

AESTHETICS OF COLOUR AND DRAPERY IN DECORATIVE ARTS: A SURVEY OF SILK-LINEN FABRICS DESIGN AND DECORATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study delves into an aspect of decorative arts that deals with the use of draped coloured silk-linen fabrics for design/decoration. It also shows how the colours and the drapery of silk-linen fabrics help to stimulate and delight our senses when seen in sitting rooms, halls, churches, social arena like wedding ceremony, rendezvous, and other places where these coloured silk linen fabrics are used for decorations. The major aspect of the study is based on the effects of colours, and drapery (that is also known as folds) of silk-linen fabrics in the interior and exterior decorations. The aesthetic aspect of these silk-linen fabrics in their varying colours and drapes in places such as the inside of churches, inside of halls, outside of social arena as festivals, inside of our homes (sitting rooms), and so on is looked into to show how these coloured silk-linen fabrics decoration/designs in their colour variations, interplay and folds, beautify the entire background of the above mentioned places. Photographs of different draped coloured silk-linen fabrics installations were useful visual devices for analysis and interpretation in the study. However, the absence of these designs of draped coloured silk-linen fabrics in any of the above mentioned places makes them not to conform to the aesthetic needs of our time especially now that fashion is the order of the day and the ultimate. Without doubt, the effects of colours and drapery of silk-linen fabrics decoration on these places in their opulent splendours and adornment stimulate and delight our sensory perceptions.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Colour, Drapery, Decorative arts, linen, Fabrics© and Design

INTRODUCTION

In an unpublished key note paper “Art Historical Studies and the Challenges of the Discipline in Africa” read at Art Historical Association of Nigerian conference at the Continuing Education Center, University of Nigeria, Nsukka on November 28, 2007, Kunle Filani observes that Woven fabrics, decorated surfaces, ornamental objects, baskets, pottery, painting and sculpture are classified as aspects of art. These art objects are motivated and derived for cultural, social, political and religious purposes. Art is however (measured and) generally defined by its aesthetics value which inspires in us the passionate appeal. It challenges our passion. It is through this challenge that we begin to understand better what a work of art is. A means of understanding a work of art is to situate it in the environment in which it was created, especially the audience for which it was made. The above assertion is in line with what Ikejiani-Clark (2004: 7) posits: Artistic impressions are product of environmental stimuli. Commenting on the significant of art to the society, Ola Olodi in Art Appreciation lecture mimeograph, “The Art of Black Africa: Readings in African Traditional Art” asseverates thus:

Art plays a very significant role in social arena; social in the sense that various ceremonies or occasions bring together both elite in the society and the masses. These ceremonies includes coronation, yam festivals, child naming, among others.

In the above mentioned social arenas and other places such as church interiors, wedding reception venues, and halls the use of “Draped Coloured Silk-Linen Fabrics” of various lengths and breaths for decorations are highly the vogue and the ultimate, therefore, are on the increase. The use of these draped coloured silk-linen fabrics can be said to be installation art as we are going to see later as we proceed. The decorators, designers and artists spend their time and energy to fashion out different styles with the use of silk-linen fabrics of different shimmering and dazzling qualities and effects to form what is known in art parlance as “drapery” that is also known in common parlance as folds.

The symmetric (formal), asymmetric (informal) balancing and the juxtaposing effects of these draped coloured silk-linen fabrics in different directions, highly beautify the entire background of the wall, chairs, tables, ceiling, doors, windows and the outside of the environment (social arena). They are eye catching as they are highly decorated in different designs of overlapping, interlacing and intertwining effects that provide visual agitation and produce an aesthetic mood that touches the beholder’s mind and consciousness. At this juncture in an academic discourse of this nature, it is of importance that we provide the reader with the preliminary remarks about the meanings and understanding of the variables of the subject matter - aesthetics, drapery, decorative arts and silk-linen for the sake of thematic clarity and in avoidance of ambiguity.

Aesthetics is a sub-branch of axiology in philosophy that deals with the study of beauty in art. If we speak of beauty in art, we refer to those visual elements in works of art that are appealing to eyes of the beholders, hence, it is said that beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder. Each person has his or her own idea of what is beautiful. Aesthetics is associated with the field of art, and its main concern borders on the laws of perception, and the way we react and respond to beauty and artistic experiences in our minds and senses. Draped coloured silk-linen fabrics design/decoration if seen stimulates the sense of beauty in us since the main concern of beauty is law of perception. Amifo (2004: 104) calls it “seeing sense.”

