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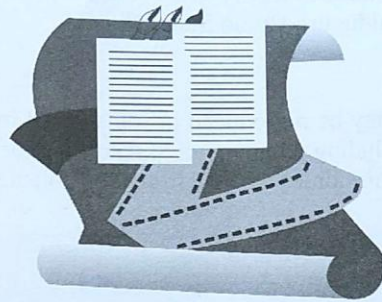
# LIWURAM

## JOURNAL OF THE HUMANITIES

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UNIVERSITY OF MAIDUGURI  
FACULTY OF ARTS



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## **A VISUAL RECONTEXTUALISATION OF THE 'PURE-WATER' NYLON BAGS IN PAINTING**

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### **Abstract**

The place of waste or trashed material reused into appreciated works of arts for aesthetic purposes is an accepted norm embraced by visual artists today. Therefore, a studio exploration into the medium of 'pure water' polythene bag saw intrinsic explorative attributes that can be appropriated into conceptual arts, in this case, painting. Artistic creations in this direction would reduce the environmental pollution caused by the menace of its litter in the surroundings. The paper sampled polythene bags with a focus on 'pure water' nylon because of their translucent nature, thickness, and texture over the rest. They have not been utilised creatively to attain attention thus justifying for this paper. The paper metaphorically used the reflective effects of the medium to comment on some societal happenings. It therefore recommends, that deliberate attention is given in this direction for new possibilities of novel artworks. Now, it has become apparent that nature is no longer the only place for inspiration, the artistic quest is limitless.

**Keywords:** Found Art, Ready Made, Pure water, Polythene, Nylon Bag

### **Introduction**

Discarded waste has been part of human existence from the beginning of time. Human nature by function of design, enables it to adapt, manipulate and appropriate resources within and outside its space to its advantage. In the process, the phenomenon leaves behind left over and unused products that are no longer useful. Reno (2018) sees waste as an ecological factor that comes from living things and processes and is therefore not exclusive to human beings. Utilitarian waste that comes from the manufacture and use of utilities is mostly exclusive to humans. Now, with the advancement of technology over time, its collaborative usage and application into our everyday endeavours has advanced and improved the standard of living across all facets of life. This has, fortunately and unfortunately left its impact on the organic and inorganic materials in the environment. The thrust of this paper is to create aesthetically pleasing artworks from trashed inorganic discarded polythene nylons found in the environment. In

Nigeria, the nuisance these polythene create are features seen around market, commuter and residential areas.

The paper culminated from a doctoral studio enquiry done by Alasan (2019). The conceptual exploration informed the use of the 'pure water' polythene bags. This was with the aim of using a medium that suggests similar feeling like colour other than the conventional artists' hue. The shimmering effects, the strands projected from the composition were used to reference on some societal and political ill happenings in the country. It served as a mirror of looking through at the level of moral decadence in the people. In terms of attitude, behaviour, and judging by happenings are selfish interest, over ambition, illegal acquisition of wealth, get-rich-or-die-trying syndrome, yahoo yahoo, badoo, kidnapping and so on.

### **Found Art/Ready-made**

The advent of different art movements in the twenty first century led into diverse avant-garde in artistic art creations. This has therefore, broadened the inquisitive mind of the artist artistically in adapting or appropriating physical identifiable forms into aesthetically pleasing art forms. The movement towards this direction presented artists seeking to make artistic statements with art beyond the use of the conventional oil colours and engaging space. These blur the boundaries of what defines a work of art or what medium or media constitutes it. The advent of technology and its application in all aspects of life has made working experience better and the world a global place. This phenomenon has not left out the art world.

Janaro and Altshuler (2009) state the term 'ready-made' originally was coined by the artist Marcel Duchamp for his anti-art gesture at the beginning of the twentieth century, fortunately the term was used to describe his works. They consisted of objects or found objects that were brought together in a composition as works of art. They are by nature an unusual type of art that involve creating art pieces from found objects that are usually considered not to be artistic in anyway. The objects used in found art, typically have another purpose and they are usually modified in some ways into pieces of art. The artist intentionally selects the objects he or she wants and intrinsically alters the context of the object in its daily usage, giving it an entirely new meaning and perspective (Hsu and Lai 2013). Found art or ready-made object as interchangeably applied, originates from the French word (*trouve*)- describing art created from undisguised but often modified objects or products that are not normally considered materials from which artistic art creation is made, often because of the assumption that they do not bear art function possibilities. By the nature of this art form which could be natural, man-made or fragment of an object that is found or sometimes bought by the artist, and kept because of some inherent tendencies the artist sees in it that can be used or appropriated with time.

Chilvers and Glavers-smith (2009) assert that Found objects are not in themselves particularly valuable or especially rare, they are, on the contrary, likely to be sorts of things we have seen hundreds of times, even used hundreds of times without remarking on them. Comes, bicycles, tyres, leaves and so on, they all take on new

meaning when an artist takes them and presents them to us in such a way that we suddenly take time to reflect and gain new insight into the world around us.

