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From Concept to Practice:

Visual Art as an Applied Site of Matriculture

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to examine studio-based visual arts as a venue for social awareness and cultural transformation with regard to the concept of matriculture. In this case, the notion of matriculture is broadened from its ethnographic context to include visual arts as symbolic practice, in which meanings of women are symbolized and reworked. Eight paintings, made in the period from 2007 until 2026 and based on Etimpaste, an eco-conscientious material created by means of the research, are analysed. In early paintings, including Milk Maids, Fruit-bearer, *and* Beauty in Diversity, *textured surface highlights reproductive, domestic, and informal work of women and their impact on community life. In later paintings,* including Hands That Hold the Earth, Bearer of Worlds, Threads of Memory, *and* Rewriting the Frame, *the use of diluted Etimpaste helps to analyse issues of fluidity, interdependence, memory, ecology and transformation. Mainly, the research is based on*

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matriculture, while an ecofeminist view provides ecological support. Thus, medium and message are shown to be connected to each other.

Keywords: Nigerian matriculture, visual art practice, cultural symbolism, women and social transformation, arts-based research

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Résumé

Cet article examine les arts visuels — tels qu'ils sont pratiqués en atelier — en tant qu'espace propice à une prise de conscience sociale et à une transformation culturelle, à la lumière du concept de matriculture. Ici, la notion de matriculture est élargie au-delà de son contexte ethnographique pour englober les arts visuels en tant que pratique symbolique, au sein de laquelle les significations associées aux femmes sont symbolisées et retravaillées. L'étude analyse huit peintures réalisées entre 2007 et 2026, conçues à partir de l'Etimpaste — un matériau écoresponsable mis au point dans le cadre de cette recherche. Dans les premières œuvres, telles que Milk Maids *[« Laitières »],* Fruit-bearer *[« Porteuse de fruits »] et* Beauty in Diversity *[« La beauté dans la diversité »], la texture des surfaces met en lumière le travail des femmes — qu'il soit reproductif, domestique ou informel — et son incidence sur la vie communautaire. Dans des œuvres plus récentes, comme* Hands That Hold the Earth *[« Mains qui soutiennent la Terre »],* Bearer of Worlds *[« Porteuse de mondes »],* Threads of Memory *[« Fils de la mémoire »] et* Rewriting the Frame *[« Réécrire le cadre »], l'utilisation d'Etimpaste sous une forme diluée permet d'explorer des enjeux liés à la fluidité, à l'interdépendance, à la mémoire, à l'écologie et à la transformation. La recherche s'appuie principalement sur le concept de matriculture, tandis qu'une perspective écoféministe lui confère une dimension écologique. On constate ainsi que le médium et le message sont liés l'un à l'autre.*

Mots-clés : Matriculture nigériane ; pratique des arts visuels ; symbolisme culturel ; femmes et transformation sociale ; recherche fondée sur les arts

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Introduction

The idea of matriculture was created by Marie-Françoise Guédon as an extension of the theory of culture as a system of symbols as articulated by Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 89). Geertz described culture as a system of symbolic heritage that is expressed in symbolic form and used to interpret reality and to direct social action. Thus, in the process of interpretation, the idea of culture is not restricted to social structures or institutions, but understood as a complex web that directs perception, action, and values. Symbols are not merely used to represent social reality; they actually contribute to its construction.

Matriculture is built on this theoretical base: Guédon describes matriculture as a set of symbols in a particular society connected with women, maternity, and femininity (Guédon, CfP n.d. p. 3). It is noteworthy that the concept of matriculture is not about a certain social form, such as matrilineality, matriarchy, or matrifocality. The concept is used to investigate the symbolic role of women in a society and, in this sense, every society has a matriculture, whether or not women hold dominant, marginalized, or ambiguous positions in the social structure. An important tenet of the matriculture analysis lies in the distinction drawn by Geertz between "culture as a model of reality" and "culture as a model for reality" (Geertz, 1973, p. 93). While the first refers to the manner in which a given society understands its social roles, relationships, and hierarchies, the latter refers to the manner in which a given society views its culture as a model to be emulated by its members. In the context of the matricultural approach, this distinction indicates the manner in which the symbolic construction of femininity both reflects the experience of women in a given society and defines the scope of their experience.

Thus, employing a matricultural heuristic shifts the focus of analysis beyond the participation of women in social, economic, or political systems to the symbolic codes that make such participation meaningful. Symbolic codes are present in a variety of areas, such as rituals, mythology, language, law, aesthetics, and everyday life. Repetition and cultural reinforcement cause symbolic associations related to women, such as care, fertility, sacrifice, endurance, or moral authority, to assume a normative character. The symbolic associations related to womanhood determine what behaviours by women are socially valued or devalued in that society. This focus on the symbolic character of matriculture sets it apart from structural or materialist analyses of gender. That is, structural analyses may show that women have access to resources or positions of power, whereas a matricultural analysis would explore the symbolic systems that justify or normalise such arrangements. In doing so, matricultural research acknowledges that symbolic systems can be as effective in maintaining inequality as economic or legal systems and that cultural

transformation begins with a transformation in meaning before institutional transformation is possible.

