Visual, Symbol and Material Practice: Ozudu

By

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Abstract

The oral tradition of Ozudu-Egbesu narrative that started about a century ago has no visual representations. The verbal renditions of the present-day traditional Ozudu storyteller of Orua and other story tellers that J. P. Clark contacted lack a two-dimensional visual interpretation of the Izon culture. This could be a problem in the understanding of the tale to none native and Izon youths who do not have an idea of the Izon setting at that time. It could be interesting for the researcher who grew up in a fishing camp in the Niger Delta before encountering western education to make an input on the interpretation of the Izon culture from a different view. The researcher is a visual artist who wants to create Ozudu as claimed by the narrator. The painting will be done by following the narrative of the Ozudu storyteller of Orua, who is recognized by the elders and Prime Minister of present-day Orua community. A limited palette and mixed media will be used for a better understanding of Egbesu and Izon symbols. Creating Ozuduin painting will make an understandable visual concept of an Izon warrior who is a personification of Egbesu deity.

Keywords: Izon Warrior, Limited palette, storyteller, Izon symbol, Ground.

Introduction

The Ozidi epic written by J. P. Clark is a notable classic of Izon culture and performance, yet the absence of cultural illustrations tends to reduce the level of insight it gives to the Izon culture. The researcher travelled to Orua and met with the traditional storyteller Chief Zuomkemefa Dennis Ambayai, where the Ozidi epic started to get first-hand information on the Ozudu-Egbesu narrative.

The hero of the Ozudu narrative popularly known as Ozidi as perpetuated in the title " The Ozidi epic" by the author J.P. Clark is known and called "Ozudu" by the natives of Orua. They knew that Ozudu as a person never existed in Orua community; rather he was a symbol of the deity of war called Egbesu. Z. D.Ambayai believes he was chosen by the god Egbesu as all efforts for him to refuse the responsibility of being the storyteller of

Ozudu tale resulted in an attack from Egbesu. It was also agreed by the Orua elders and the traditional Ozudu storyteller of Orua that the Ozudu tale was first revealed to an Orua fisherman called Atazi in the river when he was fishing.

It will be important to compose Ozudu in painting as conceived by the traditional Ozudu storyteller and elders of Orua. Eisner (1986) agreed that words as in texts are useless without a corresponding image of their meaning formed in the mind, hence pictures, diagrams and illustrations are great aids in the comprehension of words'. Egonwa (1985) further stated that pictures are needed for the enjoyment of written texts, especially in the educational setting. Visual artists have tried to transform the large text into visual arts to increase readers understanding of cultural texts and symbols, like the painting and illustration of Sundiata Keita epic as narrated by the griot.

The researcher has the traditional understanding of the Izon culture from the viewpoint of an Izon indigene who grew up as a child in a traditional fishing camp of various migrant Izon fishermen from different Izon clan (ebe) of Forcados riverside in Burutu Local Government Area of Nigeria's Niger Delta. The researcher had interest in depicting the Izon tradition and the symbols in the painting of the major character Ozudu for a better comprehension of the Ozudu tale. Okpewho (2014:12) had the view that previous knowledge of culture from place of birth could be of importance to research , he claimed thus**:**"...a major advance in the study of African oral literature as literature came when native African scholars began to research the oral traditions of their people."Hearing the traditional version of the Ozudu narrative first-hand from the Ozudu storyteller of Orua is inspiring to add the cultural understanding of the narrative into the visual in the form of painting. It will be a source of inspiration for the researcher to paint this fading culture in two dimensions. In the course of narrating the Ozudu tale at Orua town by the accepted traditional storyteller of Orua Chief Z. D.Ambayai, he never distinguished between Ozudu the father and Ozudu the son in narrating the Ozudu tale, both were referred to as Ozudu in the tale as the symbol of the god of war called Egbesu in the tale.