At a glance, found objects symbolise something fundamental to art as we know it, the desire and ability to show us, the audience, something real about something we are convinced we know already, to show another layer is to give another visual perspective in the everyday and to contribute to our understanding of the world we live in and the lives we live in it. They also come to represent times gone by and allow us to connect to the past at the same time as appreciating its difference to our present, reminding us of the ever present power of change. The phenomenon about the concept over time, has attained an overwhelming, unprecedented, practice the world over. It can be described as an avant-gardist response to the aesthetic convention of art (Tenbaaf 1998).

Found object shares with the readymade, a lack of obvious aesthetic quality and little intervention on the part of the artist beyond putting the object in circulation but almost every other respect it is dissimilar. With both phenomena requiring intervention as the case may be depending on the artist, we can perhaps see the confusion between the two. The found object is encountered and the effect is traumatic while the readymade is essentially indifferent, multiple and mass produced. The found object is essentially singular or irreplaceable and both lost and found.

When the idea or concept of an art work is generally envisioned, the ready thought that comes to mind is a creation of an art work from the preconceived idea coming from conventional or unconventional approach. However, the thrust of this paper is focused on the creation of artworks from materials that have already served their primary purpose of being created.

#### Reviewed Artworks with Polythene Nylon



Figure 1: **Hula Hoop III**, Artist: Mbongeni Buthelezi

Medium: Waste from Coloured Plastic, Size: 150 cm x 76 cm

<http://www.brandsouthafrica.com/tourism-south-africa-the-artist-at-work-mbongeni-buthelezi-makes-beauty-out-of-waste>

Mbongeni Buthelezi, is a South African artist who has become known for painting using used plastics which he cuts into little pieces and glues them onto the canvas. This involves melting down the coloured plastic strips onto the canvas surface itself. *Hula Hoop III*, seen in figure 1 is a portrait-like composition of what appears to be a young girl in play mood judging by the facial and body language. She appears to be holding a rope dangling between her two hands. The method used in creating the work gives a vibrant shimmering appeal to the composition. He melted the plastics layer skilfully until a desired result was attained. This gave the composition a coarse, rough looking textural appeal due to the contrasting colours in the waste plastic used, the white ones precariously showing through the dark areas.



Figure 2: **Bags**, Artist: Lauren Berkowitz, 1994

Medium: Plastic, Size: variable

Source: [www.environmental-audit.net/laurens-call-for-trash/](http://www.environmental-audit.net/laurens-call-for-trash/)

In figure 2, Lauren Berkowitz constructs equivocal space lured by its repeated forms, its downy white softness and apparent fragility, perhaps giving a sense of comfort and protection. Staying in between the two suspended wire frames embellished with the shopping polythene bags constituting the artwork, one becomes aware of its claustrophobic qualities and potential to induce anxiety. This is a solid yet ethereal space in which sound is muffled and yet light may enter. It is dreamlike, a little surreal and as one passes between the walls, their tactile qualities

evoke the visceral spaces of the body's interior. This hybrid installation art which is part theatre, part environmental, part ephemeral incorporates notions of space and time both present and futuristic.

In creating the 'Bags', Berkowitz demonstrates that functional objects can transform or be reinvented from values of the society to possess artistic value. She gives a new vision, meaning and life to the plastic shopping bags after their usefulness is over. The structural shape of the installation looks like one taken out of the windscreen from the frame of a vehicle. The work appears to be a three dimensional version of the artworks created in this study existing on two dimensional support. The placement, arrangement and stuffed nylon bags, give textural appeal but again the translucency sets them apart.

#### **Preliminary work with Polythene Nylon**

The artwork is being undertaken from trashed polythene medium used to package drinking sachet table water known in Nigeria and some western African countries as 'pure water'; they are majorly made in 50cl or 60cl. Sachet water according to Oyelude and Ahenkorah (2012), is a commercially treated water, manufactured and distributed for sale for human consumption. It is seen to be a good supplement to other types of packaged water and can be bought at cheaper price. It is a source of drinking water for low and medium class Nigerians (Omolade and Zainab 2017). Several such bags were collected and neatly arranged. This process allowed for the discarding of the dirty ones, the ones stained with oils and so on, out of the selection. Only the clean ones were used in order to achieve the desired translucent effect. The hues of the bags vary because of the different manufacturers which in turn gives variety to the vibrant strands. The conceptual nature of the work allows them to assume any viewing position.

The use of this medium came in the creative thought process of painting conceptually through another thought of using a different medium other than pigment to represent the propensities lead the artist in this direction. The off-cuts from the polythene bags gave reflective, texturized and rhythmic appeals akin to the propensity of the raindrops or water surfaces.



Plate I, Sachet Water Bags (Pure Water). Photograph: Alasan Ndaceko Joel, 2017

Plate I shows a picture of a rice bag and a plastic bucket containing the trashed Sachet water bags ('Pure Water' Bags) that were collected over time.



Plate II, the Sorting Out. Photograph: Alasan Ndaceko Joel, 2017.