Within this conceptual understanding, visual art holds analytical interest. Artistic production can be understood as a site of symbolic condensation in which cultural meaning is materialized through form, colour, composition, texture, and image. Visual art may imitate matricultural codes that prevail within the culture; however, it may also deconstruct such codes through providing alternative symbolisms. By analyzing visual art in relation to matriculture, one should see art not only as representation but as an actor in the process of meaning-making. Thus, the use of the notion of matriculture in the context of artistic activity broadens its application beyond the ethnographic scope. Instead of concentrating on myths, kinship systems, and narratives of ritual, this perspective acknowledges the materiality of artistic production and visuality as symbolic systems. This expansion of the concept of matriculture has particular resonance in contemporary African contexts, in which historical, colonial, and postcolonial processes have redefined the symbolic construction of gender.

The use of a matricultural analysis of the visual art form allows for a complex examination of the ways in which the cultural meanings of the past intersect with the modern, the environmental, and gender. By using the concept of matriculture as a conceptual framework, the current study places emphasis on the symbolic architecture of women's lives as culturally constructed and understood, and the visual art form as a field of dynamic activity in which the systems of matriculture are revealed and re-imagined, thereby highlighting the value of the concept of matriculture as a form of interdisciplinary analysis.

In this study, matriculture is therefore used not simply as a conceptual description of women's cultural position but as an analytical heuristic for reading the visual and material systems through which femininity, labour, care, memory, ecological responsibility, and agency are constructed. The analysis will take into account the symbols present in the paintings, the cultural associations of those symbols, and how the images in terms of form and materiality reinforce, renegotiate, or rewrite the meanings associated with those symbols which are inherited with regard to women. It is this method that allows for the analysis of the paintings as spaces of matriculture and not examples of a pre-existing theory.

Matriculture as a cultural and analytical concept

The concept of matriculture has been useful in the study of visual arts, since culture does not manifest itself merely through verbal discourse. Culture also manifests itself through

gestures, artifacts, actions, space, colour, material, and symbols. The carrying of a basket on one's head, for instance, can simultaneously be an artifact of labour, a symbol of sustenance, and a symbol of a culturally transmitted activity. Moreover, the image of hands holding the earth could be used to express messages of caring and environmental conservation beyond the mere depiction. This concept therefore offers a way of studying how symbols contribute towards the construction and transmission of cultural meanings with regard to women and their connection to family, community, environment, memory, and continuity.

The distinction between "culture as a model of reality" and "culture as a model for reality" made by Geertz (1973 p. 93) is especially relevant in this context. Cultural symbols are not only representations of the existing social order, but also serve as models that help people comprehend, reproduce, negotiate, or change the social order. When used in terms of visual representation, the above distinctions make it possible to analyse the paintings used in this research not only as representations of agriculture's social reality but also as alternatives to it.

Therefore, the analysis of matriculture within the context of this research is undertaken in terms of three interrelated questions. The first question concerns the symbols, gestures, objects, bodies, and material formations that make up the visual language of each painting. The second question relates to the cultural associations and value systems contained within the visual language. The third question involves whether or not the painting reproduces, engages with, or redefines the meanings of the Nigerian cultural value systems.

The paintings in this study are not treated as isolated aesthetic works: each painting is interpreted in its relationship to specific cultural meanings. The analysis is based on women's positioning with regard to Nigerian notions of labour, nourishment, embodiment, memory, environment, community, technical knowledge, and cultural continuity. Much emphasis is laid on recurrent motifs in the paintings, including vessels, fruit, hands, the Earth, threads, frames, machine shapes, and the female body. The meaning of these motifs lies not so much in their formal nature as in the cultural relationships they create in each particular painting.

In this regard, matriculture can be defined as a process rather than an institution and not only about the preservation of traditional imageries of women. While some of the paintings confirm traditional symbolic connections between women and nurturing care, others challenge them. In this way, the matricultural heuristic allows for an identification of both the empowering *and* restricting aspects of cultural symbolism. Such a distinction is very important, since the reverence for women as nurturers and supporters of community

may recognize their significance and, at the same time, may impose the invisibility of duty upon them.

The chosen works therefore create a series whereby meanings of matriculture can be analysed as they shift from labour and provisioning toward issues of collective identity, ecology, cultural memory, storytelling, and technology. In this respect, the studio functions as a space where inherited cultural meanings are not simply represented but also subjected to visual scrutiny and possible rethinking.

Ecofeminism as a supporting perspective

Ecofeminism in this research is used as a secondary theoretical framework. The importance of an ecofeminist analysis here is mainly in its ability to bring forth the connections between gender, environmental accountability, embodied knowledge, and caring systems. Ecofeminist researchers have been challenging cultural systems in which women and nature become objects of exploitation, while at the same time highlighting the relational perspective of ecological existence (Plumwood, 1993, p. 47; Shiva, 1988, p. 47).

In this current study, however, ecofeminism becomes an important analytical tool in those cases where artworks relate female identity to environmental care and material sustainability. *Hands That Hold the Earth*, for instance, creates a visual link between the hand of the human being and the Earth, and makes care into ecological action rather than domestic behaviour. In the same way, the environmental motivations of creating Etimpaste expand the ecological theme from the realm of depiction to that of studio practice.

Ecofeminism thus supplements the matricultural perspective by focusing on the connection between care, embodiment, environment, and material sustainability. Ecofeminism does not supersede the matricultural perspective as the main mode of analysis. Rather, it offers another perspective in those instances where ecological themes become important elements in the visual and material evidence.