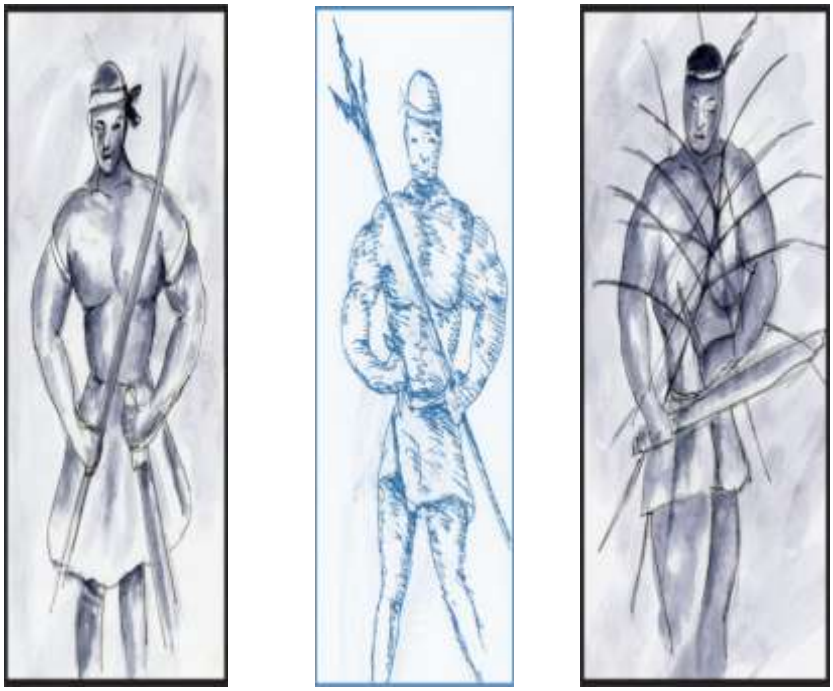
Composition ofOzudu

The art of drawing is very important in the imaginative composition of the painting of Ozudu. The imaginative composition came with the combination of cultural fashion, religious beliefs and the concept of war at the time.

Imaginative Sketches of Ozudu

Various concepts of Ozudu sketches with Izon weapons of war earlier used were made with pen and ink. This may give the artist an impression of what Ozudu may have looked

like about two hundred years ago with traditional *Egbesu* warrior attire with the concept of Ozudu the warrior as narrated by the storyteller.



Warekoromor Mark, *Ozudu,centuries ago*, Pen and ink on paper, 2015

Detailing Studio Production Process of OzuduPainting

The traditional storytellers gave a detailed description of the warrior and the researcher had fore-knowledge of the cultural and physical looksas describe by the story teller. But there was no detail or mention of the use of spear as a traditional weapon of the war of Izon culture. The Izon were known for the use of three edge spear and macheteas traditional weapon of war.

The combination of ideas of what Ozudu may look like by the Izon story teller and reviewed knowledge of Izon culture inspired the researcher to create asketch of Ozidi on a black ground.



Warekoromor Mark, White Chalk Sketch of Ozudu on a dark ground

Producing Ozudu as Narrated by the story-teller

The Red cloth which is assumed to be the symbol of the deity of war called Egbesu is applied to the painting directly instead of colour. This mixed media approach is for a better understanding of the symbol by the natives. The traditional symbols are better understood by the natives and non-natives when the real materials were used instead of colour.

Fixing of Egbesu Red head banner of Protection

Fixing the Red traditional cloth represents the presence and guidance of the Red Egbusu deity on Ozudu.



Warekoromor Mark, Fixing the red head banner of Egbesu(detailing) Mixed Media , Photograph by Warekoromor Mark 2015.

***Egbesu* Waist Cloth**

Warriors wear only clothes without any metal accessories. The textile materials are firmly glued to the painting ground to achieve durability of the. Cloth material is used in place of colour.



WarekoromorMark ,FixingEgbesuWaist Fabric(detailing) Mixed Media ,Photograph by Warekoromor Mark, 2015.

Use of colour

A Limited palette comprising of Yellow Ochre, Cadmium Red, Raw Umber, Burnt Umber, Ultramarine Blue and Titanium White were used.These colours were stretched to create a spectrum of colours from the lightest of shade to the darkest shade of the brown African skin.This shades of brown were used to create various degrees of the effect of light on the skin to achieve a three dimensional effect on a two dimensional space field. Red colour was lately introduced to all the shades of brown on the palette to achieve a red scheme of Brown colours to create harmony with the mixed-media used.