In sorting out the sachet nylon bags as seen in plate II, it involved the taking out the package water bags from the sacks onto a clean floor for the categorisation process to start. Then it was observed after they were spread out, that some had been mutilated or burnt, some had oil (palm or grandnut oil) stains at varied degrees and they were squeezed due to the general method of use. In getting them stretched out and flattened, the left over water in the bags were pressed out leading to the next stage. Only the clean bags without stain were used because the aim was to use a translucent medium.



Plate III, the Cutting. Photographs: Alasan, Ndaceko Joel, 2017.

Plate III shows the cutting edge sections of the 'pure water' bags with the aid of a razor blade and other cutting tools like palette knife and so on. The synthetic nature of the polythene easily wears out the sharpened edge of the gadgets during cutting, thus necessitating for a use of more than one instrument during the trimming process. Only the edge sections were cut because they had a rough deformed appeal caused by heat in the joining process of the bag.



Plate IV and Plate V the off-Cut Strands. Photographs: Alasan, Ndaceko Joel 2017.

Plate IV shows the cut strands alongside the board from which the cutting was done. A section of some well-arranged 'pure water bags' with other materials are displayed on the table. Plate V shows the pile of the cut strands waiting to be used.

### **The Artworks**

In plates VI and VII, the visual dialogue between the undercoat hue of some warm and cool colours under the translucent strands heralds the illusion of an ethereal appeal of the works. They shimmer, flicker and have oscillating effect. At a glance, the artworks appear to be predetermined, calculated and having mathematical grids that wear the strands. However, the approach was not systematically and strictly guided, it relied on the artist's visual judgement to maintain a vertical and horizontal appealing pattern in sticking the strands unto the surfaces.



**Plate VI, *Wealth*, Mixed Media, 152cm x 142 cm, 2017.**

This non-objective abstract painting titled *Wealth* mimics the linear fall of the rain. The visual effects of this painting emanate from the mottled raindrops which is characterised by their blurry effects. The off-cuts strands from the nylon sachets, create a reflective texturised blurry effect like the rain. Emphasis is on the attributes of the raindrops imageries realised from the use of nylon off-cut strands. The work is a concentration of the linear characteristics of the medium showing the transitory fleeting effects of the raindrops as they flow downwards. The composition has a flat background and it appears bluish grey in colour.

In the painting titled *Wealth* shown in plate I, the medium's shimmering effect is to represent the goal for virtually everyone whose dream it is to make it in life. People struggle every day to make ends meet and still save extra for a rainy day. The linear nature of the work represents the selfless hard work put up by reputable people in the society. Despite the challenges in life, if one remains straight, focused, stead-fast and determined, great success would be his or her reward. The glittery and shimmery

effects of the strands symbolise riches, luxury, gadgets, and accessories like diamond and gold.



**Plate VII, 'Not Everything that Glitters is Gold', Mixed Media, 152cm x 142cm, 2017.**

In this second work, the nylon sachet bags unlike in plate VII had its background not flat. It is worked upon with warm and cool colours of yellow, blue, purple, red, green and orange but subdued not to conflict with the reflectiveness of the polythene sachet strips. This was done to see how the work would look like combining the two concepts together. The result was different from plate VI, it has more variety and dynamism to the work. The linear composition of the strands of this painting flows in a horizontal view juxtaposed against the mottled-like flow of colours downwards in the background.

The painting titled '*Not Everything that Glitters is Gold*' shown in plate VII is appropriated to the nature of the medium to human behavioural attitude of deception. People tend to be of a character that they share no affinities with. This life style is trendy now because it cuts across all spheres of life. An example is with most of our politicians who people judge by their outward appearance instead of their inner worth. That is why they come around at every election time campaigning to make people believe their promise for a better life, for every citizenry. But just like the lines from a chorus of a song by a Nigerian artist TuFace titled 'E be Like Say', from his first studio album called 'From Grass to Grace'; singing thus,

*E be like say they want to tell me another story again oh*

*e be like say*

*E be like say they want to act another movie again oh*

*e be like say*

*E be like they want to do another deceiving again oh*

*e be like say dem want to dance*

*Galala na di dance again o*

*They want to sing another song again they want to sing x2*

*E be like say they want to code they want to dance*

At the end of the day, it is contrary to the promises made that the electorate get for their votes. This attitude and behaviour is the reason that has brought us to where we are today as a nation that once used to pride itself amongst other African nations as the giant of Africa.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the paper established through literature that explorative contemplation into this medium is possible, as they possess qualities that assume definition of colour and form. Furthering spatiality thus, enabling it to engage the viewer in a visual dialogue in whatever perspective the artworks takes. The polythene nylon reveals dynamic blend, blur of patterns and structures in an inordinate entity that gives beautiful experiences from an artwork. The characteristic bold, skewed, appearances of the surface having tactile quality, plays an important role amongst others in composition. Further studio explorations being done in other branches of art and related fields into appropriating the medium in appealing artworks of art. Nigeria is a developing third world country that is yet to tap into the recycling venture like the western nations. It is hoped with the increasing number of artists with advocacy will arouse awareness on the negative economic and environmental impact they have on the environment if the people and relevant government agencies fail to do the needful.

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