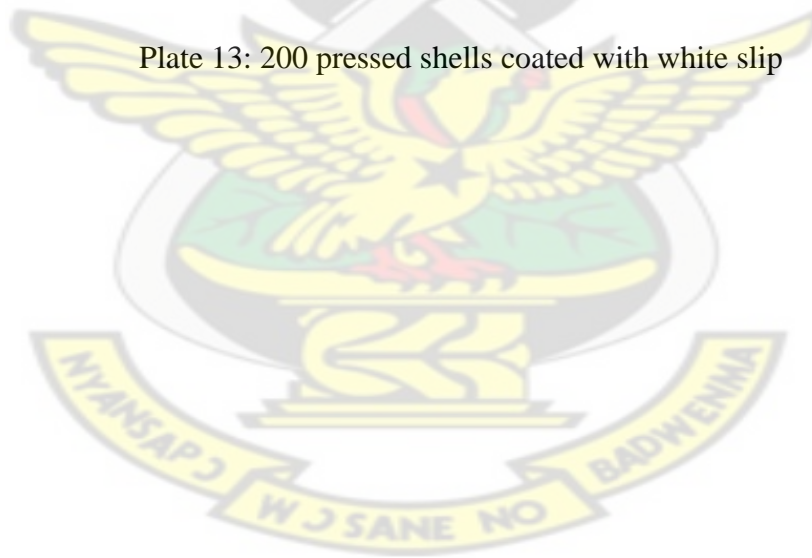




Plate 14: Drying: 'Deceptive Fraternities' figure, scale: 10m×5m.

3.7 The Ceramic Murals

Conventionally, ceramic murals are often done on small pieces of tiles that are assembled to form a complete art piece. Murals usually offer artist a larger surface area to express meaningful thoughts. In this project, the artist developed a symbolic composition with human faces and cowries to construct meaning.

3.8 The Process of Mural Production

The clay bars were kneaded into balls and with the help of the sack board, guard sticks and rolling pin, slabs were rolled out and cut to the measurement of 8"x5". It was exposed to room temperature to dry to the leather-hard state. The image of kneading is shown in plates 15.



Plate 15: Kneading clay for murals

After cutting the slabs, they were packed on shelves to harden gradually. The slabs were turned upside down intermittently to ensure even drying and also to prevent warping. The slabs were packed for compacting at the leather hard state. Plate 16 shows an image of leather-hard slabs ready for compacting.



Plate 16: Leather-hard slabs ready for beating

At the leather-hard stage, a heavy wooden stick with a flat surface was used to beat the slabs one after the other on a concrete floor. This was done to make the clay slabs more

compact and also remove any air pockets trapped in the clay. To get an even thickness the slabs were placed between two guide sticks before beating. This was done to both sides of the slab, starting from one end to another, to ensure a uniform thickness and compact slabs. Plate 17 below shows an image of the slab compacting process.



Plate 17: Beating the slabs

The compact slabs were cut to measurement. Each slab measured 8"×5". This was done by placing a wooden template measuring the size of the tiles onto the slabs and cutting along the edges using a scraper. In all, 70 tiles were made for the mural. After arranging the tiles in the correct order, the design for the murals was scaled to the size of the arranged tiles and it was transferred onto the tiles using a modeling tool. The arranged tiles are shown in plate 18. The composition of the design constituted semi-abstract human faces, cowrie shells, straight, curved and spiral lines.



Plate 18: Arrangement of leather-hard tiles

Following the design, the surfaces of the tiles were scoured and clay slip was applied. Wet plastic clay was added bit by bit until the relief patterns were attained. Plate 19 shows an image of the formed relief designs on the tiles. Incised patterns were also cut and details were carefully applied to conform to the design. It was covered with polythene sheet to allow slow and even drying. The entire design was modeled on all the arranged tiles; hence there was the need to cut through the designs to have individual tiles separated from each other. This activity was done using a knife. The process of cutting through the relief forms to separate the tiles is shown in plate 20. The entire mural was coated with coloured slips and allowed to dry for a while. Grooves were made at the back of the tile to enhance mortar grip during installation. Images of slip coated murals at the leather-hard state and the bone dried state have been given in plates 21 and 22 respectively.



