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Exploration of Hairstyles for Fabric Designing and Production

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Abstract:

Textile designing and production over the centuries have become more sophisticated and intriguing. It has progressed rapidly and steadily in its quest to seek for more opportunities and possibilities for expression. As a result of this evolution, over the last decades, rather amazing things have come not only to contend the traditional landmark of textile designing and production, but to also reshape it. This paper explores textile design concepts based on indigenous and contemporary hairstyles by examining their intricate arrangements and styles. Design principles were applied to originate assorted textile designs, using a computer aided design software, Adobe Photoshop as a design tool. Consequently, nine textile designs based purely on hairstyles including elements, textures and some colour ways have been made.

A textile design catalogue of the results has been produced and some of the outcomes have been successfully printed onto appropriate textile materials. The qualitative research approach was used and the researchers specifically employed descriptive, experimental and observational research methods. Some of the results show that varieties of hairstyles are potential resources for textile design.

Keywords: *Hairstyles, Textile design, Motifs, Computer aided design and Symbolism*

1. Introduction

Textiles have ceased to become a stasis but as rather an organic entity with a life of its own. Textile designers and artists in this light have not only incorporated traditional (conventional) and non- traditional (non-conventional) materials and techniques but also have employed unconventional motifs to a synergetic aesthetic end other than the traditional aim of fabric for clothing.

The choice to use African hairstyles as the principal motif for this study is cognizant by the supposition that the African culture of which hairstyles are a significant element, is a rich system of insignia. In most African communities' hairstyles are used to communicate visually more frequent than the oral. Africa is rich in a variety of ways including natural resources, manpower and culture. Within this structure of the African culture is a wide range of legacy ranging from religion, music, dance, art, architecture to oral literature. Within the visual culture, we find an innumerable array of hairstyles which have been explored to some extent by painters, sculptors, photographers, poets, anthropologists and traditionalists all in the name of preserving and showcasing them. Unfortunately, they have always followed specific guidelines that allow these hairstyles to be portrayed in a teleological format. The focus of this study is to use African, specifically Ghanaian hair styles as a medium of designing. In as much as hairstyles adorn and beautify our culture, they could also inspire contemporary designers in this post-modern era of textile designing. However, the translation of this very important aspect of our identity as a people in the textile designing industry is yet to be realized hence the researchers' choice of using hairstyles as the principal motif for the study. The study is aimed at reviving this sacred element in our culture as people and project hairstyles in a conceptual interpretation which will provide an experience to remember and a chance to fully taste African hairstyles in all of its complexity.

1.1. Computer-Aided Design

The use of computer-Aided Design has improved industrial production process significantly. The CAD system permits the designer to develop project functions, mainly based on the design of the item which one wants to create by using a series of tools provided by a data processing system. To improve the speed and efficiency of the operations which are usually made by hand, with this there is the possibility of having available tool which quickly generates on the monitor of a computer. (Aboagye, 2009). Castelli et al. (1999) commented that Computer Aided Design (CAD) has become part of the textile design revolution. The move to computerization is a major trend in the apparel/textile industry today. Computers are changing the way designers all over the world are working. For textile designers, CAD has become more or less indispensable.

Years ago, the process of fabric design was extremely tedious. A fabric first had to be visualized, and then the arduous process of rendering would take place. The hand produced sample swatch would be time-consuming and therefore expensive. If any changes were necessary, even minute changes, a whole new swatch would have to be rendered.

Today, with the introduction of CAD and its many software capabilities like Corel draw, Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator and many others, the possibilities are endless. The entire process of designing a fabric is revolutionized. Where previously designers used to labour over graph paper and stencils, now they simply have to play with a mouse or stylus pen to come out with innovative designs. And the result is not only an increase in speed, but greater accuracy than the manual process. It is no wonder that even small-scale textile design and manufacturing companies are using CAD systems.

1.2. Cloth and Symbolism

One of the most obvious features of the material culture of the Ghanaian is cloth. Cloth is not only used for personal adornment, but also used symbolically as a powerful expressive medium of communication. The hand-woven cloth is not only valued for its aesthetic quality, but it is also valued for its symbolic and expressive quality. The Adinkra cloth is one important art object that constitutes a code in which the Akans have deposited some aspects of the sum of their knowledge, fundamental beliefs, aspects of their history, attitudes and behaviours towards the sacred, and how their society has been organized. For example, the symbol in an Adinkra cloth called "*Kontonkrowi*" (means rainbow) is used politically to depict the encompassing nature of the powers of the king in the Akan society. When used in funeral situations, the symbolism points out the inevitability of death for every person, young and old, royal and commoner.

