

TEXTILE SCULPTURE: EXPLORATION OF SOME INTERIOR DECORATION OBJECTS USING TUFTING TECHNIQUE

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Abstract

This study explores the use of tufting techniques in textile design to create innovative and functional interior decorative sculptural objects by merging craftsmanship with contemporary design, the research showcases how tufting can transform simple materials into three-dimensional artworks that redefine interior spaces. It focused on three distinct pieces flower vase, zebra textile sculpture and a fish textile sculpture. Each work highlights the versatility of tufting its capacity to evoke aesthetic appeal. The flower vase incorporates diverse inspirations including African wax-prints patterns, the zebra textile sculpture has a bold visual statement rich with texture and pattern while the fish textile sculpture captures dynamic motion appearing as if diving gracefully into water. The creative process began with conceptual sketches and progressed to armature construction using welded rods. Patterns were drawn in reverse on monk cloth stretched over a tufting frame, tufted with acrylic yarns and then affixed to the armatures to create the final forms. This meticulous process produced textile sculptures that combine artistic expressions with cultural storytelling. The findings underscore tufting's potential as a sustainable and innovative medium for textile sculpture, capable of bridging tradition and modernity in interior designs.

Key words: Textiles, Sculpture, Textile sculpture, Interior decoration, Tufting.

INTRODUCTION

Textile art has long been a significant aspect of human creativity and culture, serving both functional and aesthetic purposes. As societies evolve, so too has the use of textiles, moving from basic utility to complex forms of artistic expression. The quest for unique and personalized artwork has led textile artists and enthusiasts to create different techniques, methods, approaches, and styles over the years. There are various techniques of textile art which are mentioned below, they include: punch needle, applique, knitting, sewing, weaving, resist techniques, patches work, printing, felting, quilting, mirror work, macramé, tufting among others. These techniques could be synergized or incorporated into other sections in the Fine and Applied Arts such as sculpture, painting, ceramics, fashion design and graphics.

Sculpture has historically been a medium of artistic expression, using materials such as stone, metal, and wood to create enduring forms. Over time, however, artists have expanded their material repertoire, incorporating unconventional elements like textiles to redefine the boundaries of traditional sculpture. Textile sculpture, an innovative fusion of textile and sculptural practices, has emerged as a dynamic art form that challenges conventions while addressing contemporary aesthetics. Sculpture, as one of the oldest and most enduring art forms, has served as a medium for human expression, storytelling, and cultural representation across centuries. Traditionally, sculpture involved carving, modeling, or assembling of hard materials like stone, wood, and metal to create three-dimensional forms that embody artistic and cultural significance. From the ancient statues of Greece and Rome to modern abstract works, sculpture has continuously evolved, reflecting societal shifts and technological advancements.

In contemporary art, the definition of sculpture has expanded to include a diverse range of materials and techniques, breaking away from its traditional associations with permanence and rigidity. Among these developments is textile sculpture—a dynamic fusion of textile art and sculptural practices. This innovative art form uses fibers and fabric as primary materials, challenging the boundaries of both mediums and offering unique platforms for artistic expression.

The origins of textile sculpture can be traced to the mid-20th century when artists began incorporating condition (Kettle & McKechnie, 2012). Techniques like tufting, weaving, and felting have further propelled textile sculpture into the mainstream, allowing artists to create forms that combine structural stability with the softness and tactility of textiles. For instance, tufting—a technique where yarn is punched into fabric to create textured and layered surfaces—has become a popular method for producing intricate designs and functional forms (Gordon, 2014).