Plate 19: Forming relief design on tiles



Plate 20: Cutting through relief forms to separate tiles



Plate 21: Slip coated mural. Size: 58"×38". Medium: clay (leather-hard state)



Plate 22: Slip coated mural. Size: 36"×31". Medium: clay (bone dried state)

3.9 Firing

The designed tiles, cowrie shells and the abstract human figures at the bone dried state were packed in a kiln for the first firing to a temperature of 1000°C. An image of the bisque fired human figure is shown in plate 23.



Plate 23: Bisque fired abstract human figure

The pieces were coated with manganese oxide after bisque firing. Some portions of the manganese coating were wiped with a sponge to create dark and light tone effect on the pieces. Images of the manganese coated tiles and the abstract humanoid forms are shown in plate 24 and 25. The pieces were packed into the kiln for the second firing to a temperature of 1180°C after drying. Plate 26 shows an image of the finished ‘money dreamers’ mural; plate 27 shows an image of the slip coated races and money mural on clay bricks background. Plate 28 shows the finished ‘races and money’ mural, whereas an image of the second fired deceptive fraternities figure is shown in plate 29. Plate 30 and 31 shows images of some bisque and glost fired cowries respectively. The finished piece of the ‘deceptive fraternities’ figure standing in cowries is shown in plate 32.



Plate 24: Manganese coated tiles after first firing



Plate 25: Manganese coated abstract human figure



Plate 26: '*Money Dreamers*' Mural ;(2014), 35"×30" second fired (1180°C), 21st century iconographic ceramic mural; coloured slipped, manganese washed finished. Piece produced by *Emmanuel O. Asiamah*.



Plate 27: Slip coated '*Races and Money*' mural on clay bricks background.



Plate 28: '*Races and Money*' mural (2014), 55"×35" second fired (1180°C), 21st century iconographic ceramic mural; coloured slipped, manganese washed finished. Piece produced by *Emmanuel O. Asiamah*.



