

ART ACTIVISM AS A MEANS OF CURBING HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND WASTE MANAGEMENT, USING DISCARDED PUBLIC POSTERS AS SUPPORT FOR PAINTING

¹**Chinonyelum Gloria Okonkwo, ² Clifford Ezekwe Nwanna (Ph.D)**

^{1,2} Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

ABSTRACT

Over the years, trafficking in persons has assumed a global dimension as various concerned government and non-governmental agencies battle the crime using various media and techniques. In Nigeria, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Person (NAPTIP) has been tackling the problem of human trafficking for decades. The approaches employed by various abolitionists groups appear insufficient since the rate of the crime appear to be on the increase, especially in Nigeria where stories of young Nigerians girls entangled in sex slavery has become prevalent. In view of this problem, this study addresses the issue of sex slavery and other core aspects of human trafficking which includes; forced labour, illegal adoption, child soldier, among many others. The paintings produced in the course of the research were designed to sensitize the public on the challenges associated with human trafficking and to serve as an avenue towards the amelioration of the problem. Consequently, waste management and poverty were also addressed by the use of discarded or waste public posters which deface major streets in Nigeria. When used for painting these waste receives a new lease of life thereby turning waste to wealth. The study employed qualitative and quantitative methods. Data was sourced through primary sources,(mainly oral sources) and secondary sources ; written sources both published and unpublished. The study reveals that painting could be a veritable means of creating awareness among the people about the evils of human trafficking, thereby turning the public into advocates of change. The research has also proved that the use of discarded poster for painting could contribute to waste reduction in the society and serves as a means of turning waste to wealth. The study encourages more works on using art as an advocacy towards the fight against various aspects of human trafficking especially trading young girls into sex slavery.

Key words; Art activism, human trafficking, waste management, support, painting, posters.

INTRODUCTION

Proper waste management is still a very big issue in our society today and has affected the effective management of the environment. A vast amount of generated waste is still inadequately managed or disposed of which now results in the littering of the environment and indiscriminate dumping of waste in every nook and cranny of society. Waste management is a term used to refer to all of the ways that waste is dealt with throughout its lifecycle, from recycling, up-cycling or composting existing waste to minimising its production in the first place.

Waste refers to materials that are considered useless or valueless. Interestingly, the idea of waste is diverse, hence waste means different things to different people, something that is useless to an individual could be useful to another person. In line with this view, oftentimes, some wastes are given a new lease of life through upcycling and reuse. Waste generation has frequently been on the increase as a result Of global population growth, amazing technological advancement and its resultant urbanization as well as industrialization. Waste could be classified into non-hazardous and hazardous wastes. Non-hazardous wastes

are solid wastes which could be broken down into the following; plastic waste, paper/ card waste, tins and metals waste, ceramics and glass waste, textile waste, and organic wastes.

Hazardous waste include radio-active wastes, industrial wastes, electronic wastes, among many others. Wastes could be managed through adaptation, exploration, utility and aesthetics. Busari and Olayele (2007;243) aver that “the widely favoured scientific and effective approach to waste management is the adoption of three “Rs”- reduce, reuse and recycle means of waste management, the art based approach appears least popular, hence a lot of experts are calling for art based approaches to waste management which is not only effective but give an immediate result.

In all, it is generally accepted that wastes are discarded materials that are considered to be useless or valueless and there is a relationship between art and waste. Discarded public posters which is considered to be waste is upcycled and utilized as a support for paintings that highlight the ills of human trafficking which equally hinders societal development. Human trafficking is a crime against humanity and it can be defined as any act or recruitment or transfer or harbouring of a person through the means of threat, fraud, force, coercion or deception for the purpose of exploitation. Victims of human trafficking fall prey to their captors mostly as a result of poverty or poor background and poor economic condition in their countries. Traffickers prey on those with little economic opportunities and those struggling to meet the basic needs. Traffickers take advantage of the unequal status of women and girls in disadvantaged countries and communities, and capitalize on the demand for cheap, unprotected labour and the promotion of sex tourism in some countries (Aronowitz, 2001; Miller & Stewart, 1998).