Another significant function of the Adinkra cloth is evident is colour usage as well as the constituent symbols that are incorporated in the design of the cloth. The colours and the constituent symbols of the Adinkra cloth evoke complex concepts that relate to social and political organization, beliefs and attitudes, moral and ethical issues about the self and one's responsibilities, knowledge and education. The communicative aspects of cloth among the Akan have been discussed in a limited way as "proverb cloths" by Aronson (1992) and Domowitz (1992). For example, notes that "Proverb cloths offer an accessible public voice to those who are constrained to silence." As "textile rhetoric" by Yankah (1995), notes that the cloth design, along with the mode of wearing it may be used not just to praise political heroes, to commemorate historical events, and to assert social identities, but also as a form of rhetoric - a channel for the silent projection of argument.

Cloth forms a very important aspect of Ghanaian art and culture; this is because of their uniqueness with respect to the cultural symbolism that they reflect and portray. It is the objective of this research to exhume some of the intricate and ever expanding frontiers of the Ghanaian textile artistry.

1.3. Motifs in African Textile Designs

Both the indigenous and contemporary Ghanaian textile designers have always admired the more spontaneous runny effect that plays with a more cautious asymmetrical pattern variations. The African cultural heritage is endowed with a lot of cultural values and beliefs and it is no wonder that these cultural values and beliefs find themselves deeply intertwined in Africa arts such as textiles.

African textile designs and arts are representative symbols of African society. Some people and societies in Africa have developed symbols from proverbs, sayings, and king's quotation in a form of arts. Similarly, other ethnic groups also use the cultural landscapes, natural objects, or their innovative works in a form of arts for their contemporary designs. It is these symbols that have been collected from various ethnic groups and then presented artistically through patterns for fabric decoration and design. Later these design elements transformed and embedded on fabrics. The aesthetics value of these African textile designs has well defined in a form of design elements such as lines, curves, symbols or motifs. The concept of creating motifs and its account on African textile cloth is not only to please eyes and the viewers. But it is also used as medium of communication in a society that conveys spiritual values and beliefs from their ancestors. African textiles show that Africa clothes and their imported motifs define charity, culture, appropriate social relationship and their behaviors in a society. Due to this deep-rooted perception of cloth values in African society, design denotation has involved a lot of actors in the field and has handed over through descendants (Debeli, 2013).

The unraveling of the meaning of motifs and symbols employed by the African artists is a task which must be left at the doors of ethnologist, because in specific monographs on African motifs found in painting or in textile printing on one hand are representational and on the other hand, are geometric which give the impression that the former used to be representational; but through successive copying and styling they were reduced to geometric symbols. This has brought about uncertainty in the origin of certain design motifs. As to the ideas behind such motifs as those cut on the stamps used in printing Adinkra cloths, some historians believe that the Ashanti's borrowed these motifs from the amulet symbols used by the Arabs from the north but renamed them giving them a local historical, magical or allegorical significance. For the textile designer, his field of study is something other than the interpretation of

the content of these designs or motifs, for his sphere is the appreciation of the form in which they are depicted, and although his task will be made both higher and more interesting by all that he can learn from the meaning which they hold, yet their initial value for him lies in the visual appearance, and this is the exact position of this study to explore the aesthetic qualities of indigenous African hairstyles in the designing and production of textile fabrics.

2. Materials and Methods

The researchers employed the descriptive and experimental methods of qualitative research. The descriptive method was used in the accurate description of the procedures employed in the research in order to facilitate reproduction. Techniques and procedures of extracting motifs, hence systematic approach of producing printed textile designs using Adobe Photoshop were documented. The experimental method was also employed to generate motifs from contemporary and everyday hairstyles with the aid of the Photoshop software. The researchers experimented with permed, braided, plaited, twisted and cornrowed hairstyles mostly found in African communities. Conscious and systematic manipulations were applied to the various hairstyles even though some results were accidental. A number of hairstyles were considered; the braid, cornrows, perms, twists, and plaits amongst others. Dominant among these selected ones is the cornrow. The cornrow hairstyle in Africa covers a wide social terrain: religion, kinship, status, age, ethnicity, and other attributes of identity can all be expressed in hairstyle. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the categories from the parent population of the study. The categories include corn row, braided, plaited and permed hairstyles. The selected hairstyles are classified as follows:



Figure 1: Plaited Hairstyles



Figure 2: Corn row Hairstyles

Source: www.theglamorouslife.com/hairstyle-gallery



Figure 3: Hand drawn Hairstyles through Observation by the researchers (Source: Manu, 2010)

2.1. General Procedures in the Production of the Designs

The study was based on the premise of envisioning the possibility of generating motifs from a genre of real and photographed traditional and contemporary hairstyles which would subsequently be used to design fabrics with proverbial penchant or proclivity. Suitable Adobe Photoshop software commands for manipulation of the selected objects (hairstyles) were carefully applied to obtain vector images suitable rendering printed textile designs. Other subtle effects were combined for the results desired in each stage of the designing process. The general procedures employed in generating the designs are as follows:

- Selecting the image
 - Adjusting the size and image quality
 - Converting the image into outlines and application of other features
 - Resizing, arranging and defining the patterns
 - Colour application and other background effects

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Design 1: “Nkabom” (Unity is strength)

“Unity is strength” (Figure 4), is a fabric based on the Akan proverb which says “*prɔɔ wɔ hɔ yi se wo yibaako a ɛbu, wokabɔ mu a emmu*” which literally means that a stick of broom can easily be broken but when they are fastened together they will be strong and cannot be broken. The motif in the design was adopted from a braided hairstyle popularly called corn roll. The braids are in a circular

formation which starts from a point in separate rolls but the ends of these individual rolls end up woven together at the tail end into one single rope which looks bigger and stronger. It is this unique formation or pattern of the hairstyle which informed its title because it has the resemblance of the popular broom proverb. The design also incorporates different colour shades and arrangements which augment a background texture created from the same motif all going to buttress the idealness and significance of its name, unity is strength. The design has wax effect at the background. The colours used and the arrangement of the motifs make the fabric a mummy cloth.



Figure 4: "Nkabom" (Unity is strength)

3.2. Design 2: "ɔbra" - (Life)

(Figure 5) titled "ɔbra" (life), had its name from the Akan proverb "mono tew, naguanguansote" which means that both green and dry leaves fall off the tree at one point in time. Literally meaning, both young and old dies. To the Akans, death was created by the creator and is part of the rhythm of life. Those who die continue to live in the land of the spirits, which is a replica of the world which we live in. Death and birth are opposite as is brown and green in the world of plants, for just as death takes away people from the community, birth replaces those who are taken away so there is always a constant traffic between the land of the spirits and our world. Death is often personified as a wicked destroyer who pays no regard for status, age or beauty, and takes away those whose time has come. The motif used in the designing of the fabric, is adopted from a braided hairstyle. The colours used in the work reflect the proverb after which it was named with the green and brown colours. The motif is arranged in a zig-zag pattern and there is a bubbled textured effect at the background. The fabric can be used as a mourning cloth especially when a young person has died. It would also serve as a warning to young people who may be thoughtless and think that they have all the time in the world, that death comes both to the young and the old and that a person must be prepared for death at any time.



Figure 5: "ɔbra" - (Life)

3.3. Design 3: "Nokwardie"- (Honesty)

"Nokwardie" is the name of the fabric design in (Figure 6). It is derived from an Akan proverb "wodennbrabatunkwan a wudu, nammom Wonsan wakyi bio, which means that if you live on fraud, it gets to a point where you get swallowed up in your lies and deceits. The first moral instrument given to newly born Akan children on the eight day when they are outdoored to be made members of their families and to be given names in a ceremony called "abadinto" or outdooring- is to be truthful. A newly born child remains

nameless until the time for giving him or her name comes, and until that day the child is considered a visitor or a guest. The belief is that the visitor had come from the spirit world and after staying for seven days, he or she becomes the responsibility of the family, standing in place of society, to remake the visitor into a member of the family or society, the child is given a name to identify him or her and to make the child one of them. The fabric is designed with a hand drawn plaited hair style. The rope-like hairstyle is arranged nicely in a full drop pattern. The background textures are in a form of pieces of ropes arranged in linear pattern. The cool colours used in the design which is brown, blue, cream and black gives the fabric a dull and beautiful effect which makes it an ideal cloth for funerals in other tribes.