Plate 29: Second fired abstract human figure



Plate 30: Bisque fired cowrie shells

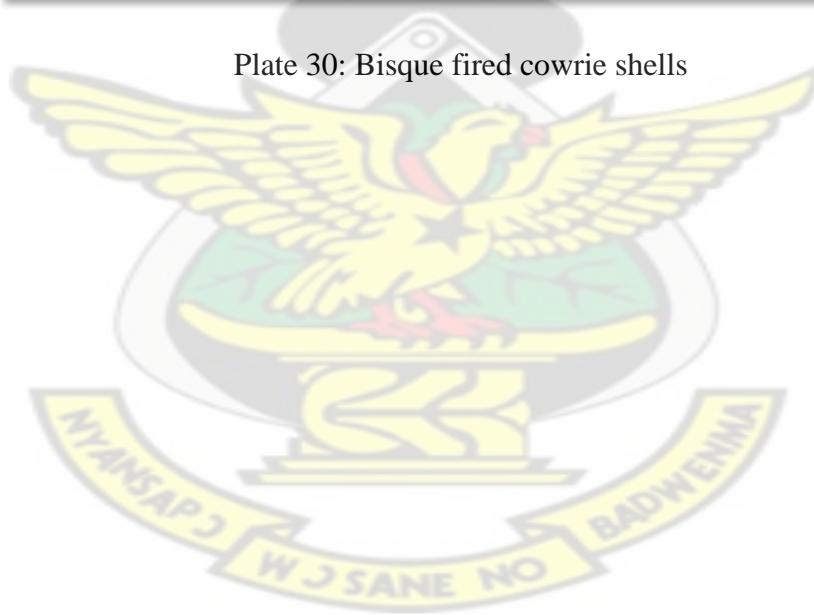


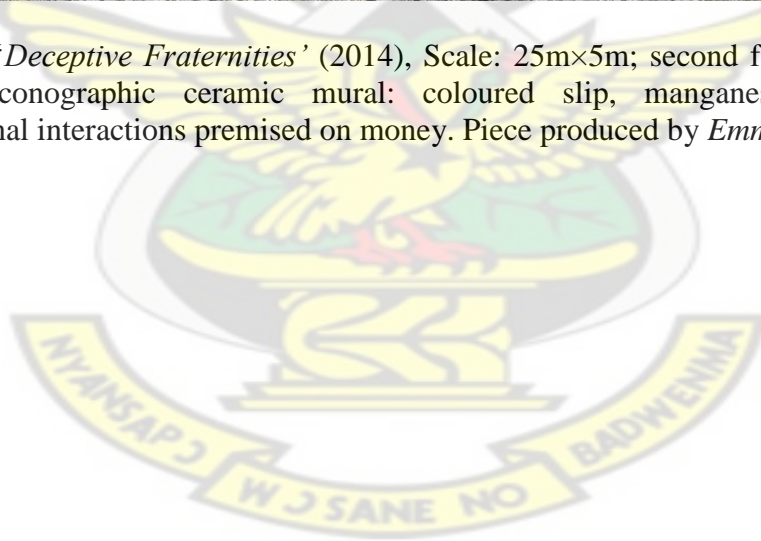


Plate 31: Second fired cowrie shells





Plate 32: '*Deceptive Fraternities*' (2014), Scale: 25m×5m; second fired at 1180°C, 21st century iconographic ceramic mural: coloured slip, manganese washed finish. International interactions premised on money. Piece produced by *Emmanuel O. Asiamah*



CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Artistic Intents and Intuitions

The intent of this study was to revive the old cowrie shell money as an economic tool to examine the connections between money and mankind through the use of ceramic studio art pieces. It attempts to reveal the universal iconography in money by employing the cowrie shell as a metaphor to describe common cultural identities formulated through migration, diasporization, international relations and the digital age media. Derrida and Moore (1974) designate the notion of money to metaphor. They believe that, the notion of money can be construed metaphorically in progressive erosion, a regular semantic loss, an uninterrupted draining of the ancient meaning. Hybridity was used as an art concept, to merge old and some 21st century currency symbols to reflect on how both the white and black race are evolving into a common people due to the quest for money. The resulting art pieces were projected to engender symbolic image reading that illuminates the viewing experiences of its audiences as pragmatic encounters that establish conversational discourses about money. The choice of the cowrie shell as an icon to be used in global shared spaces is logically espoused by Van Damme's (2007) historical exposition that the cowrie shell was used as money on almost all the continents, and the fact that the symbolic usage of the cowrie is still acknowledged in the 21st century. Jokilehto's (2005) definition to cultural heritage designate that 'cultural heritage is the entire corpus of material signs – either artistic or symbolic- handed on by the past to each culture, and therefore to the whole of human kind'. This definition gives meaningful trace

and supports the perpetual usage of the symbolisms of the cowrie shell. The choice of hybridity as an artistic tool to produce a multicultural artwork was supported by Munos (1999), he writes that hybrids catches the fragmentary subject formation of people whose identities traverse different races, sexuality, and gender identifications. Counts (2006); Bhabha (1994) and Matthews (2002), shares similar view about hybridity; they describe hybridity as a viable alternative to forge multicultural art works that offers multiple contact zones to observers.