Textile sculpture stands apart for its unique aesthetic qualities, blending the intimacy and pliability of textiles with unconventional materials into their works. Magdalena Abakanowicz(nd), a trailblazer in the field, revolutionized textile art with her monumental fiber installations known as the Abakans. These organic, textured forms transcended the limitations of traditional textiles, exploring themes of identity, nature, and the human structural and spatial presence of sculpture. Conceptually, it often delves into themes of memory, identity, and cultural heritage. African artists, for example, frequently utilize textiles to convey narratives rooted in tradition, colonial history, and globalization, with vibrant patterns and symbolic motifs reflecting the cultural significance of textiles in African societies (Onuzulike, 2019). Despite its potential, the use of textile sculptures—especially those created with tufting techniques—for interior space decoration, remains underexplored. Traditionally, textiles have been confined to two-dimensional applications or functional roles, and their adaptation as three-dimensional elements in interior spaces is yet to gain widespread recognition. This research seeks to address this gap by exploring the artistic and functional possibilities of tufted textile sculptures within interior spaces. Therefore, this study carried out exploration on textile sculptures for interior decoration using tufting techniques.

Statement of the Problem

There is a growing demand for unique and personalized decorative elements that provide both aesthetic appeal and a sense of individuality, in the field of interior decoration. Traditional decorative items, while beautiful, often lack the textural richness and tactile quality that textile sculptures can offer. This study addresses the gap in knowledge regarding the use of tufting techniques to create textile sculptures for interior decoration.

The aim of the study

The aim of the study is to explore the application of tufting technique to produce textile sculpture for interior decoration.

Objective of the Study

1. To explore textile sculptures for interior decoration using tufting techniques.

Research Question

This study seeks to answer the following questions.

1. In what ways can textile sculptures for interior decoration using tufting techniques be explored?

Significance of the Study

This study on tufted sculpture is significant for several reasons, particularly because tufted sculpture is not widely recognized or practiced in the art world.

1. Innovative Art Form: By exploring tufted sculpture, this study introduces a relatively new and innovative art form that combines textile techniques with sculptural elements. It encourages artists and designers to experiment with tufting, expanding the boundaries of textile art and sculpture.
2. Cultural Relevance: The research highlights the potential of tufted sculptures to reflect cultural narratives and traditions. By incorporating tufting into contemporary art, the study emphasizes the importance of textiles in cultural expression and heritage, potentially revitalizing interest in traditional crafts.
3. Interdisciplinary Approach: This research promotes an interdisciplinary approach by linking textile art, sculpture, and interior design. It fosters collaboration between artists, designers, and architects, encouraging new creative partnerships and the development of unique artistic expressions.
4. Educational Resource: The findings from this study can serve as an educational resource for students and emerging artists. By documenting techniques, processes, and outcomes, it provides valuable information that can inspire and guide future practitioners in the field. Workshops, tutorials, and curriculum materials can be developed based on the insights gained, fostering a deeper understanding of both tufting and textile sculpture.
5. Artistic Exploration: The study encourages artistic exploration and experimentation with materials and techniques, enabling artists to push the boundaries of traditional textile art. This exploration can lead to new forms of expression, enriching the artistic community and encouraging innovation within the medium.
6. Economic Impact: The development of tufted sculpture as a recognized art form can contribute to the local economy by creating jobs and opportunities in the textile and craft industries. Workshops and classes can

generate income for artists while also fostering community engagement. Additionally, as tufted sculptures gain popularity, they can lead to increased sales of related materials and supplies, benefiting local businesses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Overview of Textile Art

Textile art has a rich and diverse history that spans various cultures and techniques. Initially serving practical purposes such as clothing and shelter, textiles gradually evolved into an artistic medium that reflects cultural values and social narratives. According to Katz (2013), early textile arts were often linked to cultural rituals and religious practices. As noted by Burnham (1972), these practices emphasized the significance of textiles in various societal contexts. In many ancient societies, textiles symbolized wealth and status, as seen in the intricate designs of ancient Egyptian textiles (Tiradralli, 2016) and in ceremonial contexts within ancient Greece and Rome (Carroll, 2013).

The modern textile art movement gained momentum in the 1960s, significantly influencing the development of textile sculpture. As suggested by Albers (2017), artists like Lenore Tawney and Sheila Hicks pushed the boundaries of traditional textile practices, encouraging a more experimental and conceptual approach. Contemporary textile sculpture continues to explore innovative materials, techniques, and themes, blurring the lines between art, craft, and design (McQuaid, 2018).