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria is one of the nations with a large number of persons being trafficked abroad, particularly to Europe, with victims well known in more than 34 nations. The international organization estimated that 80 percent of women and girls travelling from Nigeria to Europe, whose numbers had soared from 1,454 in 2014 to 11,009 in 2016, were potential victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in the streets and brothels of Europe. This is alarming and calls for urgent attention. It is obvious that economic hardship and lack of job opportunities contribute greatly to this problem. In view of these, the researcher advances art advocacy as a means of enlightening Nigerian youths on the dangers of human trafficking and also presents the idea of waste to wealth, using discarded out-door posters as support for creating paintings. This idea of “waste to wealth” will not only equip the youths with skills for economic gains but will also contribute to the reduction of waste in the environment.

Review of Related Literature

Available literature that are related to the research were reviewed under the following sub-headings: conceptual framework, theoretical framework, theoretical studies, empirical studies and summary of review

Conceptual Framework

This section explains the dependent and independent variables in the study and how they affect or relate to the research. Shikalepo (2020) opined that, “conceptual framework combines the variety of important literature findings that are relevant to the research into a single unit, with one perspective that reveals the strategic literature path for the research”.

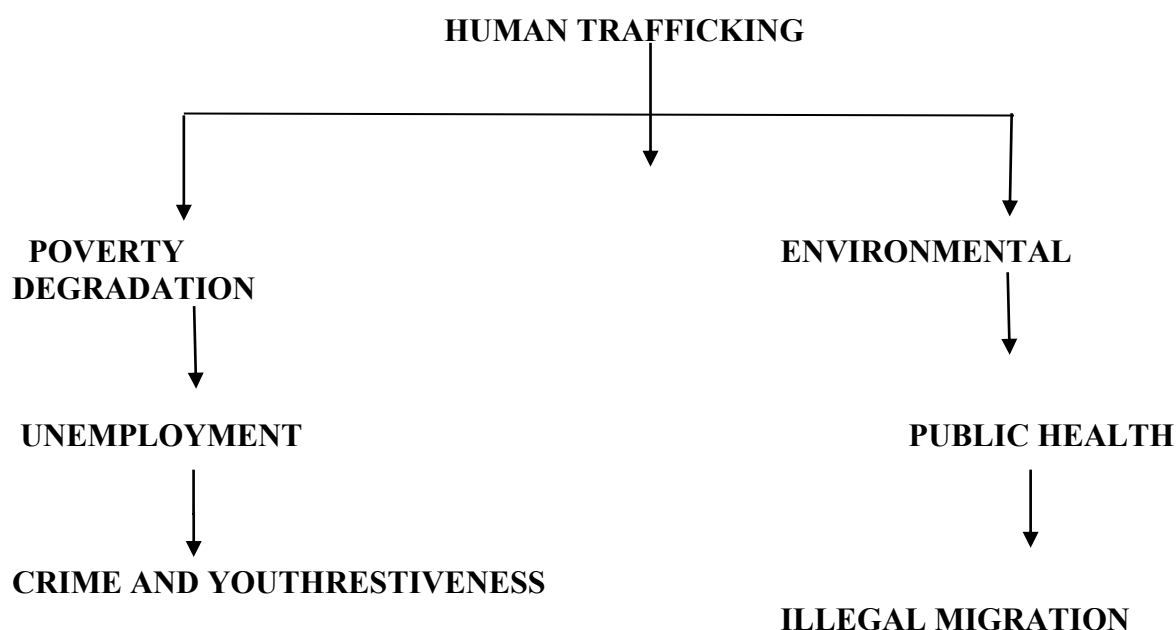


Diagram 1: Conceptual Framework for Human Trafficking

Concept of art

Art can be defined as a diverse range of human activities and the products of those activities, involving creative or imaginative talent expressive of technical proficiency, beauty, emotional power, or conceptual ideas. It encompasses a wide variety of forms, including painting, sculpture, music, literature, dance, and many others. Art can serve various purposes, from aesthetic enjoyment and cultural expression to social commentary and personal exploration. Art often sparks conversation and debates about cultural, social, and political issues. It can challenge perspectives, inspire change and reflect the values and concerns of a society. Throughout history, art has played a significant role in political movements. It can be a powerful tool for protest and advocacy, giving voice to marginalized communities and shedding light on injustices. Artists often use their work to question authority, highlight societal issues, and inspire social change. This can be seen in various forms, from street art and murals to music and literature, all of which can influence public opinion and policy. Art also has the power to preserve history and cultural heritage. It captures moments in time, telling stories that might otherwise be forgotten. Through art, we can learn about past civilizations, understand different cultures and gain insights into the experiences of people from various backgrounds. This makes art a vital means of preserving and sharing human history and culture. Art also serves as a means of personal expression and emotional release. For many artists, creating art is a way to process their thoughts, emotions, and experiences. It can be therapeutic, providing a way to explore and express feelings that might be difficult to articulate otherwise. This aspect of art can be deeply personal, yet it often resonates with others who may have had similar experiences or emotions.