A comprehensive review on iconography, visual culture, cultural identity, symbolism, hybridity in art, semiotics, the Ghanaian diaspora, the cowrie shell and the birth of Ghana's currency revealed the hunch to use the cowrie money to describe dualities, international relations and world citizenships. The review of related literature revealed how culture is evolving due to its fleeting nature, and how this evolution imprints visual impressions on the mind to result in the formation of complex people. These revelations called for the conceptualization and production of ceramic studio art pieces that will appeal to the 21st century man who is inescapably nurtured by multiple cultures. The studio explorations started with significant thoughts at the epiphanic stage on how to produce symbolic art works that will appeal to the fragmentary understanding of people from different cultural backgrounds using a common *identifier*. The intuitive ideas captured at the epiphanic stage were sketched and developed on paper to give the artist a fore-knowledge about how the art pieces will appear in the round and in relief. The final stages of studio explorations engaged the application of studio forming methods, decorations, finishes and firing.

4.2 Evaluating the Studio Techniques Employed

Exploring how to produce a good number of cowry shells in the studio was necessary. This is because, the scale of the work required that the artist employed a technique that would facilitate efficient production. Contemporary ceramic studios are known for exploring different approaches to create artworks. Dominant among these approaches, especially in Ghana is the plastic forming methods that include throwing, coiling, pinching, modeling, pressing and slab building. This project explored the use of press moulds to produce the numerous cowries. The moulds were two parts each, with simplified features which were necessary to avoid undercuts. Although the cowries were simplified in form; relevant details were maintained for easy identification. Having pressed a good number of the halves; they were joined to form the cowries.

The abstract humanoids, was constructed using slab building techniques. The purpose of the design was to create a piece that will communicate international interaction between the black and white races under the hidden but obvious pretence of acquiring wealth. The figure had to stand out when placed amidst the cowries. Practically, this called for the construction of a figure approximately six feet (6ft) in height. Upon considering the size of the kiln available, the figure was built into two halves with one inter-locking the other. This was achieved by using the slab building technique. The artist made constant reference to the subject matter during the building stages of the piece.

In an interactive assessment made with a professional sculptor and lecturer at the Department of Painting and Sculpture KNUST; Mr. Kwame Opoku-Bonsu indicated that the content of the piece and the interactive nature of the forms are in line with the concept

behind the piece and its symbolisms are clearly indicated. He however advocated for the expansion of such iconographies, because the scale counts a lot in the meaning of the work. One observation peculiar to iconographic art is the way form and content interacts to construct meaning. Most of the forms and incised decorations applied were not realized at the epiphanic and idea development stages. Rather, they were achieved during studio exploration with materials. Premised on this experience, the artist maintains that, idea development in ceramic studio practice should only end at the state when the whole work is consumed by audiences at various exhibitions and fora. This is because, in the process of executing and exhibiting the art work, the artist encounters several serendipities and comments from audiences which turn out to be beneficial to the artist and his art work.

Symbols have a way of initiating a cognitive discussion within their audience. It draws on certain known ideas to give an imaginary coherence to what is perceived by the sense organs (Lopes, 1996). The intuitive drive which spurred the creation of the murals was based on symbolisms of money and its connections to life and all its appendages (Bonnett, 2005). The imagery of the mural reflects on the symbolic manner with which humanity reason and dream about acquiring money in the 21st century. The choice of portraying the concept on assembled rectangular clay tiles in the form of a mural was very relevant. This is because the production of murals offers a wider surface area where artistic thoughts are expressed. The production of tiles and its arrangement took a different approach. The artist explored different shapes aside the usual square shaped tiles used for murals. The slabs were cut into rectangular shaped tiles, and the arrangement did not follow the usual order. The tiles were arranged to show repetitive projections at the

edges; thus, breaking the monotony of square and rectangular outlines of installed murals. The expressive nature of the mural and the application of design elements and principles in execution of the work were premised on insightful experimentations with clay. This project used antique finishes to explain an old economic concept that has modern significance.

The researcher experimented on a series of non-vitreous surface effects by using mixtures of clay and non clay materials that modifies the clay surface. After exploring with a variety of available materials, the researcher settled on a wide range of polychromatic slips prepared from specially prepared engobes with red, black, ash, and white mixed with different clays and manganese oxides at varying ratios to produce different colour effects. Depending on the firing process, mineral pigments were transformed into different colours after bisque firing. The resulting colour spectrum included different grades of black, dark red, orange, brown, white and ash. Some of the pieces were washed with manganese oxide and fired the second time to leave layers of black tones that created antique effects on the artworks.

