

**Mixed Media In Metal Art****Emmanuel Mensah**

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Abstract:

The focus of this study was to explore and incorporate various artistic and non-artistic media into the production of metal art. The study was particularly interested in integrating more non-metallic materials that are not traditional to the production of metal art in the decoration, finishing and the protective coating of metal art works. Qualitative, descriptive and quasi-experimental methods of research were used for the study. Basic hand forming techniques including raising, chasing and repoussé, piercing and soldering were employed in the execution of the works. Other techniques such as painting, dyeing and macramé were also used. Non-metallic media that were used in the production of the works included leather, nail polish, acrylic paint, epoxy, PVA glue, graphite, eye pencil, lagging, foam, wood, shoe polish, shoe lace, eggshell paper, spray paint, cotton cords and correction fluid. It was discovered that non-metallic media could successfully be integrated into the production of metal art thus diversifying the course of traditional metal art in Ghana, particularly in KNUST.

Keywords: *Mixed Media Art, Chasing and Repoussé, Raising, Lagging, Piercing, Soldering.*

Introduction

Art practice has over the centuries seen numerous revolutions. Ideologies, philosophies, aesthetics and techniques in producing art works have undergone tremendous changes. Movements such as Dadaism, Cubism, Impressionism, and Surrealism have all brought major changes in the practice of Art over the centuries. The use of a combination of different materials in a single work of art is one practice that is really fascinating. This is termed mixed media art.

Mixed media art was hitherto practiced by painters where they combined Indian ink, acrylic paint, oil paint and sometimes attach cowries, shells, and newspaper articles to their canvasses (Adjei, 2007). This fact is however not the same today as all artists practicing in various art genres have bought into the ideas of mixed media art.

In metal art, artists the world over, have over the years integrated different materials into their works. Some of these materials include paints, leather, wood, twines, fabrics, bones, horns, ivory and “found” objects heading for the trash can. Metal artists including Lilyana Bekic, Louise Norrell, Tedd R. McDonah and Valentin Yotkov are some of the people who use mixed media in the execution of their works. In Ghana, mixed media art is practiced by various artists including sculptors, ceramists and painters such as Opoku, Awuah and Osei Agyekumhene. In metal art however, not much attention has been seen by way of using mixed media for art works. The use of metal as the only material for the production of metal art can sometimes be a barrier to the development of student’s creativity as the material is expensive to acquire and requires specialized tools and equipment for the successful production of metal art works. There is thus the need to explore alternative materials that are not traditional to the field of metal art and incorporate them into the production of metal art. This will remove all barriers existing, as artists will be exposed to a wide variety of materials for the execution of their works. Mixed Media Art has the tendency to boost an artist’s level of creativity as s/he is able to work with various media both familiar and unfamiliar to their fields for the production of works of art (E.K. Agyemang, personal communication, 14th September 2009).

Materials And Methods*Materials, Tools and Techniques*

The study was in two parts. The first part was exploration of the nature of Mixed Media Art in general through interviews and observation of Mixed Media Artists and Art works

within the College of Art And Social Sciences, Centre for National Culture, Kumasi and E.K. Agyemang's Mixed Media Studio at Apatrapa New site. The second part of the study also involved the production of art works by combining traditional metal art media with other non-metallic material that were not usually used in metal art production.

Copper and brass were the only base metals that were employed in the execution of the works as well as a little iron rod. The works were fabricated using metal working techniques such as raising, chasing and repoussé, piercing, soldering, drilling, and polishing. Tools used included raising and chasing hammers, peen hammers, jewellers saw frame, sets of pliers, needle files and table files, raising stakes and anvils, workbench and the flexi shaft.

Non-metallic materials that are not usually used in the production of metal art that were integrated with metal for the production of the works included acrylic paint, nail polish, correction fluid, shoe polish, shoe lace, eye pencil wood, cow horn, lagging, spray paint, cotton cords eggshell paper, epoxy and PVA glue. These media were administered via painting, macramé, and the physical attachment of media to each other.