The creation of artworks using solid waste materials does not imply that the works are created with unknown concepts. Such works have various reasons for being created. An example is this study which is environmentally motivated, to mount an advocacy towards waste management and environmental abuse. In all, the study advocates for an attitudinal change in order to ensure a better world.

Concept of Advocacy

Advocacy can be defined as the act of arguing in favour of something, such as a cause, idea or policy. It involves activities aimed at influencing decisions within political, economic and social systems and institutions. This can include activities like public speaking, media campaigns, and engaging with lawmakers to promote or defend a specific cause or set values. This can involve organizing campaigns, raising public awareness, and building coalitions to support a cause. Advocates often work to ensure that the voices of those they represent are heard in decision making processes. Art advocacy refers to the promotion and support of the arts and artists, often with the goal of ensuring that the arts are recognized as a vital part of the society.

The researcher advances art advocacy as a means of enlightening Nigerians on ways to control and manage solid waste through the idea of waste to wealth. In this research, discarded out-door posters were recovered and used as support for creating paintings. This idea of “waste to wealth” will not only equip the youths with skills for economic gains but could also contribute to the reduction of waste in our environment. The innovative power of art depends on its ability to trigger cultural, cognitive and psychological changes (Bell and Desai, 2011; Bleiker, 2018; Danchev, 2009). Resistance movements and environmental activists use artistic expressions to educate and engage community in participation, in decision-making (Bianchi, 2018; Brewington and Hall, 2018), and strengthen community identity. No wonder why environmental humanities recommend art as having the ability to cause the cultural change required to contend with socio-environmental catastrophe (Robin, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

The theories used in this study are as follows

Functional theory

The functional theory is a sociological theory that understands society as a system, that is made up of interdependent parts. These parts which include, agencies of socialization such as, family, work, law, education, religion. All these parts need to function properly for a society to run smoothly. Functional theory was propounded by August Comte (1798-1857) and Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). All the parts of the society maintain equilibrium and a state of balance under a perfect condition. However, when a problem arises, it is because a part of the social system has become dysfunctional, usually caused by some type of rapid change in any of the parts which the other parts of the system are not able to adjust to. Human beings are part of the social system of the society, and are being governed by human rights and societal norms and human trafficking is one of the crimes that destroys the rights and peaceful co-existence of individuals of the society, thereby causing dysfunction in functioning, smooth running and maintenance of the society. Functional theory operates on the premise that human beings are inherently co-operative and caring, each playing their role in maintaining the harmony of the society (Schriver, 1998).

