Izon Colour Interpretation and the Contemporary painter

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Abstract

Most contemporary African Artists depict African traditional art works with unlimited palette without much consideration for the traditional African coluors as recognized by the natives who see this art works as symbolic, social and religious art works. The full colour palette does may not encourage a particular traditional colour scheme. Most of the times, it does encourage the unnecessary use of colour outside a chosen colour scheme. Artists should be encouraged to use a limited palette from the beginning, because it encourage the artist to have a good understanding of colour theory and its application. The Izon cultures has classification of traditional colour into three catagories of black, red and white which represent perception and understanding of colours. The presence of these colour in art works allow the intended message of the culture to be understood and it also allows the artist to express his spirituality on the art work. Hamerton 1876 expanded limited palette, Jan's grey and Daniel Smith 2018 created a middle part colours in the use of colour. The use of traditional limited colours will lead to better interpretation of traditional art works and encourage understanding and application of colour theory.

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Key words; Symbols, Traditional Art Work, Limited Palette.

Introduction

The application of required number of colours for painting has been a matter of concern since the time of the early records of western cave painting. Soft rocks and animal blood were used to express records of hunting skills and sometimes as symbols of rituals. The early cave men were reduced to few colours because of few available colours and traditional African artists were faced with the use of limited traditional colours for painting masks, ritual symbols and body tattoos. One of the earliest attempts on limited colours painting by man was the early cave painting at the Grotte Chauvet in France, Daniel.1971 states that,

> … the oldest paintings are at the Grotte Chauvet in France. Claimed by some historians about 32000 years old. They are engraved and painted

using red Ochre and black pigment and show horses, Rhinoceros, Lions, Buffalo, Mammoth, abstract design and what are possibly partial human figure.

The early artist were restricted to few colours that were sourced directly from nature, these artists were referred to as Bronze-age colour artists. Homes 2013, states that "Bronze Age limited colour was a matter of necessity and not choice" because of the few colours available . The name 'Zorn' was derived from a famous Swedish portrait painter named Anders Zorn (18th February 1860-22 August 1920). He consistently used yellow ochre, ivory black vermilion and flake white four limited colours in his paintings. The 'Zorn Palette' (also called Apelles palette) was named after him, it was a modification of the carbon black, yellow earth colour, white, and red earth colour of bronze age Greek painting where the limited palette was a matter of necessity. The difference in approach in painting has long resulted into arguments as to which painting method is best. The "last supper" by Tintoretto from the late 1500s, he used reduced colours (limited colours) to depict perspective and effect of light to painting scene that were beautiful.



The "last supper" by Tintoretto from the late 1500s
https://designshack.net/articles/inspiration/10-free-color-palettes-from-10-famous-paintings

The painting "last supper" by Tintoretto from the late 1500s, in that painting he used reduced colours was able to show perspective, dept of distance in the painting and effect of light to portray scenes that were beautiful. The artist who painted with few colours where referred to as limited palette painters and artist who paint with many colours as possibie without mixing colours where called unlimited palette painters.



Secundino Herna ndez, Untitled, Acrylic and Lacquer on Linen, 551x25 cm, 2017
https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/secundino-hernandez-interview-paso-victoria-miro-london

The unlimited palette or open palette painting started when artist in Europe had access to factory manufactured tube paints in England on the 6th March, 1841 when John Golf Rend 1801-1873 invented the metallic collapsible paint tube first in England. Williamson 2022. Modern factory production of paint tubes gave room to the production of different pigments of various tones and values of colours amounting to thousands of different colours at the disposal of artists. The range of possibilities in using different factory manufacture tertiary colours.. There were a lot of experimentation with the new colours

available to the artist. They were rare, rich and diverse paintings that various artists have attempted to create using different approaches in understanding the use of colour.

The artists who use many colours in their unlimited palettes relied on the availability of colour to produce harmony without creativity in mixing colours of choice. They were lazy and could not mix colours on their own. They left with many colour of choice in the art shops which was likely to damage their paintings due to over use of colours. According to Hamerton 1876, "There have long been two factions amongst painters concerning the approach to outfitting a palette: Those who believe in using a restricted palette, and those who prefer using an open palette".

The unlimited palette group believes that beauty is in the natural world and it is well represented by using all the available colours and full selection chromatic tones of all available colours. The artist who holds fast to a very limited palette of few colours are reduced to painting formula which is capable of producing only pale, gray or brownish works of art (earth colours).