Methodology

The qualitative, quasi-experimental and descriptive research methodologies were employed in the study. Sidhu (2003), Denzin & Lincoln (2000) and Bernard (1995) explained that experimentation is the most scientifically sophisticated research method. Experimentation consists of the deliberate and controlled modification of the conditions determining an event and in the observation and interpretation of the changes that occur in the event itself. The study experimented with various artistic media that are not usually used in metal art production in order to determine their effectiveness when they are integrated with metal. The project made use of materials such as spray paint, acrylic paint, nail polish, coloured pencils and eye brow pencils which were applied onto the metal art pieces. The metal art pieces were either polished or allowed to tarnish before the said materials were applied. This was done to determine how the various materials behaved under the various conditions. White glue, PVA glue and Epoxy were also used as adhesives for materials such as paper, wood and sand with the metal art pieces so as to ascertain which adhesive works well with which materials.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) opined that descriptive research examines the situation as it is and does not involve changing or modifying the situation under investigation nor is it intended to determine cause and effect relationship. The various materials, tools and the

step by step processes that were used in executing the various art pieces were described. This was to give a clear understanding of the processes in executing the works and also to make replication possible. The descriptive method was also used to record, scrutinize and interpret secondary data from literary sources.

Identification, Collection And Processing Of Materials For The Project

Various materials, both natural and artificial were collected for the project. Some of them were bought from the market especially the artificial ones. Those that needed to be processed were done accordingly. These included cow horns, wood, sand, the insulator and leather.

Wood

A 10x10 cm of 'Wawa' was bought from the wood market and lathe turned by the help of a professional at the 'Sokoban' wood village. The wood was polished with black shoe polish and coated with transparent nail polish in order to make it glossy and to protect its surface.

Cow Horns

Cow horn was bought from the Kumasi Abattoir popularly called 'Mayanka'. The undesired parts were sawn off before the horns were boiled on fire to remove the smell from them. After the boiling, the horns were allowed to dry and then filed. Filing was done to remove the outer part of the horns with a rough file. After the filing, the horns were made smooth using a paper cutting knife and then with a grade 150 emery paper.

Lagging

The insulator was ripped from a worn-out fridge at the repair shop. This was washed with water to clear off dust particles that had gathered on it. It was then allowed to dry and then carved into an abstract human face with a hobby knife.

Leather

Vegetable tanned leather was bought from the market and dyed using the marbling technique. The leather was sanded and pounded to soften it before it was used for its intended work.

Designing

Sketches were made for the various projects. Ideas for the designs were developed from natural objects, passages from the bible, words from songs and poems and also from imagination. The various materials available for the projects were also taken into consideration when the designs were being sketched. Designs were made for works to be made in the round, in relief, as well as in two dimensional forms. The philosophies behind the works aesthetically pleasing forms and the materials available were also seriously taken into consideration while designing. Various designs were sketched and thoroughly discussed before the final ones were selected after consulting other renowned artists. The designs that were developed for the various works are displayed in figures 1 - 12.

Sketches For Project 1*Figure 1: Mother and child**Figure 2: Kiss the bride**Figure 3: "D'anase"*

Ideas for these designs were developed with the human figure in mind. The cow horn was the main material that was taken into consideration during the designing. All the media were procured before the designs were made. A few changes however occurred in the main work during the final execution.

Sketches For Project 2



Figure 4: Coat of many colours



Figure 5: Ornamental robe



Figure 6: Joseph's robe

The story of Joseph, son of Jacob was the inspiration for these designs thus the designs were made in the likeness of a robe.