Child-brides, sex trafficking, illegal organ transfer, prostitution, labour trafficking and other forms of victimization are all contributors to human rights violations which the functionalist pointed out. In order to address these kinds of violations, the researcher tries to use painting to create awareness and expose the activities involved in this crime, by depicting the different causes and effects of human trafficking on the victims and society, in a pictorial form. This will help the society to get acquainted with the required knowledge and guide themselves from falling victims to this dreaded crime.

Theory of Deviance

Deviance, according to Clinard, (1974) is defined as behaviour that is so much disapproved of, that the community finds impossible to tolerate. In terms of Clinard's definition, crime and delinquency are the most obvious form of deviance. Crimes refer to those activities that break the law of the land and are subject to official punishment. Human trafficking is a crime against humanity and national law and it contravenes the fundamental human rights and as such, it is condemned and disapproved by the law. The researcher tries to use painting to depict, in colour forms, those activities involved in this crime, in order to expose the crime and help to bring it to a total stop.

Theoretical Studies

Human Trafficking: The Modern Slavery

Majority of governments and scholars distinguish human smuggling from trafficking. The former involves a situation in which someone assists a consenting person to illegally cross a national border and where the two parties have relatively brief contact with each other. In the latter, at least some deception or coercion is involved in recruitment or transit and in which the person may have protracted ties to the trafficker (Aronowitz, 2009). There may be intersection between these two types, such as when a person first enters into a voluntary agreement with a smuggler but later experiences some kind of deception, coercion, or other victimization from the same smuggler or a different one, thus qualifying as trafficking. Furthermore, the dualistic distinction between smuggling and trafficking has been questioned insofar as there can be uncertainty between the two—victimization in smuggling and agency in trafficking or a mixture of choice and compulsion in both smuggling and trafficking (O'Connell Davidson, 2013).

Slavery is the total control of one person by another for the purpose of economic exploitation. The person is controlled by violence and denied all of their personal freedom and forced to make money for someone else (Bales, 2004). According to Bales, slavery manifests itself in bonded labour, forced labour, and human trafficking—which expands the scope of slavery beyond Bales's own necessary conditions: violence, lack of freedom, and “total control” by another person. Other experts have contested his definition because it conflates slavery with other forms of exploitation. Patterson (2012), for example, restricts the compass of modern slavery to cases in which individuals are socially isolated, suffer “parasitical degradation,” and are denied membership in the society of their masters (trafficking to foreign countries where one enjoys no citizenship rights), but not other instances of trafficking (within a nation or lacking social isolation and degradation) or forced or bonded labour (in which the worker is neither socially isolated nor denied all rights). However, Patterson's (2012) construction of slavery is itself problematic insofar as there is ambiguity in the meaning of key constructs (social isolation, parasitical degradation) and because he treats all instances of sex trafficking as slavery regardless of whether his other criteria are met. Bales (2004) defines debt bondage as a situation in which people give themselves into slavery as security against a loan or when they inherit a debt from a relative. Some leading authorities agree: The International Labour Organization (ILO) considers bonded labour a form of forced labour, as does the US State Department.

Empirical Studies

Painting in the form of mural are powerful protest tools. Since the 1960s, they have been visual sponsors for major peace and activist movements across the globe. They have lined the streets of cities and communities to inform, educate, protest and beautify. Today, they function as sites of activism by catalyzing community action at their physical sites, creating a

sense of a global anti-slavery culture that extends into streets and communities and helps to create a narrative of empowerment over one of victimization within modern anti-slavery visual culture (Jeffery, James and Trodd, 2020).

A prominent modern slavery mural was produced in 2010, by Shepherd Fairy in Covington, Kentucky (United States), protesting against the use of child soldiers. The piece drew parallels between the Vietnam War and the invasion of Iraq. It drew criticism and was painted over soon after its completion. The following year, students from T.C. Williams High School in Virginia (United States) completed a more positively received mural in their school.