Warekoromor Mark,LimitedPalette forPaintingOzudu, Photograph byWarekoromor 2015

The natural graduation of the colours from the darkest tone to the lightest tone on the palette helped in the quick placing of colours on the painting. The researcher avoided the use of black directly from the black colour tube or Ivory Black but mixed various dark shades of colours of the limited palette to achieve a dark tertiary colour close to Ivory black in other to create harmony with colours already existing on the palette. Different tones and

shades of colours were created for the effective distribution of values of colours in the creation of three-dimensional depths on a two-dimensional space field.

Application of Cultural Symbols and Detailing of Young Ozidi Painting

The textile materials used on the painting were true symbols known to the native of Orua as Egbesu cloth; this mix-media used could easily be identified. The textile materials used were firmly glued to the painting ground to achieve a very long-lasting duration on the painting. The material used for mix-media was tinted with oil colours to create harmony with colours. The textile materials were also sized with glue and water to ensure durability.

The Symbolic War Face Mask

The Izon believe wars were fought not only in the physical but also in the spiritual. A warrior should be able to see beyond the physical. The chalk from seashells is ground to powder and applied to the eyes of the warrior for a special spiritual vision.



Warekoromor Mark, Fixing the Face Mask ,Photograph by Warekoromor Mark 2015

Fixing Symbolic Cowries



WarekoromorMark ,Fixing Sea Cowries as Mixed-Media,,.PhotographbyWarekoromor Mark

Wearing the sea cowries symbolises the attainment of spiritual powers and war charm for protection from enemies. The cowries were fixed to the ground of the painting permanently with glue and metal strings. Colours were used to blend some parts of the cowries to create harmony and a three-dimensional effect. The original colours of the cowries were not covered because the cowries' original colour becomes part of the painting.

Establishing Painting Mood and Spirituality

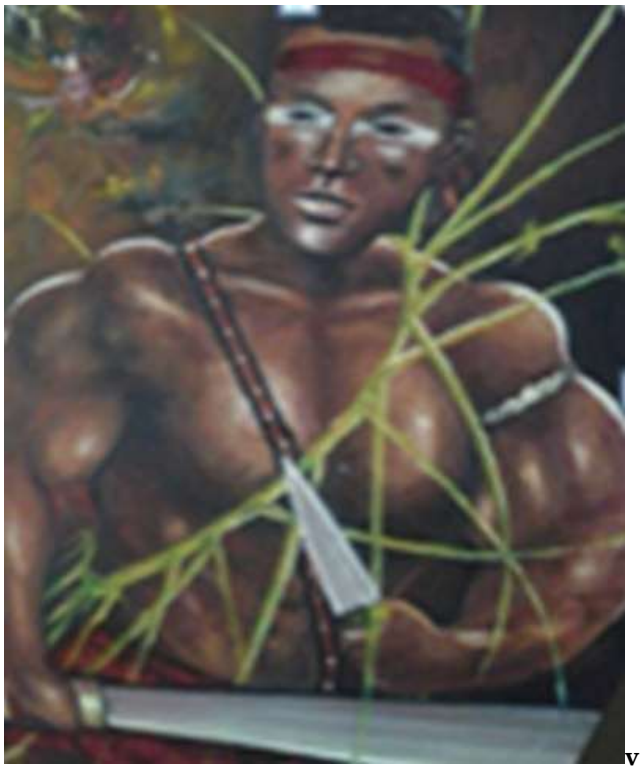
Some artists do not establish or express their feelings in the language of painting. Expressing mood and feeling in an artwork is the only way the artist can express spirituality and the mood of the artwork to other artists or viewers. The artist does not only observe the subject in a visual experience in the very depths of his being as the artist and this feeling could be what the viewer also senses in the process of seeing the artwork. According to Marilyn (1992:42), "the artist within (the God in man) has made the universal connection to the spiritual, which becomes part of the fabric of the painting."