Sketches for project 3

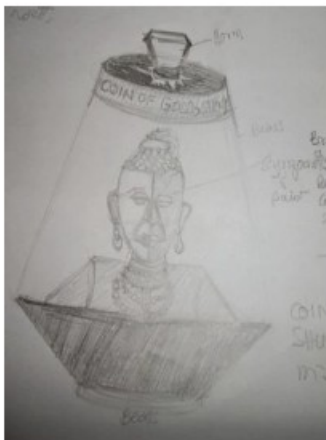


Figure 7: The vessel

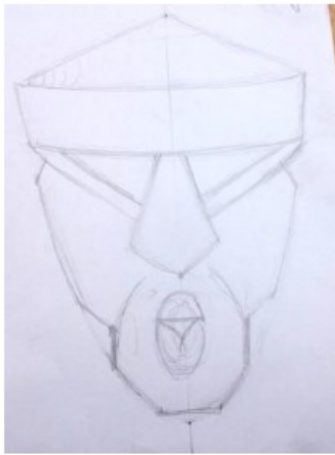


Figure 8: The ornamental pot



Figure 9: Naett

The sketches were made in the form of containers.

Sketches of Project 4*Figure 10: Him**Figure 11: Her**Figure 12: He*

These designs were developed from human faces, mainly the features of the African. Other details were added during the actual production of the works by the researchers.

The Production Of The Main Works

After the designing stage, the actual stage of production of the various projects was next. At this stage various metal working processes were used for the forming of the metal parts of the works. The other non metallic materials were also processed and attached to the metal parts using various techniques and joining materials based on the type of media used. Some of the working processes are shown in plates 1 - 12.

*Plate 1 : Sinking a metal disc on a block of wood**Plate 2 : Raising the disc on a metallic stake*



Plate 3: Piercing a sheet of metal



Plate 4: Soldering a work



Plate 5: Drilling a work



Plate 6: Applying nail polish to a work



Plate 7: Carving for embossing



Plate 8: Embossing a work

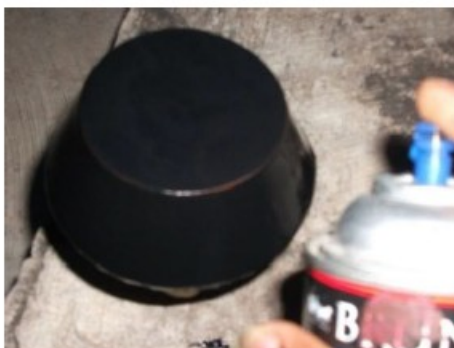


Plate 9: Applying spray paint to a work



Plate 10: Designing the work with a knife



Plate 11: Integrating metal and other media Plate 12 :A work painted with acrylic paint

Results And Discussion

Appreciation Of The Works

According to Amenuke et al., (1999) and Adu-Agyem (1990) Appreciation is the full awareness of all the things we see, read and hear and it has to do mainly with the arts. Appreciation is the intelligent discussion about works of art, a silent and deep thinking about them. It entails everything in art that can be enjoyed. Appreciation enables us to assess and appraise a work of art without passing judgment on it. It involves studying a work of art and trying to understand its meaning.



Plate 13: "d'anase", 3/4 view



Plate 14: "d'anase", side view

Title: D'anase

Dimension: 28cm x 9cm x 9.5 cm

Media: brass, copper, cow horn, lagging, screws, graphite, acrylic paint, shoe polish, wood and nail polish.

Year: 2010

“D’anase” (Project One)

This is a mixed media work that is composed of brass, copper, wood, screws, lagging, cow horn, nail polish, acrylic paint, shoe polish and graphite from a 6B pencil (plates 13 and 14). The figure slightly bends forward and is without limbs. The head is slightly raised upwards in line with the manners in which most Christians give thanks to God by raising their heads and looking into the sky. The “bowl” in which the cow horn sits is fitted with a domed brass that serves as a seat for the horn.

The bowl itself is soldered onto a brass disc and tilted lightly to bring movement into the work. The brass disc on which the “bowl” is soldered has been foldered at the edges so that it falls onto the lathe turned wooden base on which the whole figure sits. The figure is fixed onto the wooden base with epoxy and reinforced with screws.

The face of the figure is decorated with acrylic paint and nail polish. The back of the head, which is made from a combination of brass and copper, is decorated with graphite of a 6B pencil. This was done when the metal was tarnished and coated with a hardener and so is the “bowl”. The lathe turned wooden base is treated with black shoe polish. The metallic parts of the work were fabricated using a combination of the piercing, soldering, doming and the synclastic raising techniques. The synclastic raising technique used here allowed the researchers to form a flat disc into a bowl shape, and the raising was done in one direction. The whole figure represents a disabled person giving thanks to God despite the disability.

