

THE USE OF RICE HUSKS AS A MEDIUM FOR SCULPTURE PRODUCTION IN ABAKALIKI METROPOLIS

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Abstract

The impact of waste upcycling and its exploration in our environment has largely been discussed and analyzed in recent times. These explorations and analysis have yielded wonderful innovations and insights in art. The visual artists in particular have taken up the challenge in a unique manner by upcycling and perusing discarded materials into aesthetically pleasing, functional and as a tool in addressing social issues. The research explored the use of rice husks for sculpture production. The study employed a qualitative method of research. Sources of data were got from both primary and secondary sources. The study analyzed creative works executed with rice husks that will give positive measures in curbing waste thereby bringing development in our environment. It also showed that some of these wastes are not just for art's sake but for developmental or utility purposes. The study will encourage similar works on the use of rice husks for sculpture production.

Keywords: exploration, rice husks, sculpture, metropolis, medium

Introduction

In the 21st century, environmental concerns have become central to global discourse, particularly regarding the challenges posed by increasing waste generation and poor waste management. As urban populations grow and consumption patterns intensify, the accumulation of waste materials both organic and inorganic have surged at an alarming rate. Unfortunately, in many developing nations like Nigeria, effective waste disposal systems remain inadequate, leaving many communities burdened by unsightly and hazardous waste heaps. Every day, individuals consume products that generate waste, with little to no structured attempt at reuse, recycling, or transformation. According to Ilhan (2016), "waste is inseparable from people's activities, and its production never stops." This simple yet profound observation highlights the presence of waste and the urgent need to seek sustainable solutions. Waste is often viewed merely as a burden to be discarded; however, it also holds hidden potential, particularly when viewed through the lens of creative and artistic innovation.

In Nigeria, artists have also begun to explore the possibilities of transforming waste into art. This is particularly important in a society where public awareness about recycling and sustainable art practices remains low. According to Kayode (2016), the poor waste management systems in Nigeria are "a clear indication of the low level of improvisation and regenerative art awareness among most Nigerians." He argues that art and design should serve as vehicles for promoting environmental consciousness and creative problem-solving. Artists can play a significant role not only in beautifying the environment but also in re-educating the public on how waste materials can be repurposed for social and artistic value.

Among the most overlooked forms of waste in Nigerian cities are agricultural by-products. In Abakaliki, the capital of Ebonyi State, the rice milling industry plays a significant role in the local economy. This activity, however, generates large volumes of rice

husks, a by-product often discarded or incinerated, contributing to environmental pollution. These materials, which appear valueless, could be re-imagined as resources for artistic expression and environmental remediation. Despite the lack of large-scale institutional support, individual artists, schools, and community-based organizations in Nigeria continue to experiment with waste-to-art projects. These efforts not only help reduce waste but also provide alternative livelihoods, promote environmental education, and contribute to local aesthetics. In this context, the use of rice husks and crown corks as sculptural media represents an important step in the advancement of eco-art practices in Abakaliki Metropolis.

However, by experimenting with these waste materials, artists can explore new forms of expression while contributing to the broader goal of environmental sustainability. Beyond merely creating art, these practices can educate the public, beautify public spaces, generate employment, and promote environmental sustainability.

Therefore, rice husks can be effectively utilized in sculptural expression to highlight their aesthetic or functional value while contributing to waste reduction in Abakaliki Metropolis. It also explored the use of rice husks as alternative sculptural media, with a focus on promoting creative expression, environmental sustainability, and effective waste management in Abakaliki Metropolis.

