

A Comparative Analyses of Form and Style in the Works of Suowari Jacqueline and Ibim Cookey

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the artistic realms of Jacqueline Suowari and Ibim Cookey, two remarkable Nigerian visual artists who have carved their unique paths within the contemporary art landscape. Suowari's masterful ball pen artistry and mixed media approach juxtaposed with Cookey's photorealistic pencil renderings, offering a captivating exploration of form and style. Through a meticulous examination of their biographies, creative processes, and 5 works each, totaling 10 artistic expressions, this study aims to unravel the profound narratives embedded within their works. Employing qualitative research methodologies, including library research and critical analysis, this paper navigates the intricate layers of identity, cultural heritage, and socio-political commentary that permeate Suowari's and Cookey's oeuvres. By dissecting the symbolic representations, technical mastery, and thematic underpinnings, this research illuminates the multifaceted roles these artists play in shaping contemporary Nigerian art discourse. Moreover, it delves into the ways in which their artworks serve as potent vehicles for challenging perceptions, fostering dialogue, and celebrating the resilience and beauty of the African diaspora. The research design utilizes both observational and survey methods, while data analysis is conducted using the semiotic descriptive approach. Among various similarities and distinctions, it was revealed that both artists engage in mixed media exploration, indicating the depth and diversity of their artworks. Ultimately, this comprehensive exploration seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge surrounding Nigerian visual arts while offering a nuanced appreciation for the transformative power of artistic expression.

Keywords: Jacqueline Suowari, Ibim Cookey, form, style, artistic expression.

INTRODUCTION

Art has long served as a powerful medium for exploring the depths of human experiences, narratives, and perspectives. Within the Nigerian art scene, two remarkable artists, Jacqueline Suowari and Ibim Cookey, have emerged as visionary voices, employing their distinct artistic styles to captivate audiences and ignite dialogues. Suowari, a masterful ball pen artist, and Cookey, a photorealistic pencil virtuoso, have carved their unique paths, each leaving an indelible mark on the contemporary Nigerian art landscape.

This study seeks to unravel the intricate tapestries woven by these two artists, delving into the form, style, and thematic underpinnings that shape their artistic expressions. Through a comprehensive examination of their biographies, creative processes, and artistic narratives, this study aims to shed light on the multifaceted roles they play in shaping contemporary Nigerian art discourse while celebrating the resilience and beauty of the African diaspora. By employing qualitative research methodologies, including library research and critical analysis of existing literature, this paper navigates the symbolic representations, technical mastery, and socio-cultural commentaries that permeate Suowari's and Cookey's works. Furthermore, it explores the ways in which their art serves as a potent vehicle for challenging perceptions, fostering dialogue, and elevating underrepresented voices within the global art arena.

Ultimately, this comprehensive exploration seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge surrounding Nigerian visual arts while offering a nuanced appreciation for the transformative power of artistic expression in reflecting and shaping societal narratives.

Brief Biography of Jacqueline Suowari (1990)

Jacqueline Suowari is a full-time ballpoint pen artist and draughts woman. Suowari was born in the year 1990 in Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria. Suowari studied Fine Arts and Design in the University of Port-Harcourt where she majored in Painting and graduated as the second-best student in her department.

Suowari developed a keen interest in art at the age of five and she had her mother who encouraged and supported her by buying crayons and paper and even created her own portfolio where she stored her drawings and paintings. As a teenager, she used ballpoint pens to do her drawings but getting into the university, it was not a traditional art media for drawing, so she abandoned it and started using charcoal pencils and pastels. She was unsatisfied with the paintings because they never created the contrast and the kind of strokes she needed. After graduating from university, she built a career as a painter for four (4) years and later stopped because she never had passion for it. She made up her mind to start drawing again. Her passion was not just to draw small works, but bigger works however, she could not find her desired paper-size in Nigeria to draw with so she had to import paper that could contain the size of her drawings.

Suowari was motivated to be a draughts woman when she read a profile about Toyin Odutola; a Nigerian American contemporary visual artist that is known for a vivid multi-media drawings and work on paper. This gave birth to her journey of becoming a draughts woman. At first it wasn't easy because drawings on paper without painting was not appreciated and valued in Nigeria at the time, but her passion kept her moving.

