

THE TRANSFORMATION OF DISCARDED MATERIALS TO OBJECTS OF AESTHETIC IMPORTANCE: JUNKS TO WEALTH

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ABSTRACT

Junks otherwise known as found objects or trash are regarded as useless or discarded materials in homes, offices, workshops, factories and the environment as a whole can actually be turned into objects of aesthetic importance and also serve as a means of wealth creation through artistic expressions. These items which range from common things like disposable packs, waste plastics, straws, tires, twigs, to metal junks from vehicle parts and other metal or steel equipment constitute bulk of the waste materials that contaminate the built environment. However, this research explores some means through which junks could be adopted as a medium of creative expression hence solving three basic challenges which are: environmental degradation, economic hardship affecting the Nigerian young artists and the artistic value these objects could add to our environment. Scholarly, this study also contributes to existing literature on the topic. The research methods employed for this study include studio experiments, interview and review of some literature. Among others the research discovers that artists especially upcoming ones will find the use of junks economically viable as they have to spend less or nothing in procuring materials for their art works since junks are available freely or at cheaper cost within their immediate community instead of buying imported and expensive ones. For the purpose of this research, seven different types of junk items were examined and it concludes among others that through the use of junks by artists, the volume of waste objects in the environment decreases hence reducing the danger on the built environment at the same time producing aesthetic works as both indoor and outdoor beautification objects. The paper recommends that artists and art students should begin to explore the use of found objects as medium of creativity and this idea should be added to art and design curriculum at all levels of education.

Keywords: *Junks, Trash, Found objects, Discarded-Objects, Environment*

INTRODUCTION

Junks in the context of this paper are objects or material that its original owner threw away or discarded because it is no longer useful or relevant.

It is regarded as useless or valueless. They are already thrown away or dumped somewhere. In the language of visual art, such objects are also called found objects, trash or even discarded objects. For the purpose of this paper, such materials must be

theoretically dry: newspapers, boxes, cans, plastics generally, rubber, metals, glass, tires, electric wire and appliances, wood, broken tiles and ceramics, fabrics and so on. (Zimring & Rathje, 2012) These materials go through creative recycling in order to become something new and serve different purpose from what they were originally made for.

Art especially the Visual arts is material oriented right from the prehistoric time when objects like stones, shells and bones were the available artistic media (Willet, 1997:1) over time other materials like clays, cast metals such as bronze and brass also emerge as media of artistic expressions especially in sculptural practice (Akintonde, 2004). As the history of art progresses, the landscape of art materials changed drastically especially from the late nineteenth century to early twentieth century when sculpture was already characterized by different forms and material expressions (Akintonde, 2004) Sculpture is the aspect of art that covers three dimensional works which are created from modeling, carving, casting construction, assemblage, wedding and recently installation techniques. Sculpture because of its three dimensional nature obviously accommodates many forms of materials for its execution and finishing. In the contemporary art world such materials include junks.

The process of transforming junks to the objects of wealth or aesthetic importance can also be called recycling which is also a way of minimizing waste generation by recovering and reprocessing usable products that might otherwise become waste for example recycling of aluminum cans, papers, metal junks and plastic bottles to produce other items different from what they were originally. (Emgin, 2012) For example processed used paper can be

turned to modeling material for the production of Paper Mache in sculpture. Crushed glass containers used to make new glass containers, and scrap metal used in foundries for producing bronze works in sculpture.

Recycling for the purpose of art can be viewed as both down-cycling and up-cycling. It resists the argument that an object is dead once it is disposed of (Emgin, 2012). It can be argued that art, in this scope acts as an instrument of transformation and represents objects once regarded waste as artifacts

There is no gainsaying that trash constitutes bulk of the solid waste in our environment and the fact remains that we are in waste age because we keep on consuming one thing or the other as a result of constant production of consumer goods, so it becomes unavoidable that waste abound around us. Although there are various methods of waste disposal and management, creative conversion of discarded materials into objects of aesthetics and functional benefits to the end users is not yet widely accepted and academically publicized. Apart from making the society non susceptible to environmental epidemics emanating from waste and trash pollution, the use of junks as medium of artistic expression thereby giving a second life to old, discarded and useless objects inform of craft and other types of creative works which will enhance the personal economic and socio-cultural well-being of the artist, his immediate society and the country as a whole.