Sculpture

Sculpture is a three-dimensional art form that involves shaping materials such as stone, metal, wood, or clay to convey meaning, emotion, and narrative. As described by Brown (2014), sculpture has undergone significant evolution from its early origins in ancient civilizations, where it often served religious or ceremonial purposes. In contemporary contexts, sculpture incorporates a diverse array of materials and forms, enabling artists to challenge traditional notions and engage with innovative practices, as highlighted by McQuaid (2018). This evolution has led to increased interest in mixed media and interdisciplinary approaches, allowing for a more expansive exploration of artistic expression.

Textile Sculpture

Textile sculpture represents a unique combination of textile art and traditional sculpture, utilizing techniques and materials from both fields. According to Jenkins (2003), textile sculpture is increasingly recognized, with artists experimenting with fibers to create visually striking and conceptually rich forms. Contemporary textile sculptures often challenge the distinctions between art, craft, and design, creating a dialogue about the role of textiles in both functional and decorative contexts (Wild, 2017). As tufted sculptures emerge as a unique subset within textile sculpture, they offer new opportunities for artistic expression and innovation.

The Tufting Technique: Origins and Applications

Tufting is a textile technique that involves creating raised patterns or designs by inserting yarn into a backing material, resulting in a textured surface that can be visually striking and tactile. As noted by Rosenberg (2015), tufting has gained popularity among contemporary textile artists who appreciate its versatility and the unique tactile qualities it imparts to artworks. The origins of tufting can be traced back to various cultural practices, where similar techniques were employed to create decorative textiles. According to McQuaid (2018), tufting was historically used in producing carpets and upholstery, where artisans crafted intricate designs by hand. The earliest evidence of tufting dates back to ancient Egypt, where textiles were tufted manually to create soft, luxurious fabrics for royalty (Hansen, 2009). The industrial revolution in the 19th century brought significant advancements in tufting technology. The invention of the tufting gun in the 1930s allowed for the mechanization of the process, making it faster and more efficient (Smith, 2015). This evolution has made tufting more accessible to artists, enabling them to experiment with larger and more complex forms.

Today, tufting is not only used for creating functional items like rugs but has also found a place in contemporary textile art. Artists and designers use tufting to explore textures and create intricate, three-dimensional forms. According to Martinez (2018), the versatility of the tufting technique allows for a wide range of artistic expressions, from abstract designs to detailed, representational forms. The use of tufting guns, which automate the process, has enabled artists to experiment with scale and complexity, resulting in large-scale textile sculptures that are both visually and tactilely engaging (Martinez, 2018).

The Role of Textile Sculpture in Interior Decoration

Textile sculpture plays a significant role in interior decoration, offering unique opportunities to enhance the aesthetic and emotional qualities of spaces. According to Katz (2013), interior design increasingly embraces a

multidisciplinary approach, allowing textile sculptures to serve as focal points or complements to existing décor. This integration can add depth, texture, and visual interest to various environments.

Tufted sculptures, in particular, can contribute to the warmth and intimacy of a space, making them ideal for residential, commercial, and public settings. As noted by Wild (2017), they can be utilized as wall hangings, room dividers, or standalone installations, allowing for diverse applications within interior design. Furthermore, the tactile nature of textile sculptures encourages interaction, inviting viewers to engage with the artwork physically and emotionally. As such, textile sculpture has the potential to enrich the sensory experience of interior environments, fostering a deeper connection between art and the viewer.

Sustainability and Eco-Friendly Practices in Textile Sculpture

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on sustainability and eco-friendly practices within the art world, including textile sculpture. As noted by Dewhurst (2019), artists are increasingly aware of their environmental impact and are exploring ways to incorporate sustainable materials and methods into their work.

The use of natural fibers, recycled materials, and eco-friendly dyes is becoming more common among contemporary textile artists, according to Brown (2014). Sustainable practices not only contribute to environmental conservation but also enhance the conceptual depth of the artwork. By consciously selecting materials that align with their artistic vision, artists can create pieces that reflect their values and resonate with socially conscious audiences.