In year 2014 and 2017, Suowari was signed by the (Avant Gallery.n.d) in New-York who discovered her online. Suowari has made a name in Contemporary Art of exhibition both in Nigeria and overseas. Suowari is inherently motivated by the power of the intriguing art of drawing. One piece of her work contains thousands of ball-point pen strokes which take several hours to achieve perfection in her eyes and sometimes, several months to complete. She combines various elements of design to share inspiration and experience with the viewer in each piece of her work. She communicates her deep emotions and thoughts with each of her work that captivates and passes a message to her audience.

In terms of size and scale, Suowari's works are up to 8ft tall and most of her works are portraits of women than of men. She is currently a full-time studio artist in ball-point pen drawing. She is currently represented by Avant Gallery in the United

States of America, also, she has been featured in notable domestic publications including Chukwuemeka Ben Bosah's book titled "The Art of Nigerian Women" which contains some of the best artists that Nigeria has to offer.

Brief Biography of Ibim Cookey (1999)

Ibim Cookey is a photo realistic pencil artist. He was born in January 1999 in Port-Harcourt and hails from Opobo, Rivers State, Nigeria. Cookey studied architecture at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He had always loved to draw but never took it as a profession until the year 2015 when he was in his first year at university. He saw an artist online who made portraits and instantly fell in love with portraiture. Coincidentally his friend posted one of his works online and it trended across so many social media platforms such as Nairaland, Linda Ikeji blog and other reputable sites. He got an invite for an exhibition in South Africa where he spent two weeks showcasing his works. He also got more invitations to United Kingdom, Niger Republic, Lagos etc. to exhibit his works.

Cookey is motivated by the society and a desire to be a voice of Africa through his art to change people's view about Africa. He has won many awards such as Garden City Advancement Award, Nigerian Teen Choice, special recognition award from the Ministry of Arts and Culture [2018], Nigerian Hyper award [2019] and also, he is the award-winning artist and Art Ambassador to the Rivers State Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Cookey's works are done primarily with graphite and charcoal pencils on paper, his drawings are well detailed and some of his backgrounds are done with acrylic colour with African wax and print designs. Despite all his achievements he still desires to be the best and ascertain to be at the top with his passion and drive for success.

Cookey refers to his art as 'AfroEmofusion' coined from Afro Emotional Fusion because most of his drawings capture the portraits of Africans expressing everyday emotions in their society. He is currently represented by Artco Gallery, and he lives and works in Port Harcourt.

RESEARCH METHOD

The paper utilizes semiotic visual analysis to describe the form and style in the works of Jacqueline Suowari and Ibim Cookey. Iconography and iconology support the descriptive analysis in terms of interpretation of meaning contained in the works. Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) the Swiss linguist founded semiology early in the 20th century and semiotics derives from the Greek word “semeiotikos”, which means action of interpreting signs. Signs take the form of words images, sounds, odor, flavors, acts or subjects, but things have no meaning and become sign only when one provides them with meaning. Semiotics can translate a picture from an image into words. Iconography which was developed by art historian Erwin Panofsky refers to a collection of particular types of images used by artists to communicate deeper meanings in their artwork (Rose 202, Saye32).

Iconology on the other hand is the study of visual imagery and its symbolism and interpretation. It focuses mainly on the study and interpretation of the meaning of visual images and symbols. It can uncover the social, cultural, and historical background of subjects and themes in the visual arts. Erwin Panofsky introduced a three-step method of visual interpretation of art. The first level or step involves the primary or natural subject matter of the artwork. The secondary level involves conventional subject matter, including signs/symbols/images, i.e. iconology, whereas the tertiary level involves intrinsic meaning and essence of a work. It uses pre-iconographical observation and from the results it not only tries to recognize as such the themes which are represented, but whenever feasible and in so far as possible, it tries to penetrate them. This serves as the methodological approach to comparative analysis.