Platel: Joel Berger, *Sex Trafficking Awareness*, , Ohio, USA,

It aimed to raise awareness of sex trafficking and raised money for the Charity Courtney's House by charging students \$3 to have their hand print on the mural. Two other murals were created in 2011, both in America, and in 2012 three murals were created in the UK, two in Ireland and eight in Colombia. However, it was not until 2014 that murals on modern slavery increased and became more globalized, with 19 in the United States, four in Yemen, and one in Nicaragua, Argentina, the Philippines and the UK. In 2015, the creation of murals continued, with 24 murals across North America, Europe, Africa, South America and Asia. The year 2015 also marked a high watermark for UK murals with 18 across the country, unsurprisingly in the wake of the UK's 2015 Modern Slavery Act (Jeffery, et al., 2020).

Summary of Review

This review shows a wide consultation of literature, theories and concepts. From the review, it was possible to establish that paintings in different forms and in from various geographical locations could have far reaching effect on the society and could be used to solve problems and proffer solutions in a given society.

Again, looking at the extant literature and knowledge available on the subject, only very few art exist in Nigeria, that addressed the problem of human trafficking in relation to environmental degradation in the country.

Research gaps

Most of the contemporary paintings on human trafficking in Nigeria today were not done with the idea of reducing and upcycling waste, judging by the existing literature and knowledge. This is the first body of work to the knowledge of the researcher that employed discarded flex posters as support for paintings with an eye on waste reduction and environmental beautification. This research fills a gap in this area. This also is the first research work on combating human trafficking and environment, that highlights the correlation between poverty and human trafficking. Morality, they say, die in the face of poverty.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative method of research, .it is also a studio based research and the outcome of the studio production was analyzed descriptively. Data for the study were gathered through primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are mainly oral sources which include interviews, focused group discussions, and researcher's observation. Secondary sources are written materials, both published and unpublished. They include, books, internet source, newspapers, thesis, and many others.

The study area is Awka, the administrative capital of Anambra state and the headquarters of Awka South Local Government Area.

Research instruments

Instruments used for the research include pictorial questionnaire, computers, digital cameras and printers, among others.

Tools and Equipment

Tools and equipment used in the execution of studio project include:

Tools:

Scraper:	used for scrapping out old paints from the pallet
Pallet knife:	used for mixing colours
Pallet:	used for holding and mixing colour
Cutter:	used for sharpening the pencils used for drawing
Hammer:	used for framing
Nails:	used for joining woods together
Gun tacker:	used for holding the canvas to the stretcher
Saw:	used for cutting of wood
Measuring tape:	for measurement of widths and length of the stretcher

Equipment

i Easel:	used for mounting of the canvas
ii Computer:	used for research analysis
iii Camera:	used for capturing images use for painting
iv Printer:	used for printing out material for the research

Materials

Materials used for the project include, acrylic colours, oil paints, brushes, discarded flex posters, glue among others. Pictures of some of the materials are shown for better comprehension.



Plate 2: Acrylic Colours, courtesy: The researcher (2024)



Plate 3: tubes of oil colour. courtesy: The researcher (2024)

Oil / Acrylic colour: oil colours are colours that are mixed with oil in the course of production. oil colour is mixed together with linseed oil before using it for painting. While acrylic colours are water based colours, it can be mixed with water while painting

Brushes:	used for applying paint or colour on the canvas
Flex Poster:	acts as a support or background for painting
Top bond:	used in priming of canvas
Pencils:	used for preliminary sketching of concepts
Paper:	used for drawing



Plate 5: Picture showing set of brushes. courtesy: The researcher (2024)

PRODUCTION PROCESSES AND PROJECT ANALYSIS

Stage One: Conception Stage

This stage entails generating original ideas for the project. These include pencil sketches and drawings. The artist explored ideas in series of sketches that strengthen her imagination on the concept and themes that suits the concepts. Several thumbnail sketches were produced with pencil, of which the artist selected the best that describe her thoughts and ideas. Some of the preliminary sketches produce are as follows:



Fig 1: A sketch for *Reflection*. Courtesy: The researcher (2024)

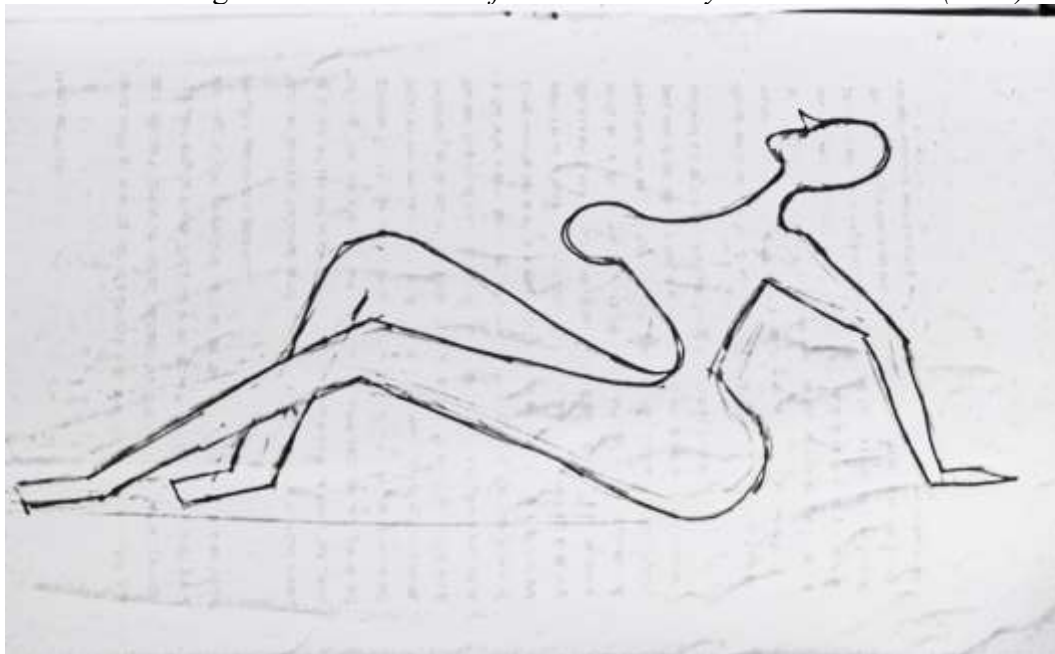


Fig 2: sketch for *Hostage*. Courtesy: The researcher (2024)



Fig 3: Sketch for *Victims*. Courtesy: The researcher (2024)



Fig 4: Concept art
Courtesy: The researcher
(2024)

Stage two: Preparation of support and ground for Painting

Discarded flex was chosen as the support for the painting and the preparation of ground comes in the followings steps .

Step 1 – the researcher starts by gathering used flex or posters from areas such as refuse dumps ,gutters and around the of streets. These posters constitute havoc due to improper disposal after usage and they also deface the environment when they are torn and still hanging on their frames.



Plate 6: photograph of discarded flex dumped in the street of Awka



Plate 7: photograph of gutter filled with discarded flex

Step 2 – at this level, the researcher dips the used posters into a large bowl of water, adds detergent and washed it thoroughly. this is to ensure that all the dirt accumulated on the flex from the dumb where it was collected.

Stage three: Construction of the stretcher

The stretcher is attached on the support for painting. The production of stretchers in this study were carried out using pinewood. The researcher choosed pinewood over white wood because of the good qualities of pinewood. A good pinewood is resilient and prevents intrusion and destruction by insects such as, ants and termite. Unlike the white wood, the pine is resilient, with even sides and cannot easily be infested by wood ants. Typically, dimension of the wood is about 2 inches in thickness to avoid warping in of stretcher due to pressure from extending the canvas. In addition, cutting of the wood to create standard dimensional length of 3 feet and 4 feet in width was carried out meticulously. Angular split ends of the woods are shaped at an angle 45°,hinged at both ends using adhesive and gun tacker.