Practice-based research and artistic epistemology

The theory of practice-based research legitimates the practice of art as a means of knowledge production. Sullivan (2010) argues that art practice constitutes a kind of inquiry, which produces knowledge not accessible through discourse. Barrett & Bolt (2007) highlight the reflexive character of practice-based research, while Smith & Dean (2009) describe the relationship between theory and practice as iterative. Candy &

Edmonds (2018) describe practice-based research as a means of creating a kind of knowledge as material. Practice-based research underpins the methodological approach taken in this research, where the artworks do not function as examples but as sites of knowledge. As a consequence, matriculture is not only theoretically but also physically explored.

Practice-led inquiry and material experimentation

This research undertakes a practice-led approach to its methodology, wherein the production of a work of art functions as both a form of investigative practice and an epistemic outcome. Practice-led research overcomes the traditional positivist distinction between subject and object by highlighting the embedded position of the artist-researcher as a cultural agent whose knowledge production takes the form of iterative cycles of production and reflection (Barrett & Bolt, 2007; Sullivan, 2010). While positivist forms of research position the work of art as a form of illustration of pre-existing theory, practice-led research, as a methodology, recognizes the work of art as a form of production that gives rise to theory (Smith & Dean, 2009).

Knowledge production as a type of outcome takes the form of material engagement, wherein the production of the work of art functions as a form of thinking through materials, as Ingold (2013) suggests. Here, the relationship between intention, control, and the unanticipated becomes a dialogue. For example, the development of Etimpaste as an eco-friendly form of painting medium functions as a way to challenge the environmental impact of traditional forms of artistic materials. The methodological structure of the article operates across three interconnected phases:

1. Material innovation (development of Etimpaste)
2. Iterative studio experimentation (texture vs. dilution)
3. Reflexive visual analysis (thematic and theoretical interpretation)

Material as method

Etimpaste is not considered here as a neutral substrate, but rather as a methodological tool. This is due to the fact that, according to feminist materialist theory, which recognizes the agency of matter (as opposed to its inertness) (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010), the process of material experimentation is considered as an epistemological practice. Moreover, the change in the viscosity of the Etimpaste, from dense and impasto to diluted and translucent, is not considered as a technical change but rather as an epistemological practice related to issues such as weight, memory, and change. Furthermore, the dense and impasto Etimpaste is related to issues such as the tactile and the issues of the body

and labour, while the diluted and translucent Etimpaste is related to issues such as memory, narrative rewriting, and interdependencies, which are related to the ecological.

This is in accordance with Candy and Edmonds (2018), who describe the process of research through the act of creating. From this perspective, the production of insights is considered to be the result of the iterative cycles of action and critical reflection.

Reflexive analysis and theoretical integration

Next, the artwork is subjected to reflexive visual analysis, drawing on matriculture, feminist political economy, African visual epistemologies, and ecology (Federici, 2012; Fraser, 2016; Mbembe, 2001; Kagan, 2011). This is not an analysis of the artwork as an object, but as a site that is constantly being negotiated. The analysis attends to:

i. Compositional structure
ii. Symbolic motifs
iii. Material behaviour
iv. Thematic progression
v. Socio-cultural resonance

This reflective aspect is in keeping with the proposition by Sullivan (2010) that artistic production produces complex knowledge structures that exist and function at the same time on an experiential, conceptual, and critical level.

Ethical and ecological positioning

Etimpaste becomes an additional aspect of the methodology, one pertaining to ethics. Sustainable material development is closely connected with the notion of ecological art in terms of the necessity to use ecologically safe production methods (Gablik, 1991; Kagan, 2011). In such a way, the issue of sustainability becomes not only the theme of a piece of art, such as *Hands That Hold the Earth*, but a core process of the methodology as well. In this example, there is no difference between the medium and the message of the piece of art.

From studio to society

Ultimately, this methodology places the studio as a locus of cultural intervention. Through a series of iterative processes, the research offers a model of the ways in which practice-led research can offer a form of critical understanding of the symbolism of matriculture, gender, environmentalism, and futurity. The artist-researcher-author does not observe

culture but becomes a participant in it through a series of material and symbolic negotiations. In this way, the very act of the studio becomes a form of methodology and argument itself.

Analytical framework

The analytical framework is established through the lens of matriculture, which draws on the distinction made by Geertz (1973) between culture as a model *of* reality and a model *for* reality. Three interrelated aspects of the interpretive matrix are considered:

1. Materiality and Symbolic Labour
   This concerns the ways in which the materials used, as well as the textures, and processes employed in the artworks, carry symbolic meanings related to womanhood.

2. Representation and Cultural Positioning
   This refers to the ways in which the representations of the female figures, their gestures and spatial relations, and the hierarchical composition of the artworks may be understood as placing the woman within the symbolic space of the piece.

3. Transformative Potential
   This concerns the ways in which the work of art may be understood as a model of reality and the potential it offers to propose alternative forms of social reality related to gender, agency, and value.

Reflexivity and positionality

In the capacity as the visual artist and the researcher embedded in the cultural context that is the focus of this research, the author occupies a position both as a cultural producer and an analyst of symbolic forms. This positionality is recognized as an essential feature in the research process. Detachment is not a feature that the research aims to achieve; instead, it seeks reflexivity in the research process, as it is recognized that cultural representation is a product of embodied experience, cultural intention, and historical location. Reflexivity in the research process reduces the danger of essentialism in the representation of women and the concept of matriculture. Rather, it highlights the dynamic nature of matriculture as a product of colonial history, postcolonial transformations, and the current socio-economic situation.