Form and Style in Art: Definition and Examples

"Form" stands as a fundamental principle within the realm of art, governing how artists depict dimensional shapes in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional artworks. This principle is pivotal in guiding artists as they convey depth, volume, and structure within their creations. In essence, form serves as a cornerstone for artists, enabling them to effectively translate the tangible and intangible aspects of

their subject matter into visually compelling compositions. Whether through the manipulation of lines, textures, or spatial relationships, artists harness the principle of form to imbue their works with a sense of presence and vitality, thereby engaging viewers on multiple sensory levels.

Some examples of how artists create a sense of form in their work are enumerated in the following ways:

1. Integrating frontal and profile views: A fundamental technique in depicting human figures on a flat surface involves combining frontal and profile perspectives. For instance, ancient Egyptian artists depicted bodies with heads and legs in profile, while the torso appeared frontally, as evidenced in illustrations from the Book of the Dead, such as those depicting the Chantress of Amun Nauny (Figure 1).

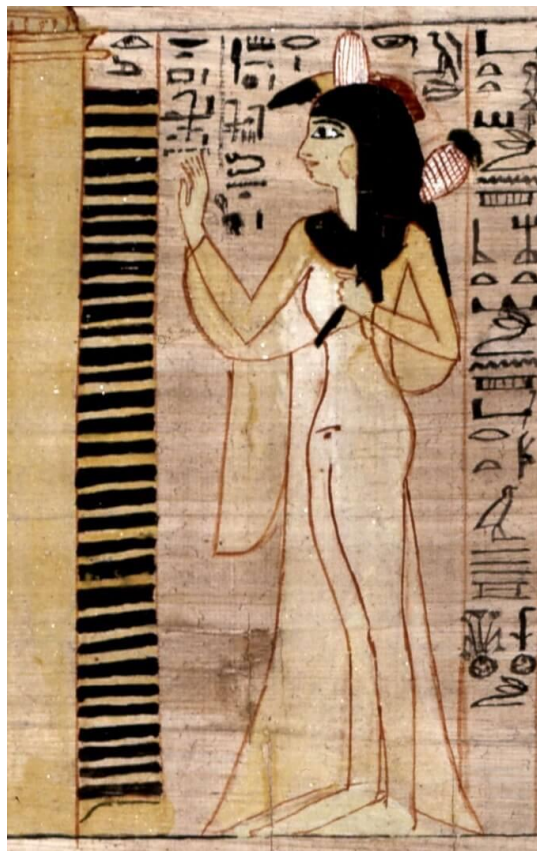


Figure 1. Chantress of Amun-Ra
Source: Egypt Museum, 2023

2. Creating illusionistic form: During the Italian Renaissance, painters achieved a sense of form by employing techniques such as chiaroscuro, using light sources to cast shadows, and incorporating vanishing points to convey depth. These optical illusions aimed to emulate the spatial perception experienced in reality. Notable examples include Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* (Figure 2), renowned for its ability to depict three-dimensional forms within a deep spatial context.

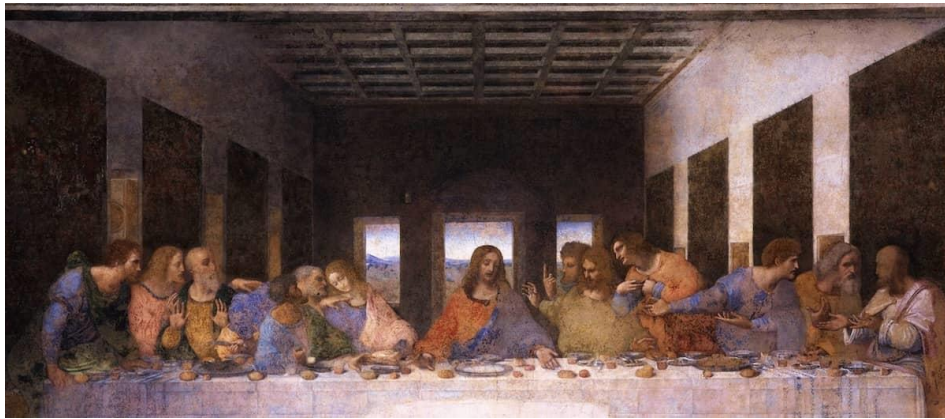


Figure 2. *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci
Source: Milan-museum.com

3. Exploring abstract form: Abstracting form involves manipulating geometric shapes to represent natural, biomorphic forms. Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O Version O)* in Figure 3 exemplifies this approach, as he transformed the typically soft, curved female figure into angular geometric shapes, highlighting the interplay between organic and geometric elements within the composition.