Plate 8 (Right): The researcher washing used flex posters



Plate 9: Woods for stretchers, The researcher (2024)



Plate 10: finished stretchers, The researcher (2024)

Stage four: Stretching of flex as a support for the painting

The support is measured with extra 2 inches on both end of the dimensional lengths and widths. The purpose of such extra dimension is to provide space for overlapping required for dragging and attaching of the support. The attachment begins, with fastening- in of the lengthy side of the flex to stretcher using gun tacker. The procedure is repeated on the other side, then the same thing is repeated on the shorter side until the stretching process is complete



Plate 11: A Stretched used flex poster. Photograph by the researcher

The stretched form can be distorted into the shape of a rhomboid, which looks odd and makes framing of the complete work difficult if the support is insufficient or when it is deficient, especially where suitable tools and equipment's are not used. Later some quantities of oil colour will be mixed with kerosene and run through the canvas using big brush, this will make the colour to assimilate well into the background in the course of painting.

Sketching on prepared support

This process required studio creative production processes, which began with the transferring of the sketches to the support. The sketching involves a quick drawing with scanty details on the support using colour roughs, once the it is covered with colour, the artist allow the colour to dry.

Stage five - Building of forms and treatment of colours

At this stage, more coats of colour were applied in vertical and horizontal strokes, the artist engages her skills in the creation of visual forms that explains the concept. She uses paints, paint-brushes, pallet and pallet knife to bring out the forms and the colours. At this stage more layers of colours are being added to get the desired composition and procedure continues until the painting is completed. Other stages involved in the actual painting which

includes Transfer drawing or thumbnail sketches from sketch pad to support, Application of colours in layers, Continuing application of colour in layers, Finishing, and Framing

Painting stages

Illustrations of steps followed in actual painting “consequence”

step 1



Plate 10: Initial drawing on support based on the idea from the sketch
Step 2



Plate 11: Illustration of step two: application of colour in layers
Step 3



Plate 12: illustration of the three steps, finishing stage
Courtesy: The researcher (2024)

Step 4



Plate 15: Illustration of the fourth step: framing of the finished work
Courtesy: The researcher (2024)

Analysis of the project

Some of the works produced by the researcher were selected and analyzed descriptively. they include: The work entitled “Consequence” depicts the figure of a pregnant woman squatted in a melancholy position. The painting is predominantly made with primary colours with uniquely bright yellow light a glow on her protruded stomach. Her large breast accentuated her femininity while her state of dejection could be seen from her posture. the artist tries to show the negative psychological effect of human trafficking on its victims.

conclusion

From the outcome of the study in relation to studio experience, it was observed that it is possible to use discarded waste posters, made of flex, as a support for painting. Although there are some challenges encountered in the course of executing the paintings, waste management could be said to have been achieved by upcycling the flex material. The use of figures to symbolize and interpret events was achieved in the research. This also range from the use of symbolic design elements to capture moods and sensations which characterized the subject matter.

In all, it is a fact painting plays a vital role in the campaign against societal ills. Painting and other aspects of visual arts has the potential to elevate, educate, inform and transform a society. Okeke (2024) posits that “visual arts play a pivotal role the campaign against the societal menace. Moreover, art proffer a way forward towards human capital development in the society. This research aimed at creating awareness about human trafficking and sex slavery, which targets mainly girls and children. the study is of the view that the lives of the victims can be transformed from bondage to grace, using art as a medium of appeal for their re-intergration into the society and curbing stigmatization of any kind against the victims.

The study calls for more multifaceted and synthesized approaches aimed at addressing the issue of human trafficking in Nigeria. This will go a long way in ensuring basic human rights among the citizens and achieving a positive result in human capital development.

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