Figure 6: "Nokwardie"- (Honesty)

3.4. Design 4: "Adee pen a"- (precious things are hard to find)

"**Adee pen a**" is a phrase from a statement "Adeea eye no, ne pe ye pena" which means that "good things are hard to come by". One usually has to suffer to get the best. This name was given due to the circumstances surrounding the design. This is a design adopted from a plaited hairstyle. The motif generated from this hairdo is arranged in a vertical half drop pattern and are placed in two different cases with different background effects. Irrespective of the different environment in which these motifs are placed, there is a general background texture which is designed with a unique love like symbol. The colours used for this fabric are wine, green, violet and pink. The cloth can be used as a mummy cloth.



Figure 7: "Adee pen na"- (precious things are hard to find)

3.5. Design 5: "Nyansapɔ - (Wisdom Knot)

This design (**Figure 8**) was adopted from a hand drawn permed hairstyle which is synonymous to the modern Ghanaian lady. Its name is "Nyansapɔ" which literally means "wisdom knot" coined out of an Akan proverb which says "Nyansapɔ" ye sane no badwenba" meaning "it takes an intelligent person to untie a crafty tied knot.

Knots are products of an art of joining together pieces of flexible materials as rope and of forming loops or designs in ropes, strings or fibres. It is one of the oldest human skills, and serves both utilitarian and decorative purposes. In some instances, knotting, has carried magical and religious significance. Our daily lives are like the art of tying and untying knots. Life situation are like knots, if well tied they hold well just like if you plan well the good plans will hold well for you. But if you tie loose knots, then it is like you are not taking time to plan well. Your plans will hold for a while and break loose. Some life situations also present themselves like intricate knots and such knots demand a lot of wisdom, caution and patience to untie. So "Nyansapɔ" as a design is reproving us to be diligent in and prudent in our day to day activities and also have patience when untying life's intricate knots. The design "Nyansapɔ" is made with a motif derived from a permed hairstyle which has been tied into a knot.

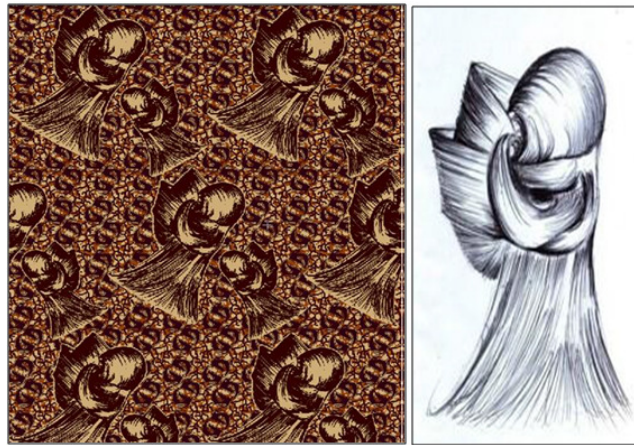


Figure 8: “Nyansapɔ – (Wisdom Knot)”

3.6. Design 6: “Onipa ho hia” - (Companionship is good)

“Onipa ho hia” is derived from a wig hairstyle. The name of this design was chosen as a result of the nature of the motif and how they have been arranged in the design. The general outlook of the design gives a feeling of a lot of hands stretched in support of each other, thus the name “Onipayede” which means “a human being is good to have”. In the Akan society, human beings are prized above money or possessions. Human beings have intrinsic value. So, the human is valued in Akan society that the Akan prefers a bad person in the house than an empty house. But this person who is prized is also a member of a community and it is in a community that a person realizes himself. To be human in the Akan setting is to be in relation with others, dead, living or by expectation (those yet unborn). This is because a human being as an individual is not self-sufficient to the extent that all his or her basic needs could not be met by him or her alone. The assistance of others is required in order to satisfy one’s basic needs. This is not to suggest that there are no individual possibilities. On the contrary, human possibilities are entranced when they are linked with those of others in the community. Co-operation and mutual help are the sine qua non of individual welfare. The motifs in the design are arranged in a horizontal undulating pattern. The background of the design consists of bubble effects and dots. The colours used are cream, dark brown, ochre and blue. The design can be used as a mourning cloth, shirting and curtains.