Interpretation of Results for Project One

The work was inspired by the story of Pastor Nick Vucinic, an American preacher who was born without limbs. In spite of all the odds against him, he did not despair and has lived a fulfilled life. He preaches the gospel of God and does most household chores on his own. He receives telephone calls, swims and types 43 words per minute which most of us able bodied human beings cannot do.

Mr. A.B. Crentsil and Nana Fynn, two renowned Ghanaian musicians in their songs admonished us to give thanks to God in all situations we find ourselves. There are people who have all the odds in life against them yet they always glorify God for their situations. Why then should able bodied human beings be cursing God because they do not have all that they desire in life or have some things not going on well for them in life? Would you prefer to be barren or have a child who is always sick or many children

who are all criminals? A writer once said “I wept because I had no shoes until I met a man with no legs”. The concept behind this work is to impress upon us to give thanks to God in whatever situation we find ourselves in. Many Ghanaians on daily basis cry about the hardships in the country and struggle to travel to other nations for greener pastures. The question is how many Ghanaians are ready to face the earthquakes, Tsunami, Cyclone and Typhoon situations in places as Japan, China, Turkey, USA and so on. The Bible says, in everything, give thanks to God.



*Plate 15: Coat of many colours
(three-quarter view)*



*Plate 16 : Coat of many colours
(front view)*

Title: Coat of many colours

Dimension: 17.5cm x 8.8cm x 5cm

Media: brass nails polish, correction fluid, wood, shoe polish, shoe lace.

Year: 2010

Coat Of Many Colours (Project Two)

This metallic mixed media work is made up of brass, nails polish, correction fluid, wood, shoe polish and shoe lace (plates 15 and 16). The work has a conical shape looking like a shirt. The conical shape was pierced, foldered on a stake and soldered with a brazing rod. The bottom part of the work was raised a bit to give it a rounded shape while the top portion was split into two, drilled and anticlastically raised to make it look like the collar of a shirt.

The piece was then coloured with the nail polish and correction fluid which is the white colour in the work. A round yellow shoe lace was passed through the drilled holes. Flat yellow lace was also glued onto the work thus dividing it into three sections. Wood was

lathe turned to fit into the bottom part of the work. The wood was treated with black shoe polish and glued into place using epoxy. The whole piece is an imaginary aesthetically pleasing composition of Joseph's richly ornamental robe given to him by his father in Genesis chapter 37. This ornamental robe is also described by Dolly Patton as *the coat of many colours*, which is the title of the work.

Interpretation Of Results For Project Two

The work, coat of many colours, represents the kinds of hatred, opposition and predicaments people are faced with as a result of their personal dreams just like what Joseph went through at the hands of his own brother which was a blessing in disguise. It has become a common phenomenon for people with dreams to build their own capacity to improve their lives to face stiff opposition from friends, colleagues and superiors.

When teachers who are unable to access the government's quota system of study leave decide to further their studies with their own resources, they are faced with all kinds of problems. Their names are either deleted from the pay rolls of their schools or embargoes are laid on their salaries or they are transferred far away from their institutions of study. These are all attempts to frustrate their plans to build their capacity, a phenomenon known in Ghanaian circles as "pull him down" (PHD). To worsen matters, the Ghana Education Service also refuses to reinstate such people into active service. Just like the sale of Joseph into slavery became a big blessing for him and the world at large, so shall the treatments meted out to teachers and other groups of workers in an attempt to destroy their plans of fulfilling their dreams end up being blessings for them. The reward for their efforts shall be as colourful as Joseph's *Coat of many colours*.



Plate 17: Naett, bottom view Plate 18: Naett, top view

Title: Naett

Dimension: 18cm x 10.5cm x 7.5cm

Media: Brass, Copper, spray paint, cow horn, eggshell paper.