Figure 3. Pablo Picasso's Demoiselles d'avigno
Source: Britannica.com

4. Sculpting three-dimensional form: Iconic examples of three-dimensional sculpture emerge from the Renaissance period, such as Michelangelo's monumental David in Figure 4 and Giambologna's dynamic portrayal of the Abduction of a Sabine Woman in figure. These sculptures demonstrate the artists' mastery in capturing the human form in three-dimensional space, showcasing intricate details and lifelike qualities.



Figure 4. David by Michelangelo
Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art



Figure 5. Abduction of a Sabine Woman by Giambologna
Source: The Walter's Art Museum Online

5. Embracing relief form: Relief sculpture involves carving or molding figures that project from a flat background. A renowned instance is Lorenzo Ghiberti's Gates of Paradise, crafted during the fifteenth-century Italian Renaissance as seen in figure 5. This masterpiece, made of bronze and adorned on the doors of the St. John Baptistery in Florence, Italy, showcases intricate relief work that captivates viewers with its depth and intricacy.



Figure 6. Gates of Paradise (**detail**) by Lorenzo Ghiberti, 15th Century.
Source: The Art Institute of Chicago

‘Style’ refers to the visual appearance of artwork. Essentially, style encompasses how an artist interprets their subject matter and conveys their artistic vision. It is shaped by various characteristics evident in the artwork, including the artist's use of form, color, and composition, among others. Additionally, the technique and method employed by the artist in handling the medium play a significant role in defining the style of the artwork. Furthermore, the underlying philosophy or inspiration behind the creation also influences the stylistic direction of the artwork. Ultimately, artists make deliberate choices in composing their artwork, which collectively define its stylistic essence. Examples include **photorealism**, **abstract**, **whimsical**, and **combined styles**.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Portraiture as Artistic Expression

(Lacey, 2021) defines a portrait as an artistic representation of a person, whether a photograph, painting, sculpture or other medium, where the face and expressions are the primary focus. The purpose of a portrait is to engage the viewer with the depicted subject by having the subject look directly at the viewer. Portraits not only represent an outward appearance, but aim to capture the essence, personality, emotions and inner qualities of the subject. Great portrait artists are skilled in rendering accurate likenesses through their mastery of anatomy, use of light, and ability to infuse emotional expression. Successful portraits convey a sense of the person's character and humanity.

Some of the most famous and influential portraits throughout history include Grant Wood's *American Gothic*, John Singer Sargent's *Portrait of Madame X*, Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, and Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. While representing the external appearance realistically, these iconic portraits also invite deeper exploration into the psyche and persona of the subjects depicted.

Portraits serve purposes beyond just depicting outer likeness. The philosopher Roland Barthes spoke of the "air" of a person that a portrait can capture - the indefinable expression or spirit that manifests their essential individuality. Portraits can function as manifestations that provide a sense of contact with the subject, sustaining connections with loved ones across distance or time. Art scholar Patrick Maynard distinguishes two roles' portraits can play: the "depictive" role of representing outward appearance, and the "manifestation" role of embodying the presence or iconographic essence of the subject. Portraits may emphasize one aspect more than the other but typically engage both representational likeness and an expression of the subject's individual persona or aura.

Whether aiming for psychological characterization, proof of presence, or manifestation of the person's very essence and *aire*, portraits hold the power to transcend mere physical rendering. The most impactful portraits give a sense of insight into the human subject's spirit, emotionally resonating with and forging connections between artist, subject and viewer.

Portraits in general fulfill a variety of roles. But from the more obvious ones, we can distinguish some as having more to do with providing information (i.e. with the depictive function), and some instead of sustaining contact (the manifestation function). Portraits are images that fulfill one or more of the following features. They are:

1. Likeness
2. Psychological characterizations
3. Proof of presence or 'contact'
4. Manifestations of a person's essence' or 'air'.