Concept of Waste

Waste reduction effort saves money, energy, natural resources and also humans from hazards. It is important that people are taught and encouraged to embrace it's reduction and project how solid waste affects their lives and environment. Bolderick (2015) further added that "the reuse and recycling of waste materials have become an economical practice for artists, once transformed into an art commodity". Kayode (2006) in analysing waste to wealth and it's regeneration to art has observed that waste recycling can be seen in two folds, first as a mechanism for reducing the accumulation of unwanted items that were discarded and second as a product conversion of waste to wealth. Since the inception of industrialization, things that were manually produced were now produced by machine giving birth to more products, more usage and more waste production, consumption cycle increased which Ilhan (2016) observed that "the attention of so many disciplines has been drawn to the increase of waste in our environment as it poses a lot of hazards to human health". These wastes and it's recycling as it relates to the discipline of art and as part of environmental issues grew out of the abundance and wastefulness characterized by post-World War 11 societies especially in the United States. A period when artists deviated from conventional art media to unconventional art media. One of the pioneers of this movement, Marcel Duchamp, introduced the idea of the "ready made" which means any slightly modified, often discarded, manufactured object, selected and displayed as an art (Bolderick, 2015). Ilhan (2016) also revealed other artists such as Braques and Pablo Picasso who introduced unoriginal elements on purpose not to mislead or fool their audience but rather to force a discussion of art and craft of unique and mass-produced objects. Today, waste has a place and plays major role in creating art work.

A lot of individuals or disciplines now indulge in the recycling processes particularly the unemployed youths who scavenge and excavate metal scrapes around for sale to metallurgical companies who recycle them. Artists in participating to curb waste have engaged actively in the international dialogue on the environmental warning, several artists have sought ways to revive the reuse of creative works. These artists breathe in Life to such waste materials they use with the heightened awareness of our environment (Hallie, 2006). Kayode (2006) expressed that "these waste management mechanisms and efforts are appropriate for a wasteful society like our own". This practice of waste to wealth has influenced a lot of contemporary African artists to experiment waste as their preferred

medium of artistic expression and has also embraced it as their potent metaphor for creative expression. On this note, Obodo and Lanie (2015) wrote a report on studio experience with used tyres and inner tubes. They described the studio processes involved, showing how improvisations were made in the actualization of some sculptures produced. The sculptures were conceptually used to address environmental issues as well as the Nigerian cultural vitality to the viewers.

In recent times, the use of waste as an alternative means for creative expressions has dramatically changed the way people look at art. In fact, it has introduced new ways of making art and has paved way for creative exploits. It has created a new path for sculptural practices. With these developments, waste has found place in art and contemporary artists have become interested in using it. Consumption habits and other social issue are criticized through waste, aesthetic and functional art pieces are fashioned out of waste, lastly these wastes are being repurposed to curb waste.

2.3.4 Waste as a medium for waste upcycling

Due to the common effective waste management practices in so many parts of the world, the menace of waste is generally well recognized and controlled worldwide. However, some developing countries do not have acceptable waste management practices, resulting in significant environmental, social and health cross-cutting issues (Deborah, Vidal & Dinis 2021). Bacinschi, Necula and Valentina (2010) highlighted waste management practice as the collection of all thrown away materials in order to recycle them and as a result decrease the effort on our surroundings to enhance the quality of life. They opined that waste management flow is a cycle of monitoring, collection, transportation, processing, disposal or recycle through procession steps of either reduction, reuse or recycle. These steps ensure effective and responsible management of waste output. The aim of these 3 steps or 3 Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle) is to ensure maximum practical benefits from products and to generate the minimum amount of waste.

Ivanova et al (2016 as cited in Bassey & Akpan, 2020) viewed waste management activities and actions required to manage waste from the collection, transportation and disposal of waste together with monitoring and disposal of waste, and with regulation of waste management processes. They further stated that the intent is to reduce the adverse effects of waste on human health, the environment or aesthetic.

They revealed that some of the refreshing approaches to waste management is Junk collection by artists for creative expression such drastic approaches encourage avenues to ensure a self-sustainable environment and also act as a channel for creating wealth.

Materials and Methods

This study explores the use of rice husks as a medium for sculpture production in Abakaliki Metropolis. The rice husks were sourced from a rice mill that generates large mounds of rice husks. After sourcing required materials, a studio experiment was carried out which involved conceptualization, drawing, modeling, casting, mounting on a metal stand. Qualitative method of data analysis was used to evaluate the outcome of the result.