4.3 A Critique of the 21st Century Iconographic Pieces

In capital, Marx attributed life itself and everything related to it to money (Marx, 2015). This statement forms the basis for the critique of the iconographic pieces. It supports the effort to reveal the meaning and value of the idiom used in this project. Once encountered, the iconographies mounted together may suddenly trigger some sort of interaction and questioning. Crucial amongst these questions could most probably be;

what the meaning of the piece is? The meaning of the pieces is expressed in the dominant objects and how they communicate with the rest of the art elements presented. The cowrie shell dominates all other elements and it is at the centre of all the activities taking place in the artwork. The humanoid forms and faces project the meaning of the cowries; they give clues about how valuable and worthwhile the dominant object means to humanity. Judging from appearance, the art pieces, clearly captures the idea of dualities and worldviews.

The hundreds of cowry shells were enlarged and formed in different sizes to make them more appealing. The shells are decorated with contemporary currency symbols (cedi, dollar, pound sterling, yen and euro. Others are decorated with hand shapes in white, brown and black coatings. The abstract and semi-abstract human figures and faces in the composition give significance to what the cowrie means contextually. However, breaking down the components into simple design elements and principles would help reveal a clearer meaning. The dominant figure depicts two humanoids in a hugging posture. From the base to the top, the sculpture is constructed into standing rectangular blocks slightly tapering from the base to the top area from all angles. The 'shoulder' areas are gently rounded to carry sharply cut arm-like forms that are rigidly clasping each other's back. They have a 'foot' each and inverted like the back foot of a sprinter on a starter. The top is formed into disc heads and attached to each other. The sculpture is almost symmetrical, composed along a vertically diagonal axis running from the crown of the disc head into the base of the sculpture. Because the basic intent was to construct abstractions, the artistic efforts relied on basic geometric forms in creating the sculpture. Thus, the piece could be described as a circular (head) standing on a rectangular (body).

The piece is scarred with some incised decorations and colours. From the base to the top, each of the figures is decorated with prints of the feet and palm. One of the figures is finished in black and the other in white. The main foot of the black figure is painted in black and white; the heel is finished in black whilst the forefoot is finished in white. In the same vein, the white figure has a foot with the heel finished in black and the forefoot finished in black. The outer parts of the heads have an even distribution of black and white finishes; and the inner parts shows a concentric circle finished in black and white. The murals show faces with different expressions. Some of the faces are finished in black, red and white coatings and the faces are connected to the cowrie by spiral and straight lines.

The abstract figures are only projections from the cowries. They represent the dialogism and heterotopias money brings to bear on culture and place (Bakhtin 1981; Foucault 1982). They are relationships provoked by cultural mobility in its various forms (Atkinson 2005, 141; Fortier 2005; Mitchell 2005). The colour scheme of the sculpture represents the two sets of most distinct racial and cultural forms, while the distribution of the black and white on the disc heads have implications on hybridity, duality, multiculturalism and citizenship. The work engages situations of people who have lived in, and experienced different cultures and places, and also connotes the growing popularity of nationality hybrids in the modern world (Mitchell 2005; Fortier 2005). The footprints and palm prints at their backs engages contemporary identification forms, and also explore the conventional ideas in travel, discovery and exchange (Sidney 2014, 6-11). It interprets the collective contemporary multicultural states in which nationals from

diverse cultural backgrounds embrace and interact with unified vision of economic and cultural successes.

Significantly, the incised footprints represent people who have crossed different national borders. To give a picture of the continuity of international relations through migration, the foot of each figure is symbolically re-presented, with duality of nationality, citizenship and culture (i.e. the heel of the white figure coated in white and the forefoot in black). Respectively, the white coating represents origins whilst the black coating represents destination spaces. Hence, both spaces are familiar and unaccustomed simultaneously, making the parts of the sculpture collapse into and become the other. The whole concept of the two abstract figures hugging in the midst of the cowries signifies disguised international fraternities that are based on material and monetary gains.