Insofar as portraits deliver to viewers a realistic likeness of someone or a psychological characterization, they are depictions and could be counted as artworks (perhaps depending upon their quality, among other things). But so long as portraits are treated primarily as providing a sense of contact with someone or revealing their inner essence, they bear more resemblance to traditional icons. Portraits invoke special feelings and behaviors in viewers.

Discussion of works by Jacqueline Suowari based on Style and Form

Beginning with Jaqueline Suowari, Plate 1 titled '*Exhale*' talks about time, relaxation and expectancy. It is a portrait of an expectant mother looking sideways with both her hands on her tummy, she has a head wrap on her hair and a wrapper tied from her chest down with her back open. The image is monochrome on a polychromatic with fluorescent colors in white background. There is contrast and harmony in the colors used in the background. Her facial expression shows expectant she is to see and hold her baby in her arms. There is balance Jacqueline tones and shade. The costumes of the mother suggest a proud, strong and bold woman.



Figure 7. Plate 1. Exhale
Souwari, Jacqueline, (2018)
source: author's documentation

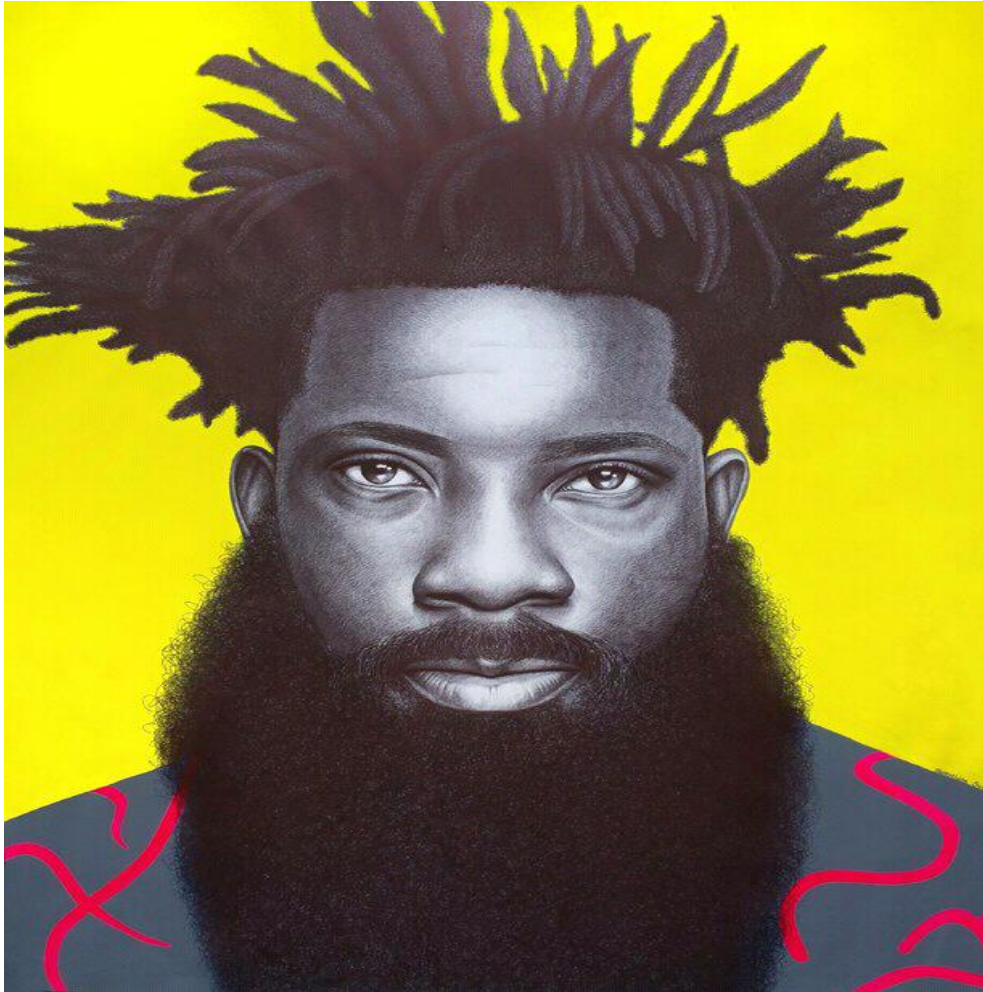


Figure 8. Plate 2. Bin Dunwuo Tua Owei [Man with lots of hairs].
Source: Souwari, Jaqueline (2019)
source: author's documentation