Ethical considerations

This research does not involve human subjects, but ethical considerations are relevant in the representation of cultures. Caution is exercised in the representation of 'African' womanhood as a monolithic category and in the application of essentialist notions of femininity. Complexity, diversity, and multiplicity in cultural representation are recognized in the research process. Symbolic references to common cultural motifs are treated in a culturally sensitive manner.

Methodological contribution

By combining matricultural theory and practice-based artistic research, this methodology has the ability to extend the boundaries of matriculture beyond the realm of ethnography. This methodology demonstrates the viability of the use of visual art as a legitimate site of analysis in relation to the study of the symbolic and the feminine in relation to women.

Matricultural Analysis of the Selected Paintings

The eight paintings described in this part of the study were created by the researcher from 2007 until 2026. They mark distinct moments in the progression of the researcher's involvement in matricultural ideas, material exploration, and representations of the labour, care, memory, identity, and agency of women. Thus, the analyses take into account the artworks not only as visual artifacts but also as research results.

Visual matricultural symbol matrix

Painting	Principal visual elements	Matricultural concern
Milk Maids	Women, vessels, head-carrying	Labour, nourishment, communal sustenance
Fruit-bearer	Female body, fruit, vessel	Provision, fertility, embodied cultural value
Beauty in Diversity	Women, ethnic dress, collective formation	Cultural plurality and solidarity
The Innovators and the Space Fish	Women, mechanical forms, tools, fish, cosmic imagery	Intellectual agency, innovation and futurity
Hands That Hold the Earth	Hands, earth, organic forms	Ecological care and stewardship
Bearer of Worlds	Female figure, world-bearing	Responsibility, relationality and

Painting	Principal visual elements	Matricultural concern
	imagery	continuity
Threads of Memory	Threads, overlapping forms	Cultural memory and intergenerational transmission
Rewriting the Frame	Female figure, frame, fluid boundaries	Agency, visibility and cultural transformation

Milk Maids



Title: *Milk Maids*
Year: 2007
Medium: Etimpaste
Dimensions: 2'x 3'

The painting *Milk Maids* serves as an entry point into a matricultural framework by situating women within a visible economy of physical labour, nourishment, and communal sustenance. Instead of presenting care in its passive, purely domestic, and biological sense, the image portrays care as a structured and skilled social activity which is critical for the sustainability of communal existence.

i. Containers and Physical Infrastructure: The large containers on top of the women's heads serve as important cultural artifacts which signify work, duty, and social continuity. The process of carrying converts the woman's body into a physical infrastructure – an instrument which connects the productive spaces with community spaces.

ii. Embodied Cultural Knowledge: The vertical stance of the figures shows learned physical balance, coordination, and endurance. Head carrying is illustrated as embodied cultural knowledge, that is, practical knowledge that has been passed down across generations through observation and practice, and which is critical to communal survival.

iii. Collective Identity vs. Individual Struggle: The lack of specific features on the figures redirects attention away from the individual identity of the figures to an embodiment of the work performed by women collectively. Although this reveals collective experiences of society, it also reveals a significant contradiction, that of the potential loss of identity in gendered roles.

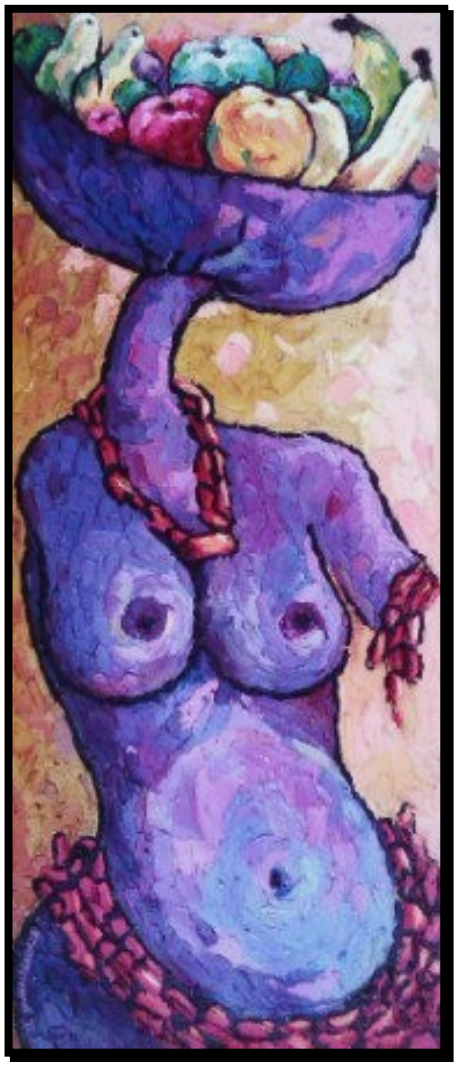
iv. Textural and Material Resonance: The physical application of textured Etimpaste mirrors the subject matter. The thick, tactile layers of the medium give physical weight to concepts of accumulation, endurance, and earth, visually reinforcing the effort required by the labouring figures.

v. Broader Ecological Networks: The women's work is integrated within a wider ecological system linking physical bodies, animals, agricultural resources, and communal survival.