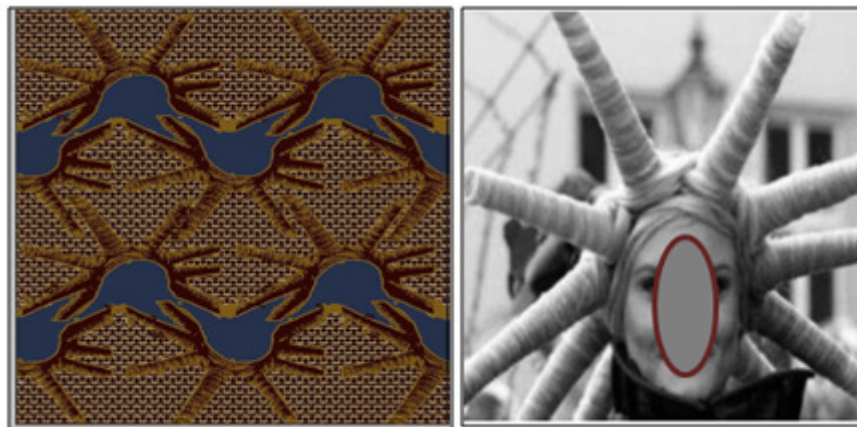


Figure 9: “Onipa ho hia” - (Companionship is good)”

3.7. Design 7: “Aware” - (Marriage)

Figure 10 is titled “Aware” which means “marriage”. The motif for the design was generated from a braided hairstyle and arranged horizontally. The same motifs have been turned upside down in a lock formation, “wedlock” Marriage is not only a union of two individuals, but a union of families and the two people become the link in the chain. Marriage is insuperable from procreation. Normally healthy people are expected to marry and to add to the numbers of people in the family and society. It is in the home that society prepares the next generation of adults. In the Ghanaian society, the idea of marriage is a permanent union and therefore the negotiations and inquiries made before it, are meant to ensure that the Akans compare marriage with palm wine. To Akans in Ghana, whereas palm wine can be tasted and spewed out if the taste is disagreeable, marriage is not like that, it cannot be tasted and spewed out. The design is made up of light green colour with beige outlines. The background consists of green, beige and dark brown palely effect in an alternating pattern. The beige and green form the main colours at the background with the dark brown as the palely effect. The harmonious nature of the colours used makes the design suitable for the young adults.

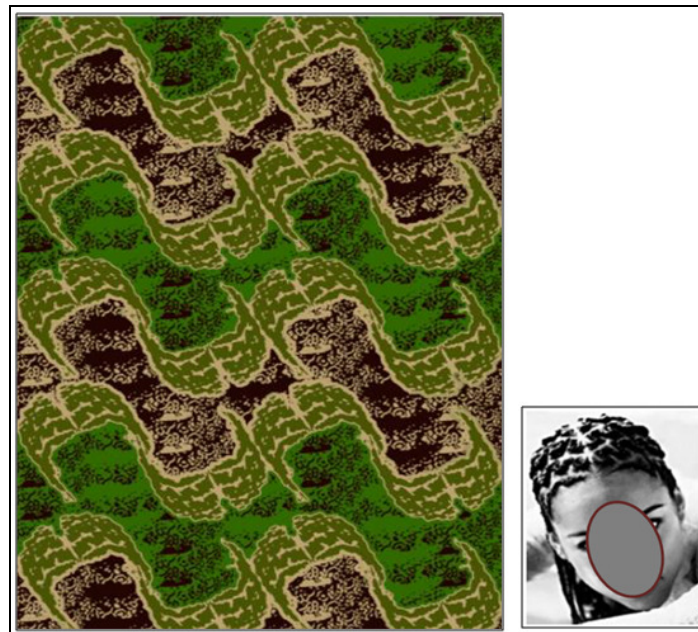


Figure 10: "Aware" - (Marriage)

3.8. Design 8: "Sika futro" - (Gold dust)

"Sika futro" is the title of the design in Figure 11. This is fabric that was designed using a hand drawn permed hairstyle. The motif comes in two different sizes, big and small and this has been arranged horizontally in an alternate manner. The interplay of the tonal variations in the motifs gives the entire design a solid appearance. There is an illusion of depth in the design. The background consists of a red patchy effect on the yellow background with diagonal parallel lines superimposed on it. The elaborate golden appearance of the fabric design gave rise to its name "sika futro" which means gold dust. Gold is one of the major God given minerals in Ghana which over the years has played a significant role in our economy and growth as a nation. In the olden days, even before the introduction of the European currency in the form of coins and notes, gold dust was one of the items used as a means of exchange of goods and services. It was especially in the Ashanti kingdom that gold attained its highest regard as a foundation metal of sacred significance. Gold is the symbol of the king.

The main colours in this fabric are gold, golden yellow, black and red which harmonize beautifully in the design. The nature of this fabric makes it perfect fabric for Friday wears for all gold mining companies across Ghana. It can also be presented as a gift to the royal family or worn for special accession like enstoolment of chiefs especially Ashanti chiefs who pride themselves with gold.