Plate 2 is a portrait of a man with lots of beards with dreadlocks on his hair, he has is eyes fixed on the viewer. The background of the work is lemon yellow, and his shirt is dark grey and colors of red in irregular lines creating a design. Scribbling is the kind of shading used to create beards on his face, tone and shade on his face light and darkness to create contrast and balance. The facial expression depicts boldness and self-confidence. In Jacqueline's work she uses hair to express identity and acceptability of one's choice of appearance and looks.



Figure 9. Plate 3. Shakara
Source: Suowari, Jacqueline
source: author's documentation

Shakara (plate. 3) is a portrait of a self-confident young woman in an afro hairdo. She is auraed in red and green colors on a white background. The lady turned toward her back and looking down over the left shoulder. She has beads on her neck and ear, her hair has tone and shade reflecting light and darkness, so is her body too. The work entitled Shakara shows a confident woman and how she adores and appreciates her beauty. The word Shakara is used to express one's beauty, freedom, self-confidence, a radiating skin especially in that of woman. Jacqueline uses Shakara to express a person's consciousness of who she/he is and have confidence to show it to the world.



Figure 10. Plate 4. Breath
Source: Suowari, Jacqueline
source: author's documentation

Plate 4 is a portrait that captures a woman's back, with her hands placed on her waist, wearing a corset and properly a skirt down. She is adorned with jewelries and accessories on her hands then with red polish on her nails. She has a floral design on a corset and lemon-yellow background. There is tone and shade in the work and the colours used are harmonized and it is symmetrically balanced. The portrait portrays a woman who is tied and most properly not having what she wants for herself, always having disappointment then she must take a deep breath and relax. According to the dictionary breath means rest or pause. Jacqueline uses

“breath” to communicate with her audience to learn to be patience and not work yourself when things are not going the way they want.



Figure 11. Plate 5. Mission Accomplished
Source: Suowari, Jacqueline (2017)
source: author's documentation

Mission Accomplished is a composition of a beautiful lady with a simple hair called pack-up gel against a lemon-yellow background with dark purple curvilinear lines. Lemon yellow symbolizes optimism, energy, joy etc. and it is gotten from two primary colors red and green. She stares at the viewer with a soft and flirtatious smile with her hands placed on her jaw and her nails are polish with red polish. Her body has tone and shade, and her facial expression speaks of completing tasks after multiple times of trying and then finally succeeded. The title

of this work and the portrait connect effectively and convey the message to the viewer.

Discussion of works by Ibim Cookey based on Style and Form



Figure 12. Plate 6. Dada Girl (2022) 60cm by 90cm, charcoal on acrylic paper.
source: author's documentation



Figure 13. Plate 7 Bouquet of flowers (2021) 58cm by 72.5cm, charcoal on acrylic paper
source: author's documentation

Dada Girl is the image of a young girl faced sideways with her eyes faced on the viewer with jewelry on her nose. Her hairdo is dreadlocks popularly known as *dada* in Nigeria, with scarf wrapped at the tip of her hair. The background is painted sky blue and flowers as a motif. In the work I notice some elements of design such as lines, colors, texture, value and texture are used uniformly and work is balance, it has unity and repetition of flower as a pattern in the work. *Dada* is natural dreadlocks carried among some persons in African countries and people with this hair are known to have spiritual capabilities such as gift of healing and ability to foresee the future. It is also a hairstyle used as fashion among male and female. The flowers symbolize hope, freedom etc. The portrait shows how the girl

appreciates, values and accepts how she looks and what makes her unique and different from others. It is freedom of expression, personality and identity of oneself.