Ultimately, *Milk Maids* reveals four interconnected symbolic systems within the matricultural heuristic:

Matricultural Symbolic System	**Nigerian Cultural Function**
The Vessel	Symbolizes nourishment, provisioning, and social responsibility.
The Act of Carrying	Demonstrates embodied labour and inherited practical knowledge.
The Female Body	Acts as the infrastructure sustaining community life.
Reduced Individuality	Highlights the tension between cultural value and gendered expectation.

Fruit-bearer



Title: *Fruit-bearer*
Year: 2012
Medium: Etimpaste
Dimensions: 3’ x 1.5’

In *Fruit-bearer*, the matriculture outlined in the previous painting, *Milk Maids*, is expanded upon by shifting the focus from women’s labour to the link between the woman’s body, nutrition, fecundity, and culture. Where *Milk Maids* centred women’s labour in an economy external to their bodies, in *Fruit-bearer* the economy of sustenance becomes internalized within the body itself, making the figure herself one that nourishes.

i. Symbolism of the ‘Bowl of Fruit’ as the Central Image of the Painting: The fruit symbolizes agricultural plenty, growth, and continuity of the whole process including cultivation, harvesting, transportation, and consumption of the produce. As a direct burden on top of the woman’s head, the load turns the woman’s body

into a means of material and cultural support. In this painting, the act of provision is presented not as something outside of women's culture, but rather as her cultural responsibility.

ii. Fertility as an Ambivalent Issue: The combination of fruit with the female body introduces themes of fertility, ripening, and motherhood, but the visual text of the painting excludes any human features from the figure. On the one hand, the painting glorifies the female body for its role as life-bringer. On the other hand, it questions the implications of such cultural symbolism for individual identity.

iii. Collective Archetype Over Individual Biography**:** Like *Milk Maids*, the loss or diminishment of facial specificities means that the painting cannot be considered a traditional portrait. The subject serves both as an individual woman and as a cultural archetype. She is known for what she does, not who she is; thus, she runs the risk of becoming culturally anonymous.

iv. Shift from Collective to Individual Representation: Where *Milk Maids* depicts several women sharing labour, *Fruit-bearer* concentrates this symbolic burden onto a single figure, illustrating how widespread cultural expectations of care and provision become concentrated on individual women.

v. Textural Materiality (Etimpaste): The dense, tactile application of Etimpaste gives physical weight to the figure and fruit alike. Rather than presenting a smooth, idealized, or objectified body for visual consumption, the thick, accumulated medium emphasizes corporeality, physical presence, and the real weight of cultural responsibility.

Within the matricultural heuristic, *Fruit-bearer* is defined by four interconnected systems:

Matricultural Symbolic System	**Nigerian Cultural Function**
The Fruit	Symbolizes nourishment, agricultural abundance, and life continuity.
The Act of Bearing	Represents embodied responsibility and culturally transmitted labour.
The Female Body	Functions as a site where expectations of care, fertility, and

Matricultural Symbolic System	Nigerian Cultural Function
	provision concentrate.
Symbolic Ambivalence	Highlights the tension between cultural reverence and individual anonymity.

In the end, *Fruit-bearer* moves toward the larger theme of matriculture as a whole. Whereas *Milk Maids* presents women as being vital labourers in an economy of feeding, *Fruit-bearer* demonstrates how the idea of nurturing sustenance is written on the body of woman herself. This poses the crucial question that will be developed through the rest of the series: How do you maintain cultural acknowledgement of the nurturing nature of women while avoiding the reduction of womanhood to the role of nurturer?

Beauty in Diversity



Title: *Beauty in Diversity*
Year: 2013
Medium: Etimpaste on canvas
Dimensions: 2.5’ x 3.5’

The theme of *Beauty in Diversity* transforms the focus of the matricultural analysis from the themes of individual work (*Milk Maids*) and individual expectations (*Fruit-bearer*) into that of collective identity and intercultural community and solidarity. Through combining individuals of different ethnic origins, differentiated by their distinctive costumes and physical appearances, in one single picture, the matricultural cultural system appears as alive, able to embrace differences and relations between its parts.

i. Ethnic Diversity and Co-existence: As opposed to imposing uniformity on the feminine culture, the picture stresses the diversity of the cultures. Ethnic diversity is presented not as a source of divisions, but rather as the basis of mutual recognition and cooperation beyond the family circle.

ii. Relational Identity and Solidarity: Placed in close proximity, the figures generate a rhythm of interdependence that moves beyond individual portraitures to a sense of structural interdependence. Individual identity is understood only in terms of relationships with others, which indicates a matricultural concept of solidarity that is achieved through the acknowledgment of differences.

iii. Recontextualizing the Vessel Theme: Although the repetition of the theme of carrying vessels links the painting to the previous images, its significance transforms into something different. Whereas the vessel in *Milk Maids* represented economic work and in *Fruit-bearer*, it symbolizes body-fertility and anticipation, in *Beauty in Diversity*, it stands for a cultural sign uniting different women.

iv. Embodied Cultural Knowledge and Agency: Clothing, body posture, and carrying techniques are cultural knowledge embodied in the form. The women take an active part in the organization of the pictorial space.

v. Material Interconnectedness (Etimpaste): The dense, layered surface of Etimpaste mirrors the conceptual core of the work. Individual textural marks merge into a unified material field, visually paralleling how distinct individual identities construct a cohesive social structure.