Conceptualization

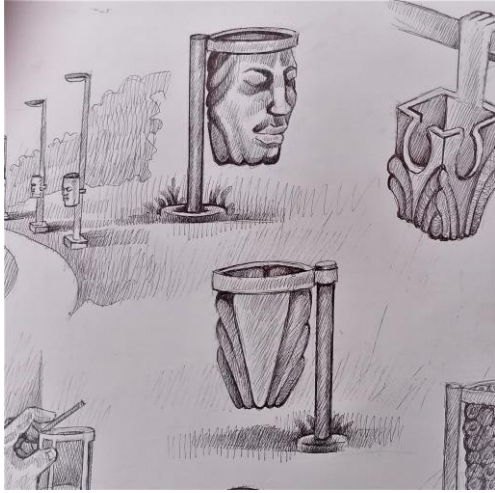


Figure 1: Concept for Sculpture produced with Rice Husks, Ballpoint pen on paper, 59.4 x 84.1 cm.
Source: Researcher's Collection, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Plate 1: Clay Model, Clay, (30.2cm x 40.2cm), 2025. Source: Researcher's Collection, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria



Plate 2: Negative Mold I, Concrete, (30.2cm x 40.2cm), 2025.
Source: Researcher's Collection, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria



Plate 3: Positive Mold I, Concrete/Rice Husks/Resin, (30.2cm x 40.2cm),2025. Source: Researcher's Collection, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria



Plate 4: Positive Mold II, Concrete/Rice Husks/Resin/Fibre Matt, (30.2cm x 40.2cm),2025. Source: Researcher's Collection, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria



Plate 5: Finished work mounted on a Metal Stand, Rice Husks/ Resin/ Fiber mat/ Metal, (30.2cm x 40.2cm x 80cm),2025. Source: Researcher's Collection, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Analysis and Presentation of the Art works

Residual simply means what's left behind or remnant. Residual identity implies something discarded, transformed to bear identity or character. In other words, value remains even after being labelled "waste". Residual identity is a sculptural work that explores transformation, utility and symbolism. It was originally modelled in clay and later cast using rice husk, resin and matt reinforcement. The piece is mounted on a metal stand and designed to function as a disposable bin. Through these dual roles, the work interrogates notions of waste, value and the persistence of identity within discarded materials. The sculpture thus, becomes a metaphor for illustrating how value and presence can emerge from what society labelled as waste.

Visually, the sculpture presents a stylized human face with softened features and a gentle smile. The choice of material which is rice husks plays a central conceptual role. Rice husks, an agricultural by-product typically treated as waste are reconstituted through resin binding into a durable sculpture medium. The transformation elevates discarded material into something valuable, reinforcing the theme of reclamation. The work is designed as a disposable bin to project an important dimension of interaction. Rather than remaining a passive aesthetic object, it participates in everyday acts of disposal. This functional integration collapses boundaries between art and utility, encouraging viewers to confront the irony of depositing waste into a form that itself emerged from.

Residual Identity through experimentation and functional integration challenges the perception of waste and its transformation into something of value by reclaiming rice husks with human likeness, and practical purpose, the work reflects on the practical purpose. The work reflects on the possibilities that can be explored into utilizing rice husks or any other waste in sculpture production.

Conclusion

Artists among other disciplines have been actively engaged in international debate on global warming and waste upcycling discourse. The researcher among other artists has proven that rice husks can be used to produce creative waste bins. This research work was undertaken to explore the use of rice husks for sculpture productions in Abakaliki Metropolis. The researcher explored specifically, rice husks as a medium of artistic expression to exhibit how waste can be used to curb waste. The major technique used in achieving this is modelling and casting, welding and joinery. This study has showed that other waste materials can be explored in similar technique to achieve same results or other creative concepts. Beautiful, creative and utility works can be fashioned from waste. This research gives room for diverse ideologies, experimentation and creative opportunities.

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