The cowries interpret how the 21st century global village hinges entirely on money and how the world is now networking to allow growth of businesses. The cowry money is hybridized with other currency symbols to explain 'who we are as a people' and 'where modernity has brought us'. It is thus the spirit and abstraction of money and exchange that has its roots in the transition from barter to currency. This abstraction has been carried centripetally from different cultures into our collective value forms. Modernity is breeding a sect of generation nurtured by myriad of transnational cultures and foreign heritages. Depending on peoples contact zones, especially on television, internet, and social media, they are acculturated, and learn so much from different cultures and places. In this way mobility is astral and virtual, travelling without moving from place of origin. Our original cultural identity is now premised not on nativity, but on contemporary culture and visual environment.

As argued by Marx, “the aggrandizing logic of capitalism caused Europe to burst from its borders and colonize the entire world, putting all people in an ever-tightening grip. All labour everywhere was perverted and every man reduced to beast” (Rasmussen, 2006). The politics of economic interest initiated by colonization is still very much alive in the 21st century. This is observed in how governments and political leaders cross borders everyday under the pretence of enhancing international cooperation, but with the ulterior motive of personal economic gains. Really, the abstract human forms standing in the cowries explain this situation distinctively. The work describes the influx of foreign nationals in oil and precious metal mining rich nations. It is used to highlight a relationship of care and acceptance based on material gains. The researcher sustains that, the 21st century capitalist approach to politics operates on the fine platform of cordiality and fraternity. This is the seeming impression created when leaders are given the public platforms in international affairs. However, the painful element in such relationships is often transferred to the lower classes in society; as they are the sufferers of the realities that emerge from such political engagements.

The art pieces also depict a condition of “world citizenship”. World citizenship in this context could be described as the sudden growth and changes in cultural identities which are mainly influenced by diasporization and the digital age media. The concept of world citizenship has made it possible for someone born and bred in Ghana to speak better English than someone born and bred in the United Kingdom, and or know what is happening in the United States of America before someone living there gets to know. World citizenship permits individuals to *‘belong to almost every space’*. The physical appearance may create some difficulties by way of acceptance. However, the modern

environment is now common with nationality hybrids; we have half Japanese half Ghanaian, half Scottish half Mexican, and half Congolese half Russian and so on. Aside the economic and political symbolism of the iconographic pieces, it also has some form of dualities. This duality gives an account of racial differences that are reconciled through pluralistic art works. World citizenships connote collective identities; such identities require the consideration of different artistic processes to appeal to the 21st century audiences. Hybridity revealed itself as a new practice of cultural and performative expression in art (Bhabha 1994; Young 2003). Hybrid art therefore, has the potency of appealing to fragmented cultures with a convergent meaning. It opens-up a space to its audience and stands as a mediator to viewing analysis and discourses in various ways and media; traditional and contemporary.

4.4 Exhibition and Audience Interaction

The display configuration of the iconographies interrogates the '*attractive power of money and wealth*' as it is displayed by its owners. The work engages the idea of wealth and interrogates the social phenomenon that stands as channels to the acquisition of wealth. The forms of dualities in the work give logical clues about the blend of the black and white race. The work interrogates the possible systems responsible for such 'hybrids' and 'blends'. Audience interaction points strongly to migration and diasporization as causes of racial hybrids. However different opinions points to how the 21st century man also assimilate into other foreign cultures through television and the internet. The ideological differences related to the exhibition configurations presented a strong

conversational discourse. Henceforth the iconicity of the cowrie shell to represent the 21st century economic environment maintained a pivotal meaning to all its audiences.