The integration of sustainable practices in tufted sculpture represents a significant shift in the art form, encouraging artists to think critically about their materials and processes. This focus on sustainability aligns with broader societal trends toward environmental responsibility, making textile sculpture a relevant and impactful medium for contemporary artistic expression.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory that will guide this study is Materiality and Medium Theory Propounded by Rosalind Krauss ("Sculpture in the Expanded Field," 1979) and Glenn Adamson (2007, "Thinking Through Craft"). This approach focuses on the importance of materials and techniques in shaping meaning. Krauss explored how sculpture had moved beyond classical forms, incorporating unconventional materials and methods. Adamson emphasized craft's role in contemporary art. In tufted textile sculpture for interiors, materiality theory investigates how yarn, fabric, and the tufting process contribute to the object's sensory and conceptual impact.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employs a practice-based research design, which emphasizes the creation and analysis of tufted textile sculptures, focusing on their functionality and aesthetic contribution to interior spaces (Candy & Edmonds, 2018). By combining creative exploration and critical reflection, the research generates original artworks and insights that advance the field of textile sculpture (Gray & Malins, 2004). The study was conducted within the scope of interior decoration, specifically focusing on spaces where tufted textile sculptures could serve both decorative and functional roles. It also included analyzing contemporary interior design trends to identify suitable applications for the artworks created. Key components and tools used, from the initial stages to the finishing are listed below:

A tufting gun is a handheld tool used to create textured designs by pushing yarn through a fabric base. It is commonly used for making rugs, wall hangings, and textile art. The tool works quickly and allows for creating either looped or cut pile textures.



Plate 1 :Tufting gun. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)

A tufting frame - a sturdy wooden or metal structure used to hold the fabric base tightly in place while tufting. It provides a stable surface for using a tufting gun or hand-tufting tools.

Monk cloth -Monk's cloth is a loosely woven cotton fabric with a grid-like pattern, used as a base for tufting and other crafts. It is soft, durable, and holds yarn well, making it ideal for creating rugs and textile art. The rest are plier, cutter and binding wire, all-purpose adhesive and brush, a pair of Scissors, acrylic yarns, 8mm and quarter metal rods, plywood, welding machine, sewing machine, tufting clipper, glue(top bond), hand sewing needle and thread, warden fabric, power grinder, mini vacuum cleaner, duckbill scissors, hand gloves

STUDIO EXPLORATION PROCESSES

Studio Exploration One (flower vase)

Processes

The creation of the flower vases began with conceptualizing the designs through critical thinking, quick sketches, and detailed pattern drawings. For the structural framework, rods of 8mm and quarter sizes were cut, bent, and welded to form distinct shapes inspired by African wax prints, an Igbo palm wine keg, and a square spiral for a modern aesthetic. Monk cloth was then stretched on a tufting frame, and reverse sketches of the patterns were made on warden and brown paper before being transferred onto the monk cloth.



Plate 2: stretching the monk cloth. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024).

The tufting process involved creating vibrant, textured patterns using carefully selected yarns. The back of the tufted pieces was reinforced with top bond glue, left to dry, and cut out before being sewn onto the covered armature. Final touches included trimming the pile to the desired height and cleaning the surface for a refined finish.



Figure 1: sketched flower vases. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Figure 2: sketched patterns. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Figure 3: sketched patterns. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Figure 4: sketched patterns. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Plate 3: Sewing one of the patterns. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Plate 4: using power grinder to cut the rods for armature. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Plate 5: welding the pieces of rods to form the armature. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Plate 6: covered the armature with warden. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Plate 7: sketching the patterns with permanent marker. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Plate 8: Finished flower vase showcasing tufted patterns on the armature. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)

Studio Exploration Two (Zebra head)

Processes

The zebra sculpture was conceptualized through detailed sketches, emphasizing its characteristic striped patterns. Rods were cut, bent, and welded into a head-shaped framework. Monk cloth was stretched over a tufting frame, and the striped pattern was reverse-sketched onto the cloth. Using black and white yarns, the stripes were tufted to replicate the zebra's natural markings. The tufted pieces were reinforced with glue, allowed to dry, cut out, and carefully attached to the armature. The final stage involved trimming the pile for a clean, cohesive finish.