This is a portrait of a woman between the age of 25-32 against a sky-blue background. She is adorned with flowers on her green dress and a scarf wrapped in her hair with earring on her right ear. She is looking in the frontal direction and her facial expression is moody like she is worried.

The background of the painting is tone and shade of blue showing light and darkness. The light is reflecting more on the left side of the painting. The colors of the flowers are pink, red, yellow and green, same green on her cloth creating contrast, balance and harmony. The painting is created mainly with lines and curves. It shows that the woman has so much to express but abhors it and hopes for a better tomorrow, the flower symbolizes gracefulness, hope, happiness etc. Cookey portrays a future filled with hope for a better tomorrow through this piece.



Figure 14. Plate 8 Ezinne (2022) 60cm by 73cm, charcoal on acrylic paper
source: author's documentation

This portrait is an image of a young girl in her early twenties looking sideways with her eyes focused on that direction. Her hair is made with thread worn by mothers in the past. The background of the work is white color design flowers. Kehinde Wiley is an artist who uses flowers and plants as background in his work.

The work is asymmetrical balance whereby the image is towards the end of the left side and the right side has more flowers than on the left-hand side. The flowers in the background have unity, harmony and emphasis. The image looks like it's separate from the background and there is tone and shade in the portrait with layers of lines to create perfection and beauty in the artist's eyes.



Figure 15. Plate 9. A woman in her Glory (2023) 85cm by 59cm, charcoal on acrylic paper
source: author's documentation

The title Ezinne is an Igbo name meaning "the good mother" A mother is a woman that is selfless and loving that is ready to make sacrifices for her children. Ezinne is a beautiful maiden who has qualities of a woman (wife material as men call it) who has a bright future. The portrait portrays the story of a young girl with a bright future and focus in life and tries not get distracted by the pleasures of life. The color in background signifies youthfulness, energy, purity, love, hope, nature and they complement the portrait. Cookey uses this medium to encourage young girls to be focused.

This is a portrait of a lady with an afro hairdo all dressed with polka dot clothing black and white color. The background is purple with different colors of flowers

such as green, white, red, peach, and blue. The lady poses like is she is overwhelmed.

Cookey used tone and shade on her hair and on her lips. There is balance in the work and the placement of the colors blended with the background. A woman in her glory portrays the importance of a woman hair and how her hair contributes to her beauty and self-confidence. Cookey's use of flowers background create different meaning in the work such as royalty(purple), passion(red), purity(white), serenity(blue). adding value to a woman.



Figure 16. Plate 10. Den of leaves 79cm by 60cm, charcoal on acrylic paper
source: author's documentation

This is portrait of a young man putting on glasses, with a black shirt and the word dope spelled boldly on his shirt with gray color with a frontal view with his neck bend a little on the right side on his shoulder. The background is red with green leaves around it. Emphasis of the leaf is more on the top than on the bottom

of the portrait. The painting shows a contrast of light and darkness in the leaves creating unity and balance. The colors red and green are complimenting with the black color creating balance. A den of leaves interprets a secret place where one wishes to be left alone, and the portrait shows that in the facial expression. The leave is a plant which is a natural thing and the colour green signifies nature, abundance etc. Cookey used cool, warm and neutral colour to create harmony.

From observation, Cookey's work needs a lot of concentration and thinking to understand the message that he is portraying. This is a good painting because the artist was able to use both elements and principle of design to create a unique piece.

CONCLUSION

Jacqueline Suowari and Ibim Cookey have used their works to change people's perspective about life, personality and happenings in society by exhibiting everyday emotion using their themes to tell and portrait to tell a story of identity, determination, confidence, and self-awareness. And through critical evaluation of their work, themes such as photorealism, hyperrealism, figure drawing, portraiture are results of their style and form. Jacqueline Suowari and Ibim Cookey can both be described as emotionalist, instrumentalist and imitational artists as evidenced in their catalogue of works. They use the present time to create their art in a way that reveals the message carried by their content and style. Despite their success, they are relatively unknown in the wider contemporary art scene. It is believed this paper will serve as a source of reference to scholars and inspiration other artists and art critics while promoting these excellent artists on a global scale.

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