Drapery simply put is fold. It is the folds found in any soft materials like fabrics and so on. In this context, what we are focusing on is the effect drapery has in or its aesthetic contribution in silk-linen fabrics decorative design. That is the folds that are created when different patterns of silk-linen fabrics are hung and spread in different designs and shapes with the purpose of achieving beautiful corrugated-like line designs in their softness (See plate 7).

Decorative arts is a term in art and craft that deals with the production of beautiful objects with materials like wood, glass, metal, textile and many others. Decorative arts are also known as minor art. Silk- linen fabrics belong to textiles, but our main concern here is on the colour and drapery as beauty of these silk-linen fabrics.

Silk-Linen is a type of soft smooth, shimmering, and coloured fabric that is usually used for covering the inside of any transparent fabrics so as to prevent penetration of light. They appear in values and hues of reds, blues, greens, purples, oranges, yellows, browns, et cetera. The combination of these various coloured silk-linen fabrics in their vary dark to their very light nuances to form drapes in different spreading designed patterns across one another is a breath taking experience when one beholds it.

We hasten to say that the use of these draped coloured silk-linen fabrics in the adornment and decoration of all the above mentioned places hinges on aesthetics. The colour combinations in their nuancing, interplay and their active moments extend our being and consciousness too. It also adduces and reveals the fact that “our lives and beings are locked in the mystery of colours” (Aniakor, 1997: 1).

Draped Coloured Silk-Linen Fabrics as Design

Design is involved in every human endeavour. It cuts across every genre of the human activity. The way and manner, with which we decorate our homes, social arena, et cetera, is overwhelming and something to write home about. The use of different coloured silk-linen fabrics to form folds in this aspect of decorative arts is a pure design occasioned by man’s quest to beautifying his environments. Design is inspired by nature, experience, knowledge, and the environment. Diakparomre and Adewunmi (2002: 91) succinctly put it:

Design involves a process of organizing order from disorder, or from assumed disorder, considering that disorder is relative. The process involves conceptualization and schematic actualization of the motivated aim. It involves considering carefully, the elements and principles of design but as much as design is deliberate attempt to create order, accidents, may also give rise to design... the value of a design could be said to be directly related to the satisfaction it earns either for the designer or consumer.

Design is the arrangement of the visual elements of an object or work of art. In common terms it refers to the arrangement of visual elements and most often to that arrangement in decorative objects. In decorative arts, design involves integrating functional necessity and a system or vocabulary of ornaments. The degree to which the decorations and the functions it should serve, determine how an object should appear, and this is dependent upon the approach of the designer. For example, in painting, line, form, space, light and colour are among the elements that must be controlled to create the desired image.

The profound rich design of draped coloured silk-linen fabrics is highly on the increase, and the society at large is feeling its aesthetical impact. For example, hardly any where two or three are gathered for one occasion or the other, that the use of the draped coloured silk-linen fabrics for decoration is not seen. Churches and other places mentioned above are not exceptions. And this is “the spirit of design,” The colour combination, the weaving pattern, the folds (drapery), the vertical, horizontal, diagonal, sagging, and the near zigzag-like and corrugated-like patterns of these silk-linen fabrics make for a complete design that create visual tension and stimulation and brashness (See plate 1 and 2).

All the principles and elements of design are present in this aspect of decorative arts under study, namely; colour, balance, rhythm, harmony, proportion and even contrast; and shape, line, texture and form. These principles and elements are employed by the designers to come up with all kinds of designs that will suit the place for which they art made to decorate.

Colour is of high relevance and plays important role, and also constitutes the vital if not all aspects of the silk-linen fabrics design/ decoration as it contributes in aiding high visual aesthetics. What is colour? One may ask. We will rely on the definition dictionaries provide. That is, that colour is a visible quality that objects have produced by the way they reflect light. Colour is very important in our lives and that is the simple reason it is taken much into consideration whenever we make our choices of materials, especially in designing. What attracts one to any design or work of art as the case might be is colour. It is of very importance in the field of decoration.