Warekoromor Mark,*Mood and Spirituality in the Painting*,Warekoromor M.2015

Tones, value, the texture of colours were used by the artist to create the mood and spirituality he felt about Ozudu in this painting. Dark colours of different values were used to represent the mysterious forces empowering the warrior Ozudu. This abstract representation of mood and spirituality at the top left-hand corner of the painting may bring this effect to the viewer depending on the cultural interpretation and understanding of colours. This section of the painting is an abstract expression of the unknown to the average man and the mood the artist had about the Izon warrior Ozudu. This helps to create the atmosphere of the unknown that cannot be expressed in words but in colours that is behind the forces that control the warrior.

Symbolic fresh yellow palm tree fronds and other body charm

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Warekoromor Mark, Symbolic Palm Frond, and other body charms. Photograph by Warekoromor Mark, 2015

Black traditional charm strings were tied across the chest of the warrior. White, black and red colours are the colours of Egbesu, the Izon god of war. Fresh yellow palm tree fronds are placed around the warrior to unify the charms and the presence of Egbesu sacredness as readiness for battle. Metal weapons of war used by Ozidi were fashioned by special blacksmiths who reside in the ancient city-state of Orua. The most commonly used physical weapons of war by the Izon warriors were the spear, knives, machetes and more recently submarine guns from the western world.

Ozudu in Painting

The red colour was introduced to the limited palette used to create a red scheme of brown tones. The choice of the red colour scheme symbolizes the danger, blood, and

the *Egbesu* deity of war. In the Izon culture, the red colour epitomizes power and life in man.



Warekoromor Mark; *OzidiOlotu*, Mixed Media, (Palm frond, Sea Cowries. Textile Materials.and Oil on Canvas) 48cm by 69cm;, 2017 Photo by Warekoromor Mark

The warrior Ozudu personifies the strength of the war god Egbesu in the Ozudu tale. The traditional *Izon* wrestlers and warriors are known for not wearing clothes to cover the whole of their bodies. The young warrior has well-built muscles for traditional Izon wrestling and physical war combat. The Ozudu painting is in a red scheme and mixed-media painting of oil paint, cloth and sea cowries. Symbolic materials like palm tree fronds,

protecting charm string around the chest and the chalk mask for spiritual sight during warfare were represented in oil colours.

Texture in the Mixed-Media Painting of Ozudu

The use of a thick layer of paint with a palette knife in some areas of the painting and Red cloth, cowries as mixed-media to achieve the close resemblance of the traditional Izon symbols for easy identification of the symbols by the natives created thick texture on the painting. The original colour of the cloth and cowries used as mix-media were not covered with oil colours. This also created undulating texture on the painting.

Conclusion

This research has made a painting of Ozudu as described by the recognized story-teller of Orua for a better understanding of the Ozudu tale. This is because the absence of a visual for new generations of Izon and for people of other cultural backgrounds has reduced the appreciation and understanding of the culture showcased in the Ozudu narrative. There is thus the need for a two-dimensional presentation of the tale in form of painting even as a supplement to the verbal and scarce literature on this subject.

The imaginative painting composition of Ozudu has created an artistic impression of what the storyteller had in mind of the description of Ozudu to the understanding of younger Izon generation and none natives who do not have the cultural understanding of the Izon.

There was the need to use the narrative of the Orua storytellers coupled with the understanding of the Izon culture to create a painting of the picture of Odudu. This will make a better understanding of the Ozudu tale by none indigene of Izon and the younger generation of Izon who do not know the old Izon culture. The Izon warrior has been represented in a visual language on a two-dimensional space field in form of painting. This invariably makes the entire phenomenon more venerable in another mode of perception (sight) instead of its original predominant audible. The Izon Ozudu epic as told over the years is all about the Izon deity of war Egbesu which was embedded in the personality of Ozudu the hero in the epic. The epic is about the strength and unity of the Izon man. The Egbesu spirit when invoked still appears in inform of an Izon warrior to believers. The presence of visual equivalence of the description of the young *Ozidi* has increased the cultural documentation and understanding of the cultural showcase in the traditional Izon epic as told by Chief Z. D. Ambayai, the present-day recognized Ozidi storyteller of Orua where the Ozidi epic started.

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