Figure 5: sketched zebra head. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Plate 9: bending the rods to shape. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Plate 10: welding the pieces of rods to form the armature. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Plate 12: winding round the mature with binding wire. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Plate 13: covered the armatures with warden (non-woven fusible interfacing). Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Plate 14: Finished zebra head. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)

Studio Exploration Three (faux fish)

Processes

The fish sculpture, designed to depict a playful fish diving into the water, began with conceptual sketches that captured its dynamic motion. An armature was constructed by cutting, bending, and welding rods into a fluid, curving form that emphasized movement. Monk cloth was stretched on a tufting frame, and reverse sketches of the fish pattern were made directly onto the fabric. The tufting process used vibrant and textured yarns to replicate the shimmering scales of a fish. The tufted pieces were reinforced with glue, dried, cut out, and carefully sewn onto the armature. The final steps included trimming the pile for texture definition and ensuring a smooth, polished finish.



Figure 6: sketched fish. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Figure 7: sketched fish patterns. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Plate 15: welding the pieces of rods to form the armature. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Plate 16: tufting on the stretch monk cloth. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024).



Plate 17: joining the placed patterns with needle and thread. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Plate 18: Finished faux fish taxidermy. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the outcomes of the research, focusing on the textile sculptural flower vase, wall hanging zebra textile sculpture, and the playful fish textile sculpture. Each section explores the process, discusses the creative and cultural significance of the works, analyzes their impact, and highlights the results achieved. The works demonstrate the potential of tufting as a versatile medium for textile sculpture, blending traditional and modern elements to create visually compelling and functional pieces.

The flower vase reflects a fusion of cultural heritage and contemporary design. The pencil skirt-inspired vase replicates the elegance of African wax print patterns, bringing cultural relevance into modern spaces. The palm wine keg vases pay homage to Igbo traditions, while the square spiral vase introduces a geometric element that aligns with modern design trends. Together, these pieces highlight the versatility of tufting in translating cultural narratives and modernity into functional art. The vases showcase exceptional craftsmanship, where form meets function. The use of tufting as a sculptural medium allows for rich textures and vibrant colors, making each piece visually compelling. The cultural resonance of the designs enhances their appeal, bridging traditional African culture with modern decor styles. These works also demonstrate the adaptability of tufting in creating durable and practical art pieces.

Studio Exploration 1 Result



Plate 20: Flower vase. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)

Studio Exploration 2 Result

Wall Hanging Zebra textile sculpture

The zebra sculpture merges naturalistic representation with modern decor, making it both artistic and functional. Its bold black-and-white palette fits seamlessly into various interior styles, offering a striking visual contrast. The piece demonstrates the precision of tufting as a medium for recreating organic patterns. Its functionality as a wall-mounted sculpture adds to its appeal, transforming it into a versatile art piece. The lifelike rendering of the stripes creates a sense of realism while retaining artistic interpretation.



Plate 21: Zebra head. Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)

Studio exploration 3 result. Faux Fish Sculpture

The fish sculpture demonstrates the ability of tufting to create lifelike, movement-inspired art. The vibrant textures and meticulous craftsmanship highlight the creative potential of tufting in capturing the essence of natural elements. Its design bridges the gap between functional decor and artistic expression, providing an innovative take on aquatic-themed sculptures.



Plate 22: fish (textile sculpture). Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)



Plate 23: Studio exploration four result- flower vases (textile sculpture). Photo source: Osegbo C.O (2024)

Conclusion

This study underscores the artistic and functional potential of tufted textile sculptures in interior decoration. By creatively manipulating materials and techniques, the research contributes to the evolving field of textile art, offering fresh perspectives and practical applications. The recommended directions aim to inspire continued exploration and innovation, ensuring that tufting remains a vibrant and versatile medium in contemporary art and design.

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