The Draped Coloured Silk-Linen Fabrics Decoration as Installations and Mobile Art

Before we make headways, it is very necessary to briefly discuss installation art. The reason is to make the reader to have a clear understanding of what installation art is all about. Installation art describes an artist's genre of three-dimensional works that are often site-specific and designed to transform the perception of a space. It refers to large scale sculpture and mixed media that occupies the entire particular place, usually intended to be impermanent. It is also art that is or has been arranged in a place either by an artist or as specified by the artist, which might be site-specific or not, and either indoors or outdoors. Installation art may be temporal or permanent, but most will be known to posterity through documentation (Wikipedia).

Though silk-linen fabrics of different colours are being in use for ages mainly for curtains, it was recently that its usage as exterior decoration materials started. What is meant by exterior here is their usage in the decoration or design of such places like social arena (See plate 3). They are used for the decoration of the "office of the dead", that is, where a dead person lies in state. They are used for the decoration of the tent for wedded couples in the reception arena (See plate 5). They are used for the beatification of the wall frontal views of halls, hotels and churches and even petrol stations.

It might interest us to know that the present writer regards these decorations as installation art. It is, in this sense that it does not remain as permanent designs or decoration as it is dismantled immediately after the particular purpose for which it is installed is over or has come to an end. Silk-linen fabrics decorations can also be regarded as mobile art, given the fact that the designers use them over and over again in different locations at a given time or period for the same purpose.

Following this line of discussion, it can be adduced that draped silk-linen fabric design-decoration is an installation art if we agree that installation art can be temporal in a place. Take for instance, plates 3 and 6 show clearly an installed silk-linen fabrics designs of different colours at the centre of a social arena, and at the side of the entrance of where wedded couples seat. They have been designed in such a way that some strands are tied to the poles of the canopies and on the iron rods on the ground. The most interesting of the designs is the centre vertical design which all the stands are tied to and spread in different directions. It looks like a masquerade, even though it is stationary (See plate 4). In decoration parlance, it is called "the announcer."

Having said so, it is necessary to briefly mention where these draped coloured silk-linen fabrics that are used for the decoration of the aforementioned places wrest, hang and are tied. What we mean here is that they are not just tied or hung on the air. They hang and tie to some places. For example, while some are tied to different ends right to the center of the arena, some are stuck on the bodies of the canopies (See plate 7). Some designs are simply made to be hung on a wall and loose down as background designs.

Those that are tied to or stuck on the canopies and those that are tied to different ends of the canopies and spread in different directions are later dismantled immediately the occasion for which it is used for decorations is over. And will also be used for decoration in another occasion elsewhere. It is installation on the one hand and mobile art on the other.

The Designers/Decorators

Who are the designers/decorators? Where did they learn it? It might interest us to know that the draped silk-linen fabrics design/decoration is done by some individuals who out of their

love for design and creativity started the decoration with the use of these silk-linen fabrics in different ways.

Some individuals learnt it through apprenticeship and out of their own sense of design started expanding it through contact with some designs published in the *Ovation* magazine – a magazine that publishes all kinds of current designs concerning the use of fabrics of all kinds. Some of them combine the design/decoration together with some other things like catering services, pedicure and manicure and plaiting of hairs. The apprentices acquire it as a skill which helps them to be self employed. These designers/decorators eke out a living from silk-linen fabrics decoration thereby engaging them and reducing unemployment in our environment and promoting development as well.



Plate 1

© The author



Plate 2

© The author



Plate 3

© The author



Plate 4

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Plate 5 © The author



Plate 6 © The author



Plate 7 © The author

CONCLUSION

The study so far, has shown that draped coloured silk-linen fabrics are very useful in the beautification of different places like our homes, churches, social arena, among others.

The draped silk-linen fabrics of different colours can pass for “paintio-textile-sculpture” of a kind. It is also installation and mobile art which the designers/decorations are individuals with high colour sense and also fully aware of design patterns. For many designers, a great source of inspiration lies in different colours of the silk-linen fabrics.

In this study, therefore, the meanings of aesthetics, colour, silk-linen and drapery were highlighted and also, the drape coloured silk-linen fabrics as design, installation and mobile art, and the designers /decorators were hinted at to make the study not to be elusive.

In all, it has been discovered that both in rural and urban areas, the use of this decoration is highly in vogue and the ultimate in festivals, marriage ceremonies (both traditional and

modern), burial and naming ceremonies, inside sitting rooms, inside churches, halls and so on. With out it, these places will look awkward in it entirety.

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