Year: 2010

Naett (Project Three)

Naett is a metallic mixed media work made from brass, copper, spray paint, cow horn and eggshell paper (plates 17 and 18). The work is made of two cones joined together. It was fabricated using the hand forming technique, soldering and synclastic raising. The work is decorated with spray paint and eggshell paper on the top part and the bottom part is decorated by cutting out the design and inscriptions from the spray paint using a sharp tool. This is done in such a way that when the work sits upright, the inscriptions are turned upside down. This means a viewer will have to bend down in order to read and by doing so, becomes part of the work. The cover of the work is carved out of cow horn. The inscription on the work reads *"coin of gold, shining coal, you my night, my sun"*. This was adopted from the poem titled *I will pronounce your name* written by Leopold Sedar Senghor. The work was made using the colours yellow and black to bring contrast and also as a result of the inscriptions on the work, quoted above.

The success of this integration confirms the fact that metal art can be decorated with paper, fabrics, paints and other found objects.

Interpretation Of Results For Project Three

The work is inspired by Senghor's poem *I will pronounce your name*. In this poem, the poet declaims his love for Naett. At a point, Naett is described by the poet as *"coin of Gold, shining coal, you my night, my sun"*. The work depicts the fact that life is full of ups and downs, that it is possible to find good and evil, joy and sadness residing at the same place at the same time. There will always be challenges and difficulties in every aspect of life we find ourselves. In relationships, one find lovers enjoying themselves at a time and at the next moment are at each other's throats. The person with whom one finds happiness is the same person who gives sadness and sorrow hence the inscription at the bottom part of the work which signifies that life can be glittering as a coin of Gold and bright as the sun but at other times black as a coal and dark as night. It is therefore important for us to recognize the fact that we cannot find all that we desire in what we

have and must brace ourselves for the odds that come with them. Life is not all roses, for roses have thorns.



Plate 19 : He

Plate 20: Her

Plate 21: Him

Title: Faces

Dimensions: He – 40cm x 27cm x 4cm

Him – 40cm x 27cm x 5cm

Her – 52cm x 27cm x 4cm

Media: He – brass, acrylic paint, cotton cords and iron rod

Him – brass, acrylic paint, cotton cords, lagging, foam, and iron rod

Her – copper, acrylic paint, cotton cords, and iron rod.

Year: 2010.

Faces (Project Four)

Faces are a threesome mixed media work, comprising three different masks namely *He*, *Him* and *Her* (plates 19, 20 and 21). The works were all executed using the embossing and chasing and repousse techniques. *He* and *Her* were embossed and their facial details chased out entirely in brass and copper respectively. *Him* was however produced without the forehead and nose in the same material. The nose was carved out of lagging and the forehead from low density foam. They were stuck onto the work using epoxy.

All three masks were painted in acrylic paint covering the surface of the metals thus hiding the original materials from which the works were made. Cotton cords were used to frame the works using the macramé technique. The cords were also wound around 3/8 inch iron rod frames. The frames for *He* and *Him* measured 27 x 40cm inches each while the frame for *Her* measured 27 x 52 cm. The works were all coated after the

paintings were done with a fingernail hardener to prevent the acrylic from peeling off and also to make the works glossy.

The works were painted in multi colours especially *Her*. This was done to emphasis the complexity of the human being especially the female specie. *He* and *Him* were made with angular features especially the cheeks and jaw, characteristics of the male figure. *Her* was however given rounded features, also characteristic of the female figure.

Interpretation OF Results FOR Project Four

“There is no art to find the mind’s construction in the face” (William Shakespeare). A person’s physical appearance has nothing to do with the way s/he thinks, acts and behaves. The fact that a person has big lips does not mean s/he is a gossip or saucy. A beautiful/handsome face does not necessarily translate into kind heartedness, humility or meekness of a person. Ugliness of a face, no matter how it is defined also does not necessarily mean the person is a rogue or mischievous.

Many atimes, people we think we know do things that we think they could never have done. This baffles our minds so much so that, we begin to ask: “you of all people?”, “what has become of you?”, “is this the same person I knew a while ago?” There have been increasing reports in the media about Ministers of God engaged in sexual relationship with church members, fathers sleeping with their own children and prominent and respectable figures in society engaged in frauds, drug deals and other unscrupulous activities that they would otherwise not be profiled for.