The objective of this paper is not only to encourage environmental purity by the reduction of waste from our community but also to project what people call discarded and useless to medium of self-sustainability through the production of artistic

objects and generate income for the artists. The focus of this research is limited to the promotion of reuse of junks or discarded materials as artistic objects only. It does not treat other methods of waste management and pollution. The theoretical framework is centered on the philosophical ideas about garbage which advocates a better understanding of trash beyond common perception and dictionary meaning

The Methodology used includes review of existing literature materials on the topic, studio experiments, field work through the use of photography and interview of seasoned artists and students of art.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Trash, according to Merriam-Webster dictionary is anything useless, worth-less or discarded. Several other names have been given to it like waste, recycled material, found object, ready-made, junks, garbage, refuse, rubbish. Whatever name it is given to them does not matter, what really matters is the fact that people have the perception that they are valueless materials because they are no longer needed or useful anymore, so the best thing is to get rid of them as soon as possible. People want to dispose of them quickly not actually thinking of any alternative so that they would not constitute environmental nuisance to their homes

Historically, industrial revolution enhances the production of consumer goods coupled with ever increasing world population and new trends in creativity resulted in worldwide development, discoveries and new innovations in various trends of life. This led to mass production of domestic goods

like plastic, paper and fabric products of various types and functions.

In dealing with junks or discarded materials we have a lot of things to consider. One of which is the source where they come from. What we call junks are actually items that are once useful to us. This constitutes day to day house hold materials used in various homes. They are items used in offices, industries, markets places, schools and where ever people are generally. Hence things once used and reused again and again are now thrown away because it is more affordable to replace with new ones. As the production increased, its by product material waste also increased.

According to Pye, 2010, “the phenomenon of waste comes clear into focus not merely as a byproduct of manufacturing process but rather as an integral element in circle of production and consumption.” The resultant effect of this is increased in waste generation in the society.

We all have junks all around us. Anything you do during the day to generate empty plastic, bottle, boxes, paper, plastic, wraps, nylon, discarded plates, spoons and other things you throw away as stated by Mustafa 2016 is waste generation. We all encounter junks in the crowded urban areas and as well as the remotest corners of the world. Junk is invariably everywhere and produced every time. In fact, it cannot be separated from peoples’ activities, (Zimring and Rathje, 2012).

According to Chen, (2015) World Bank analysis stated that the amount of solid waste generated in cities is growing faster than the rate of urbanization. She explained further that when the people’s income

level and rate of urbanization increase, production of waste automatically increases. According to Zimring and Rathje, (2012) our trash is a testament, what we throw away says much above our values, our habitats, our lives etc. Junks are part of us whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. The question is what do we do to trash in order for it not to destroy our environment and at the same time be repurposed to serve other functions other than what they were originally.

JUNKS TO WEALTH

Various people including garbage collectors and artists interact with junks for different purposes. (Mustafa, 2016) There are many ways through which people make money from trash, apart from waste management agencies both public and private,

there are other sets of people who make a living from trash business.

There are people who collect plastics, cans, scraps and papers from waste bins and landfills. These are called **Collectors or Scavengers**. They scavenge, pick and collect these items and sell to companies that recycle them. There is another group called **The Separators**, they select, classify and sort out the recycle materials for those who will recycle with machines. Several other people earn their living too by working as machine operators, labourers, account and administrative staff, security men etc for the various companies that are involved in the Trash business. For these people and for the artists who repurpose these discarded objects into objects of value, they are no longer junks but treasures.



Plate 1

Waste Collector at work

Photograph, Courtesy: Google search, January 15, 2019

TYPES OF JUNKS

There many types of junks or trash. They are generally classified into five basic groups (Zimring & Rathje, 2012, Cerny & Seriff, 1996, Herman, 1998)

Solid Waste: This includes variety of objects found around our homes, offices, shops, schools, markets, religious centers and industrial areas. It is subdivided into the followings:

- Paper Waste: This include both papers and cards, news papers, cardboards, packaging materials tissue papers and other products. Paper is generally easily recycled or reused.
- Tins and Metals: This include various forms of tins, cans, metals scraps or junks , old machine parts etc. most metals can be recycled, reused and repurposed.
- Plastic waste: This consists of all forms of all forms of plastic products like bags, containers, jars, buckets, kegs, bottles, bowls, pipes, tanks and many other plastics found around our homes. Plastic is not biodegradable, but many of them can be recycled and repurposed.
- Ceramics and Glass: Objects in this group can easily be recycled too. Through various artistic techniques ceramics and glass are reused and repurposed.
- Fabrics: Fabric materials like cotton, synthetics, wool, khaki and others can easily be reused and repurposed.



Plate 2

*African masks made from processed waste papers (paper mache),
By Art and Design Students of The Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, 2018*



Plate 3



Plate 4

*Dichotomy: Seyi-Gbangbayau
Paul, Paper Mache, 2012*

Photograph, Courtesy: The Authors

Organic Waste: This is another form of domestic waste like all food wastes, garden wastes, manure and rotten meats. This is often turned into manure. Organic wastes should properly be disposed.

Liquid Waste: This, includes dirty water, organic liquids, wash water, water detergents and even rain waters

Recyclable Trash: This generally includes waste items that can be converted into another thing. Examples include, paper, metal, furniture, plastics etc

Hazardous waste: Hazardous wastes include any item that is poisonous, corrosive inflammable and toxic. This items can harm, so it not a recyclable material.