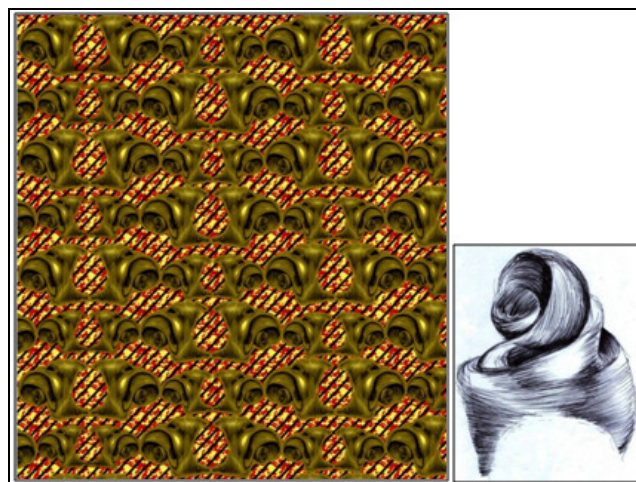


Figure 11: "Sika futro" - (Gold dust)

3.9. Design 9: "Nsuyiri" - (Flood waters)

"Nsuyiri" (flood waters) is a fabric design that was motivated by the annual flooding that usually occurs in various parts of Ghana during rainy season especially in the capital city Accra. The incessant abuse of our water bodies which is a course of some of this floods. The motif for this fabric design was adopted from a captured section of a dreadlocks hairstyle. Floods are natural occurrences which normally happens over long periods so when they become an annual occurrence, it raises question marks as to our activities as

humans. In Ghana, flooding is becoming an annual ritual because; water bodies are being abused day in day out especially in mining areas where big trenches are left open along river banks, forest areas and grassy plains. Wet lands which serve as soak ways for excess water when it rains are being reclaimed by selfish individuals for developmental projects. Also, some wet lands have been turned into dumping sites for refuse. The colours used in this design are violet, grey and sea blue which have been blended nicely to bring out a unique fabric design. This fabric can be used as the official wear of environmentalist and friends of water bodies in Ghana.

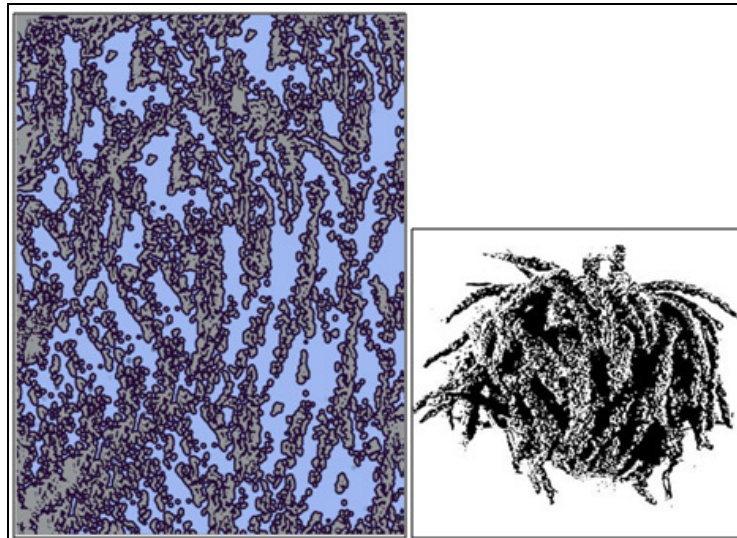


Figure 12: "Nsuyiri" - (Flood waters)

4. Conclusion

Textile designing is a very important component in the textile industry. Its significance, role and importance cannot be over emphasized and should not be over looked. In Ghana, there has been an over subscription of some traditional motifs in the textile designing industry because of the prominent exposure given to them by some eminent foreign anthropologists and local artists in the form of documentation. Interestingly some of the motifs or symbols are always being modified to suit various purposes while new ones are being designed to add to the existing stock. This is however not to demean this line of practice and project another, but to advocate through the end product of this study, alternate means for an endless dispossession of principle in the field of textile designing in Ghana. In order to use permed hair effectively for designing, free hand drawing has to be used to add details. Computer aided design cannot therefore be done away with in textile design and as such very essential. Again, there are so many hairstyles that could serve as sources of inspiration for textile design.

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