The works were displayed spontaneously in terms of the arrangement of the cowries around the humanoids to designate the notion that money is dynamic (plate 33). Its form and nature can change at any time, and mostly they are found in both familiar and unfamiliar locations. The decentralized arrangement of the clay cowries left irregular spaces between the cowries. It bears the symbolisms that 'money' without particular consideration to its form and nature is dispersed all over the world. Other forms of cowrie arrangement engaged a concentric circle around the humanoids (plate 34). This was meant to hold the audiences to understand that though the symbolisms of the cowrie is overt, there are other hidden symbolisms in the whole iconography that requires deep reasoning to understand (Hudson and Morrissey, 2002). Throughout the display, most spectators shared in the notion that 'coincidentally the quest for money has played the decoy in breaking the very backbone of original national cultures; which is the spiritual and cultural heritage. The resulting effects is the lost of native cultures, self esteem of a people and dominated nations.

The iconographies provoke thoughts on how the appendages of life are tightly connected to money. Hence, the quest for money has become a thought deeply ingrained in the fabric all cultures; thus making money a powerful tool to appeal to the identities of all people. The evolution of money strengthens its meaning to humanity; money often strengthens its hold and turns into an invisible and all-powerful spectral frame which dominates our lives (Zizek 1997). The 21st century iconographies use the cowrie shells which symbolize an economic factor as the main idiom to explain how today's world

citizenship is emerging. The humanoids and the concepts expressed on the murals are projections from the cowries. They explain how an economic factor is responsible for colonization, diasporazation, international trade and relations, and their impact on our modernity and humanity.



Plate 33: '*Deceptive Fraternities*' piece, at KNUST students' clinic, showing decentralized arrangement of cowries.



Plate 34: *Deceptive Fraternities*’ piece, at KNUST students’ clinic, showing cowries arranged in a concentric circle around the humanoids.

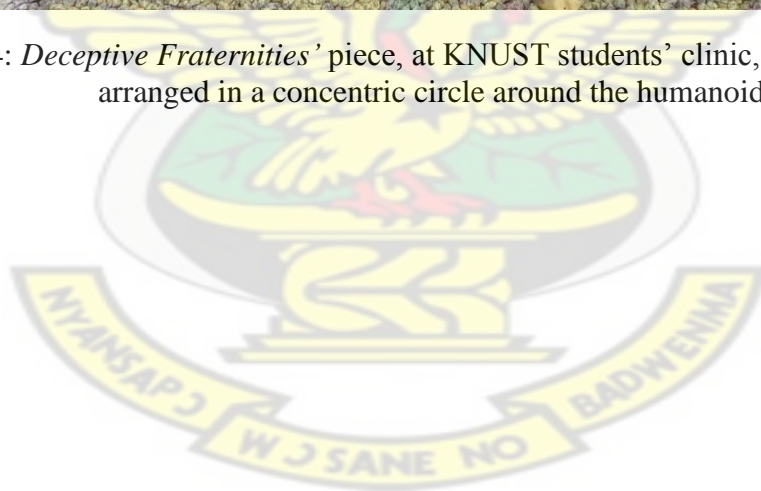




Plate 35: '*Deceptive fraternity*' piece, showing details of decorations at the back of humanoids.



Plate 34: mural: faces of people dreaming about money



Plate 35: mural: the subject of money and different races

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Summary

The iconographies engages the sensitive issues about money and how it relates to cultural identities, colonization, diasporization and the 21st century world citizenships. the review of literature, exploration and application of effective ceramic studio art techniques to examine and comment on the connections between money and mankind lead to the choice of the cowrie shell as an idiom to engage the production of the sculptural icons. The artwork hybridizes symbolic ideas and explores exhibition strategies that supposedly reveal the universal iconography in money and how it relates to culture and identity issues in the 21st century. Relative reviews on iconography related topics, especially semiotics and hybridity aided artistically in the construction of concept based clay sculptures that comments on the complexities of contemporary visual culture, migration and cultural identities. Ingrid Van-Damme (2007); Jukka Jokilehto (2005) and Homi Bhabha (1994), ideologies constructed a strong advocacy on the choice of the cowrie shell to produce hybrid monies and related humanoids to reasonably settle the fragmentary identity issues using a common identifier. Given the complex demands of culture and visibility, a polychrome of specially prepared engobes mixed with clay and manganese oxides provided antique effects that gave a sharp distinction and a merger between the white and the black human race to form '*species*' for common '*spaces*'. The resulting art works draws the viewer to engage the ideas that hold visual differences through the use of colour and the convergence of these differences due to the cowrie