Techniques of Transforming junks to Artistic Objects of Economic Value

There is no limit to the techniques and materials contemporary modern artists can use for the production of their works; it all depends on inspiration, style, creativity, available tools and the environment of the artist. Because of space limit, this paper will explain only few techniques and materials that can be used to produce art works from junks or discarded objects.

Plastic bottle covers

Bottle covers are available everywhere and they can be used to produce a lot of things like foot mat, wall designs, mosaic painting, chairs, table tops, door curtain and many other things.

Materials: Bottle covers, cutter, board (plywood, hard board, metal sheet or flat plastic), adhesive and your working sketch.



Plate 5
Metal bottle covers



Plate 6
Plastic Bottle covers



Plate 7

Plastic bottle covers used to produce table and chair tops

Photograph Courtesy: Pininterest, 2018



Plate 8

Metal bottle covers used to produce table and chair top



Plate 9

Table mats produced from Plasticbottle covers

Photograph Courtesy: Pininterest, 2018



Plate 10

Wall Clock: Plastic bottle covers
Courtesy; Pininterest, 2018



Plate 11

Wall Clock: Plastic bottles and covers
A Student of Art, Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro



Plate 12

Wall Designs (Mosaic Painting) produced from Plastic bottle covers
Photograph Courtesy: Pininterest

Plastic Straws

Materials: Straws, plastic bottles, nails, thread, wooden handles, cutter or scissors



Plate 13

Plastic straws: Brooms

Photograph Courtesy: Pininterest, 2019

Fabrics

Various types of used fabrics or old cloth can be used for this technique. The materials include Fabrics of any texture depending on the design as

desired by the artist, scissors, cutter, strings, Light iron or plastic rods, colours and brush of various sizes.



Plate 14

Tina Rice: Amulet, 2018, Stoneware, recycle thread, 14'' x 40'

Photograph Courtesy: tinaricedesign.com/nev, 2019



Plate 15

Tina Rice, Disrupting the Dark Circus, khakis, cotton recycled business suits, stoneware, cotton thread 36" x 40

Metals

Several types of metal can be repurposed through melting, welding, construction or assemblage techniques. Examples of metal junks are machine

parts, house hold iron items like spoon, fork, knife, cutlass etc

Materials: Welding machine, equipment and tools, metal junks and good working space.

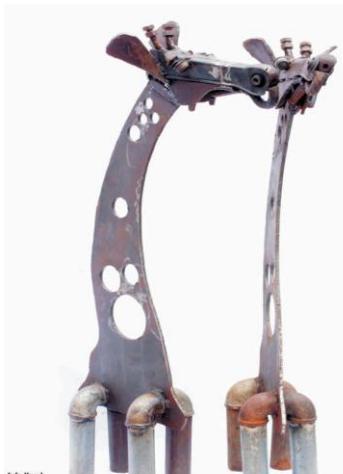


Plate 16

Akeem Murina: Olofofo Yera, steel found pipes and junks, 2012
Photograph Courtesy: www.africanartswithtaj.blogspot.com, 2019



Plate 17

Spade, rake, shear, junks
Photograph courtesy: Pininterst, 2018



Plate 18

Tires

Dumped tires of various sizes and types can be recycled and repurposed to serve both aesthetics and functional purposes. They can be turned to flower planters, garden chairs, home furniture, children toys and several other things which could bring wealth to

the artists, comfort to the people and peace to the society.

Materials: Used tires, knife, iron saw, chisel, hammer, adhesive, screws, nuts, screw drivers, pliers and other relevant tools.



Plate 19
Swing: Painted used tire



Plate 20
Toy sport car: Repurposed tires



Plate 21
Photograph courtesy: Pininterest, 2018

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The sight of useless wrapping and packaging materials in the form of papers, nylon bags, tree barks as well as domestic refuse constituting ugliness in our neighborhood is a common thing. On the other hand, with art creativity and resurgent spirit, abandoned materials can be picked and transformed. Transforming junks to wealth is a resourceful venture in art and if well promoted and developed it would serve as an input into the economy of the country. Recycling industries have unlimited scopes for self and industrial employment growth in our society. This is in line with government's crusade on economic self-reliance and wealth creation initiatives. The research focused on the importance of transforming junks to wealth

It is more advantageous for the government to set up a market for scavenged wastes and recycled products, which would encourage the need to get rid of waste and junks in the society. This is perfectly in line with the "theory" of junks to wealth. Government should take serious interest in turning waste to wealth not just in normal waste management which advocates waste destruction. Furthermore, researchers are encouraged to do more work on the transformation of junks to useful objects. The government should encourage owners of landed property and estates owners to make a reflection of art using recycled art to enhance parks and garden for aesthetic and beautification purpose. School curriculums should be restructured to accommodate the idea of junks to wealth.

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