All the scenarios stated above back the statement “there is no art to find the mind’s construction in the face” by William Shakespeare in his book titled *Macbeth*. In order to know people’s true characters, one must get close to them and not judge them from afar based on their appearances.

Findings From Media And Techniques Used

The Following Major Findings Emerged Out Of The Study

- 0 Nail polish sets well on all metal surfaces; whether mirror finished or matte. It however does not cover heavy dents on metals, thus such dents must be removed through filing and polishing before the polish is applied. Applying it requires a lot of patience as one colour must be allowed to completely dry before the next one is applied. When this is done, any type of design can be done on metal surfaces using nail polish. The polish

dries quicker than all other pigments used for any of the works. It however does not permit blending of colours like acrylic paint and mistakes can be removed using the nail polish remover. The nail polish can be used to colour the surface of metal as an alternative material to enamel which is quite expensive and not readily available on the Ghanaian market.

One advantage that the nail polish has over enamel as the traditional colouring medium for metal is that the polish is applied cold and does not require any form of heat. Enamel however does not work on brass because brass contains zinc which cannot withstand much heat. Enamel melts at temperatures from 900 °C and at that temperature, zinc would have evaporated from the metal, leaving holes in it. The polish, when applied must be hardened to prevent it from scratching when it comes into contact with a hard surface.

- 0 Correction fluid did not adhere well onto the metal surface. It easily cracked upon drying and pops off from the metal surface. It also easily discoloured on drying. It is therefore not a good material to be used directly on metal.
- 0 Graphite from pencil is a good material for decorating and coating the surface of base metal. The graphite worked particularly well on metals with tarnished surfaces.
- 0 It appeared faintly on metal surfaces that are not tarnished. Graphite from soft pencils (the B range of pencils) made better impressions on metal surfaces than graphite from hard pencil (the HB pencils). To make impressions made by the graphite permanent however, it must be fixed with varnish or a hardener.
- 0 Acrylic paint is a very good material for decorating metal surface. It can easily be blended. It can be applied thickly on metal. It is able to cover most dents made by tools on the surfaces of metal during fabrication. One does not need to polish the surface of metal works with abrasives such as sand and emery papers to remove dents and tool marks. It is good to allow the paint to dry coolly in air when using it to paint on metal. It must also be coated with varnish or hardener to prevent the paint from peeling off at a later date.
- 0 Spray paint must be shaken very well before spraying onto metal. It takes between three to five minutes to dry under the sun. It does not adhere well on surfaces with rust, wax, grease, scale and other foreign matter on it. The material exposed dents on metal surfaces when it was sprayed over them. Dents must therefore be removed from the surface on which this material is to be used. Designs can be cut through the

spray paint using any sharp tool. Blunt tools give rough edges to designs. The material is so vulnerable that the slightest contact it has with a hard surface caused it to scratch or peel off.

- 0 Care must be taken when cutting designs from the spray paint as any rush can cause the material to peel off thus destroying the whole design. It is water resistant but easily dissolved by other solvents such as thinner and PVA glue. It must also be fixed to make it permanent.
- 0 Eye pencil colour metal no matter the surface condition of the metal. The material however does not dry even when it is hardened and therefore cannot be used for works that are meant to be permanent.

Conclusion

The study has shown that the non-conventional materials that were employed in the project could be used effectively for the production of metal art to achieve variety in works of art. The research has shown that materials such as acrylic paint, nail polish, wood, foam, lagging, cow horn, paper, graphite, adhesives, fabrics and many other materials can be alternative materials to the traditional metal working materials for the decoration, protective coating and finishing of metal art works in Ghana.

It can therefore be concluded that the incorporation of mixed media into the production of metal art provides alternative and limitless opportunities for metal artists who want to explore new materials and techniques. The study provides hope for all artists especially metal artists who want to explore unfamiliar media and techniques for the production of their works.

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