Each group of thought tried to master the colours they use to produce the best effect of painting. They each find their method better and easier to use. This has resulted to works of arts produced from both sides which are of unquestionable beauty and significance from the renaissance art to today's contemporary art. The discovery and production of more paints have resulted to different uses of factory paint and approaches to painting by contemporary artists. There was the need to resolve the problems between the limited palette painter and the unlimited palette painter and the need to reconcile the approaches to painting.

In the 1870s the artist, author, art critic and publisher, Hamerton, decided to make a common ground on the use of colour to get the best result. Though Hamerton himself was a limited palette painter, he felt that too many artists use far too restricted selected colours. These were artists, whom Hamerton referred to as Oligo-chromatists who only work in low key using the common three colour palette of yellow ochre, light red and cobalt blue, plus black and white (Ivory black and flake white). They were never able to paint objects like rose and orange because of the choice of limited colours. For a limited palette painting to have chromatically complete palette, other colours should be introduced to make the painting interesting, real and true to nature. In his findings he stated that "any palette could not be chromatically complete without a bright yellow, a bright red and a bright blue. It is easy to imitate dull colours by mixture, but not so easy to imitate bright ones"

In his quest to reconcile the two groups of palette users, Hamerton further established that seven colours, black and white are all the necessary colours needed for painting. Accordingly, in his magazine *The Portfolio* (1876), Hamerton asserted that "White-Pale Cadmium Yellow Ochre Vermilion – Robe Madder-Ultramarine, Emerald oxide. Seven colours with the addition of white black - nine pigments in all was the best achieve a good ",

Many artist have recently created palettes to address questions on how best this available tube colours manufactured from the factory could be best suitable for beginners to an experienced artist. This could reduce the time spent on mixing of colour and also reduce the numbers of colours left for the artist to choose from. Too many colours on the palette may confuse the artist and that could lead the artist to lack of colour harmony.



the ultimate mixing set, jane's grey (mix ultramarine and burnt siena)

Daniel Smith, 2018 professional water colour artist, reduced the paint to fourteen, although not intending to make a limited palette of primary and secondary colours. This approach may help in reducing time for mixing of colours. In October 2018, Daniel Smith released a fifteen colour half pan ultimate mixing set including Jane's Grey (mix of ultramarine and burnt sienna

Traditional Izon Colours

The *Izon* of Niger Delta, Nigeria have limited traditional colours which are White (*Pena-pena*) which represent Peace, Holiness, Purity and Love, Black (*Dirimo*) which represent evil, death and Red (*Kwue-kwue*) which represent Blood, Royalty and Danger. Other

colours that exist in the Niger Delta environment are classified under these three traditional limited colours.



Apart from these basic colours, the artist must have in a painting palette.

The Izon colour classification of Black represent all dark shades like brown, black, and green. Ultramarine blue and various dark tertiary colours. Red represent all red related tertiary colours like rose red and pyrrol scarlet and pyrrol crimson. White represents all light shades such as white, yellow and all light shades tertiary colours.

The Egbesu Clay Pot

The author of this paper is using the limited traditional Izon colours to produce a symbol art of the egbesu deity which its symbols to the Izon culture are red, black and white. The egbesu deity of war is sometime contained in a clay pot.



Mark Warekoromor, Egbesu Warei (Egbesu Pot) 24x 36 cm, Car Paint on canvas, 2017

Method of Production

The researcher chose to experiment on the use of car paint as a medium of painting to communicate with colours. The normal process of preparing a local canvas was done. The researcher also used oil paint as the last primer before the use of car paint on the ground. Because of the liquid nature of the car paint, most secondary and tertiary colours were mixed and achieved on a can . Most accidental blending of colour on canvas occur when both colours were still wet on canvas. This is due to the fact that car paint as a medium of painting is a very fast drying agent.

Agugu (Symbolic Egbes



Figure 1, A Izon Limited Palette Painting

Mark Warekoromor ; *Agugu (Agama* Lizard) Water Colour, 18 cm by 24 cm. 2015,

The author of this paper used limted traditional Izon colours in paintin, *Agugu (Agama* Lizard) ,Water Colour, used traditional Izon colours to produce an extended limited tertiary colours that are categoried under black, red and white in the Izon culture to paint the African Agama lizard (*Agugu*) which is a symbolic animal of Ozidi shrine in the *Ozidi* epic of the *Izon* culture.