money. Semiotically, the art works entrenches itself in the ideology of currency evolution and its relevance to humanity. (Marx, 2015; Zizek, 2006; Derrida and Moore, 1974; Bakhtin 1981). Although the art work uses symbolisms as a mode of discussion, the application of overt symbols such as currencies, hand and foot prints allows it to play its role as a common semiotic model (Danesi and Perron, 1999; Chandler, 2003). The iconographic qualities in the work are easily provoked upon viewing. This engenders the art works as powerful iconographic tools to interpret dualities, common identities and the 21st century world citizenship.

5.2 Conclusion

The development of artistic concepts used to create iconographies calls for the search for specific objects that relates directly to the icon. Findings in this study indicates that different cultures have a way of linking formulated ideas to special animate and inanimate ideas in the environment, and the essence is to transform intangible ideas into concrete ideas that could be seen and touched. The popularity of such symbolic ideas produced in art only helps in easy identification and understanding. The 21st century iconographic art trigger several responses from its audiences. The most recurring response is how the economic factor was explicitly portrayed. The supporting art works especially the humanoid forms attracted different views from audiences, because their gaze was focused on just the forms without particular attention to the content.

Much work remains to be done before we can fully grasp the symbolic meaning of the cowrie in a 21st century iconography. This study defines the cowrie as an iconic object

and uses other symbolic ceramic forms to project its iconicity. It has a descriptive tendency that shed light on worldviews in the 21st century; and it identifies cultural identity and visual culture as major factors responsible for the shared spaces in today's global village. These shared spaces, as outlined in this project have always been from the economic stand of the Ghanaian and the Ghanaian diaspora to universal scenarios. The approaches in semiotics, iconography and hybridity in art gives artist liberal platforms to create symbolic artworks that means so much to the world. In its universality, the works have serious implications on issues raised in this study, however the room is also created to add and subtract from this iconographic idea until its potential to appeal to all cultures are fully evolved.

5.3 Recommendations

From the presentation of the findings and discussions, the following recommendations are put forward to encourage the production of unique iconographic artworks by ceramic studio artist:

The use of the cowrie shells to represent money in the 21st century encountered several discourses from some contemporary artist. Its acceptance was difficult because to most people, the idea is obsolete. However, the use of modern commodities such as gold, diamond, cocoa, or crude oil to represent money was also difficult to accept because trading commodities and currencies stands as separate entities in the 21st century economic environment. An iconic object may lie dormant; it may be forgotten or discredited but as long as copies of that object exist, it has not been destroyed (Chanda,

2004). A revival is always possible to let the world know what it signifies. History always helps us to unravel old icons. Therefore, contemporary artist should be encouraged to delve into history to revive old concepts that might hold some significance to modern day events.

The use of the cowrie shells, which was once acknowledged globally as currency to symbolize the idea of today's world citizenship is admittedly a broad field of enquiry which depends on how audiences perceive and interact with the iconographic pieces. This study employed a dual approach by taking on both indigenous and international concepts that accompanies the usage of cowries. The artist presented this idea by decorating the cowries with a symbol of his local currency known as the cedi and symbols of some strong currencies like, the dollars, euro's, pounds, and yen. However, this presentation did not fully satisfy the symbolisms of world citizenship as recounted by some audience. Doubtlessly, further inquiries will yield more insight. Expanding the scope of the project to include the usage of modern currency symbols from the countries known to have used the cowries in the past would settle the argument satisfactorily.

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