Within the matricultural heuristic, *Beauty in Diversity* reveals four key symbolic relationships:

Matricultural Symbolic System	**Nigerian Cultural Function**
Ethnic Differentiation	Functions as a marker of cultural identity, heritage, and plurality.
Shared Carrying Practice	Connects diverse figures through common embodied labor and sustenance.
Collective	Transforms isolated individuals into a structure of solidarity

Matricultural Symbolic System	Nigerian Cultural Function
Arrangement	and relational agency.
Coexistence of Difference	Proposes a dynamic model of communal continuity capable of social transformation.

The theme of *Beauty in Diversity* is one that represents a crucial turning point in the wider canon. Instead of remaining only a vessel carrying the burdens of labour and/or reproduction, the subject here becomes a player in the inter-cultural web. Though the women still bear vessels, they now do so collectively, transforming the previously isolated/gendered burden into a collaborative endeavour.

The Innovators and the Space Fish



Title: *The Innovators and the Space Fish*
Year: 2014
Medium: Mixed media on canvas (including eco-material composite)
Dimensions: 90 cm x120 cm

The Innovators and the Space Fish represents the point of no return for matriculture in the development of the corpus. Whereas previously in the corpus, the focus has been on labour (*Milk Maids*), body-oriented expectations (*Fruit-bearer*), and unity (*Beauty in*

Diversity), the present painting moves the scope of matriculture into innovation, intellectual labour, technology, teamwork, and the future.

i. Intellectual Collaboration and Agency: Expanding the communal aspect developed in *Beauty in Diversity*, here we see a community of collaborative women knowledge workers. Innovation here is not seen as something that belongs to a solitary (male) genius, but as an interactive and collaborative activity that fits perfectly well within the paradigm of matriculture.

ii. Hybrid Symbolism (Gear-Heads and Tools): Here, we see mechanical gears integrated in the heads of the female characters, thus symbolically merging female intelligence with technological intelligence. It does not mean that the women are being dehumanized – quite the contrary, in fact: the tools they hold prove that they are capable of shaping the physical world around them.

iii. Space Fish and Eco-feminist Synthesis: In *The Innovators and the Space Fish*, traditional ideas of nurturing and sustenance are carried into space from *Milk Maids* and *Fruit-bearer*. A productive tension exists between the mechanical gears and the fish. It implies that technological progress is not necessarily environmentally insensitive but can be present with environmental consciousness.

iv. Expanded Cultural Geography and Futurity: Set within a cosmic framework, the work liberates female identity from domestic or rural confines. By naming the figures 'innovators,' the painting defines women by what they create rather than what they sustain or reproduce, positioning futurity itself as an essential act of cultural agency.

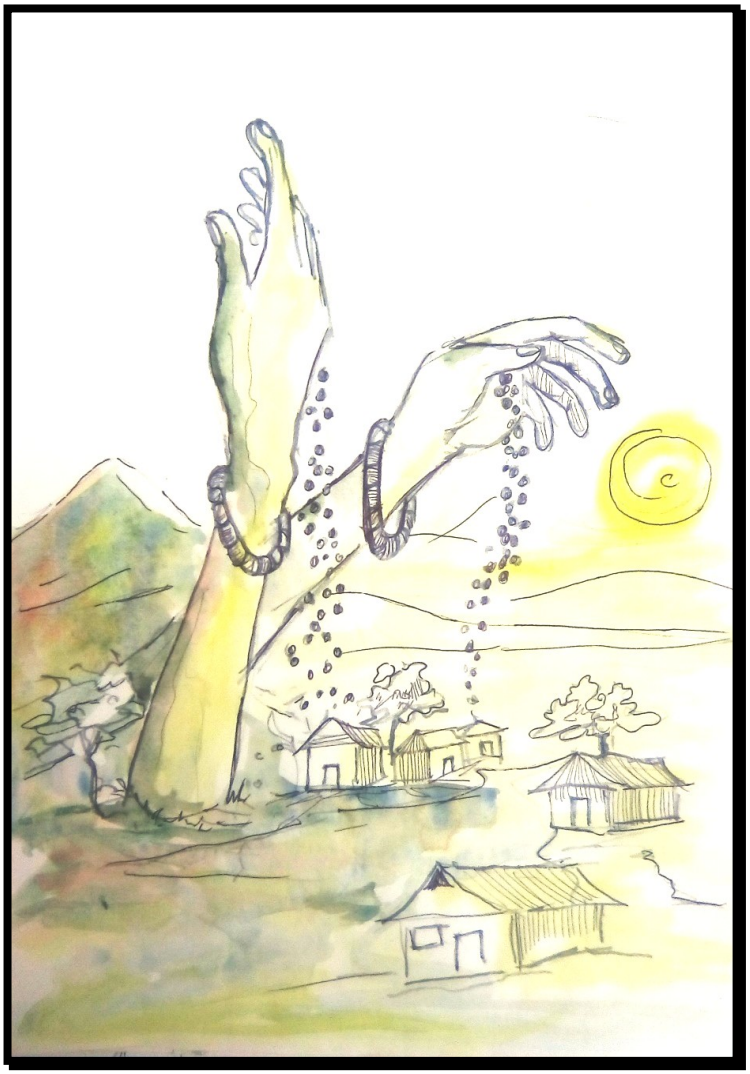
v. Material Innovation (Etimpaste): The experimental medium of Etimpaste directly mirrors the thematic focus on creation, establishing a harmony between represented technological invention and material artistic practice.