Detailed Izon Symbolic Limited Painting

The king fisher bird (*Esoso*) is a symbolic bird to the Izon culture, she produces a sound of victory for the Izon fisherman.The traditional Izon colours are seen as symbols, when used in painting .They are regarded as symbolic colour and are well comprehended by the natives when used in paintings. When the traditional colour classification of black, white or red colour scheme is created, the colours and symbol represented become meaningful to the Izon audience.



Figure 2. Sketching the king Fisher on Flight

A sketch of the traditionally symbolic king fisher bird was made. Water colour is a thin layer medium of painting. The quality of water colour paintings was determined by the brand of water colour used. The quality of the paint will also determine the level of permanence and brilliance of colours water colour paints. The ability of the artist to use good water retaining brushes and good water colour support also contributes to the effect and the outcome of the painting.



Figure 3, Mark Warekoromor. Application of water colours on the king fisher bird drawing

The artist was careful to build the colours by gradually laying the colours. The process of laying colours helps the colours to mix well on paper. This is done gently to avoid warring of the paper. Where a thick layer of paint is to be applied, the first layer of paint is allowed to dry before laying another colour on top of the first colour. In order for the artist to achieve a new tone of colou,r the first layer of water colour paint is allowed to get dry before a new layer of paint is laid on top of it. The mixture of two wet paints will mix up and a new colour will result. This also depends on the density of the colours and the quantity of water the brush was carrying. The method of application of the water colour will help to create the effect of ripple of water when she is on flight. Water colour is also splattered, sprayed or floated by rubbing the finger across the brittles of the brush to create a sprinkling effect.



figure 4. Mark Warekoromor, Application of water colours.

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It is called blooming. It creates a subtle gradients of the colours. The artist also uses the scum bling technique of water colour painting. This is done by laying semi wet stokes of water colours on the rough surface of the water colour paper and it creates the effect of scrumbling.



Figure 5. Mark Warekoromor, Introduction other Birds to the Background

The artist chose to apply light tones colours first before the dark tones of colours because it is easy to paint dart tones of colours over light tones of water colours. Layers of colours were created to achieve desire colours. This technique of painting is important in water colour because it allows the artist to have good control of colours.



Figure 6, Mark Warekoromor, *Esoso* (king Fisher). Water Colour, 16cm x 24cm, 2022

The process of completing the painting, high lighting and detailing of some area of the painting is done with a small detailing brush and other portions of the painting that are on holiday and are covered for a full completion of the painting before framing of the art work is done, if required.

Advantages of Extended Limited Palette for Beginners and Students

The use of extended limited palette in painting has many advantages in comparison to the use of unlimited colour palette in painting. The number of colours used on a palette or the choice of colour of the artist defer from one artist to another. The use of limited colours for an academic paintings is preferred on the following reasons :

(i) Colour harmony is easier to achieve
(ii) It is easy to achieve a particular colour scheme
(iii) It will be fast to achieve a colour scheme
(iv) It is easy to choose colours of choice from the palette
(v) It encourage use of colour theory.
(vi) It is easy to achieve a dominating colour.
(vii) It is easy to identify colour on the colour wheel.
(viii) Few colours are left at the disposal of the artist
(x) Colours are better managed
(ix) It encourages good understanding of colours for students and learner

Conclusion

Many civilizations and culture in Africa, Europe and Asia have conceptual understanding of colours from long interaction with nature and experimentations and have come with different colour theories with same goals and objectives. The traditional Izon limited colours best interpret the Izon symbols and culture. Izon limited palette could be use by contemporary artist in expessing their cultural ideas. Many artist believe in the theory of using few colours to achieve what many colours can produce thus reducing waste of time, energy and funds. Most artist believe in starting from the known to the unknown. They created an extended unlimited palette theories which are suitable for use. By reducing the number of colours on the painting palette will make the artist more conscious of the characteristics of colours on the palette.

The limited colour palette encourages beginners and learners in academics to understand the fundamentals of colour theory and the essential of colours in its application in painting. The limited palette helps, the student to understand colour theory and the application. It also helps the student artist to maintain a particular colour scheme. There will be a step by step application of stretched colours on the support. The student artist master the use few

colours available in the palette before mastering other approaches, expansion of understanding and appreciation of other tertiary colours.

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