Within the matricultural heuristic, *The Innovators and the Space Fish* operates across four interconnected systems:

Matricultural Symbolic System	Nigerian Cultural Function
Mechanical gears integrated into the heads of the female figures	Connects women's intelligence with technological knowledge, challenging assumptions that innovation and technical expertise belong primarily to men.
Tools held by the female figures	Represents practical skill, productive labour, and women's capacity to create, repair, and transform their material environment.
The space fish	Connects the imagery of sustenance and living organisms with technological experimentation, suggesting that innovation can remain attentive to ecological relationships.
Female figures working together within the cosmic setting	Presents women as collaborative knowledge producers whose intellectual and creative agency extends beyond conventional domestic roles towards new social and technological possibilities.

Ultimately, *The Innovators and the Space Fish* transitions the corpus from asking how women sustain existing worlds to asking how they can create new ones. It proves that matricultural values—care, relationality, and ecological responsibility—are not backward-looking, but can serve as the foundation for modern technological and speculative futures, setting up the subsequent focus on ecological stewardship in *Hands That Hold the Earth*.

Hands that Hold the Earth



Title: *Hands that Hold the Earth*
Year: 2026
Medium: Etimpaste on Paper
Dimensions: 12” x 8”

Hands That Hold the Earth brings ecological stewardship directly into the matricultural framework. While earlier works focus on nourishment (*Milk Maids*), body-bound expectations (*Fruit-bearer*), solidarity (*Beauty in Diversity*), and technological agency (*The Innovators and the Space Fish*), this painting turns toward the fundamental planetary conditions necessary for social and cultural survival. Care shifts from an interpersonal or domestic labour into a broad, collective ecological responsibility.

i. Holding as Stewardship: The central motif—human hands cradling the Earth—transforms the planet from a distant object into a vulnerable entity requiring

protection. In contrast to gestures of grasping, exploiting, or extracting, 'holding' implies attentiveness, preservation, and temporary custodianship.

ii. The Scaling of Carrying: There is a scaling up of the act of carrying through the entire corpus: Carrying the milk in containers (*Milk Maids*) and carrying fruit (*Fruit-bearer)* to the extent of physically carrying the planet itself. The scale of matricultural nurturing goes from localized sustenance to planetary survival.

iii. The Avoidance of Gender Essentialism: It is emphasized that the painting does not imply any biological connection between women and nature but makes use of cultural stereotypes related to nurturing in order to formulate the universal moral ethos. Drawing from the tradition of ecofeminism, the painting uses the relational approach to replace hierarchical relations between humans and nature.

iv. The Collective Responsibility: The use of the word 'hands' in the title of the painting suggests a collective human responsibility as opposed to individual and gender-based obligations. Thus, the concept of a chain is clear:

Care → Stewardship → Continuity → Intergenerational Responsibility

v. Fluidity through Diluted Etimpaste: In contrast to the highly textural appearance of previous paintings, the current painting makes use of Etimpaste that was diluted with water. The translucent quality of the painting medium gives rise to visual connections with water and fluidity.

Within the matricultural heuristic, *Hands That Hold the Earth* operates across four core dimensions:

Matricultural Symbolic System	**Nigerian Cultural Function**
Hands holding the Earth	Represents care, protection, and responsibility for sustaining the conditions that support human and communal life.
The relationship between the hands and the globe	Connects human responsibility with the natural environment, extending care beyond the household to ecological stewardship.

Matricultural Symbolic System	**Nigerian Cultural Function**
The merging or blurred boundaries between the hands and the Earth	Suggests the interdependence of humanity and nature, challenging the idea that the environment exists separately from human life.
The translucent, flowing application of Etimpaste	Visually reinforces connectedness and permeability, supporting an interpretation of ecological care as an ongoing relationship rather than a one-time act.

The painting represents an important point in the thematic development of the corpus: Women sustain humanity; Women are symbols of continuity; Women create solidarity; Women create innovations; Humanity should maintain the earth. Through transforming the metaphorical role of women as sustainers of human worlds to that of humanity as sustainers of a common world, *Hands That Hold the Earth* establishes the theoretical framework for the painting *Bearer of Worlds*.

Bearer of Worlds



Title: *Bearer of Worlds*
Year: 2026
Medium: Etimpaste on paper
Dimensions: 12” x 8”

Bearer of Worlds extends the idea of matriculture by turning the notion of ‘bearing’ into an abstract reflection on the responsibility for carrying things socially, culturally, emotionally, and relationally. Where other art works tackle visible labour (*Milk Maids*), physically bound obligations (*Fruit-bearer*), unity (*Beauty in Diversity*), innovation (*The Innovators and the Space Fish*), and ecology (*Hands That Hold the Earth*), *Bearer of Worlds* makes visible what remains unseen, what is not counted in the infrastructure of community existence.

i. ‘Worlds’ as an Extended Responsibility: The ‘worlds’ which are carried refer to non-physical environments such as families, cultural memories, relationships, traditions, and ways of knowing. Here the female body acts as the structure upon which these various scales of continuity rest and moves care from biological maternity into cultural creation.

ii. The Balance Between Honor and Responsibility: Acknowledging women as the bearers of worlds recognizes their fundamental social contributions; however, it also points to a narrow cultural responsibility that women have by nature to carry the emotional and social load.

iii. Conceptual Condensation of the Corpus: The work gathers all preceding thematic scales into a single metaphor—incorporating nourishment (*Milk Maids/Fruit-bearer*), culture (*Beauty in Diversity*), knowledge (*The Innovators and the Space Fish*), and ecology (*Hands That Hold the Earth*).

iv. Translucency of Diluted Etimpaste: Executed in a diluted, watercolour-like Etimpaste formulation, the painting’s translucent surface visually mirrors its central concept. Unlike the heavy texture that represents physical work in earlier paintings, this lighter material quality emphasizes intangible, hard-to-see responsibilities like emotional labour, memory, and relational care.

v. Temporal Agency and Continuity: Positioned between inheritance and futurity, the bearer carries past practices into the present while deciding what to transmit forward. This temporal bridging frames cultural continuity as an active process of both preservation and transformation.

Bearer of Worlds identifies four interconnected symbolic systems within the matricultural heuristic:

Matricultural Symbolic System	**Nigerian Cultural Function**
The Female Bearer	Frames the female figure as a structural foundation while questioning the weight of expected burdens.
The Vessels Balanced on Her Head	Makes visible emotional, cultural, and relational labour beyond formal economic production.

Matricultural Symbolic System	**Nigerian Cultural Function**
The Children on Her Back	The bearer and the 'worlds' signify continuity, relationality, and intergenerational transmission.
The Agricultural Instrument and Book in Her Hands	Positions the subject as an active agent who interprets, adapts, and reconfigures inherited worlds.

Consequently, *Bearer of Worlds* becomes the culmination of the thematic integration in the series:

Milk Maids (Labour) : *Fruit-bearer* (Embodiment) : *Beauty in Diversity* (Plurality): *The Innovators and the Space Fish* (Knowledge) : *Hands That Hold the Earth* (Ecology) : *Bearer of Worlds* (Relational Responsibility)

This turns the endurance of women into an active cultural role, one that shows that people bearing the inherited world have absolute authority over determining which aspects should remain, change, or be carried to the next generation.

Threads of Memory



Title: *Threads of Memory*
Year: 2026
Medium: Etimpaste on Paper
Dimensions: 12” x 8”

Threads of Memory serves as a pivotal conceptual development in the series, expanding the idea of matriculture from being a physical burden of carrying cultural worlds to the process of remembering, transmitting, reconstructing, and transporting them into the future. Not perceiving memory as a static and passive representation of the past, but rather as an ongoing practice of applying inherited knowledge in life.

i. Thread as a Metaphor for Cultural Transmission: In the dominant metaphor of the work, thread stands for connection, continuity, weaving, and transmission. The concept of a thread is derived from the property of connecting points; when interwoven with other threads, it makes a strong fabric. In terms of matriculture, this metaphor demonstrates the interconnection between individual, family, daily, and common memories throughout time.

ii. Embodied Knowledge: Cultural transmission does not usually depend only on formal institutions or writing. Rather, it is something that exists in everyday embodied practice – craft-making, household work, storytelling, food ways, ritual practices, and artistic performances. The thread shows the process of transmission of practical knowledge or 'ways of doing' across generations.

iii. Invisible Work of Continuity: Memory and transmission of culture involve hard work and constant attention to detail. Through this work, the process reveals the invisible work done for continuity of communal identity.

iv. Agency in Reinterpretation: The women are shown not as passive preservers of an immutable past, but as active agents in transmitting culture to the future. Since memory always involves a process of choosing and interpretation, they exercise agency in determining how the inherited knowledge finds its way into the present and adapts to changed conditions.

v. Materiality and Formal Analogy: The form and execution of *Threads of Memory* are directly reflective of its concept. Unlike the thick and heavy application of Etimpaste that we see in *Milk Maids*, where the material reflects weight and physical labour, this work uses a diluted version of the same paste, making it more fluid and translucent.

   This is directly analogous to the nature of memories. They do not stay fixed but tend to overlap and shift over time. Past experiences influence present actions, and present conditions change the significance of past events. The translucent and overlapping layers of the material allow visual elements to overlap without clear boundaries, indicating that culture is an interlinked field of experience rather than distinct compartments.

vi. Ambivalence and Temporal Belonging: *Threads of Memory* further develops the theme of productive ambiguity introduced in *Fruit-bearer* and *Bearer of Worlds*. In making women into the keepers of culture's memory, the important role played by women in the social context is emphasized, but at the same time there is a possibility of imposing societal duties on women. The text does not reduce this complex duality of recognition and duty to a binary opposition. Rather, *Threads of Memory* changes the concept of belonging. Belonging to a culture means being a part of a relational chain which connects us to our past, to our history, and our future generations. Yet, this chain is neither linear nor continuous, and threads can be connected, untangled, and knotted again.

vii. Structural Sequence and Conceptual Progression: In the larger context of the study, *Threads of Memory* serves to form a critical transitional element:

Milk Maids (Labour) : *Fruit-bearer* (Embodiment) : *Beauty in Diversity* (Plurality) : *The Innovators and the Space Fish* (Knowledge) : *Hands That Hold the Earth* (Ecology) : *Bearer of Worlds* (Relational Responsibility) : *Threads of Memory* (Active Memory & Transmission)

Within the matricultural heuristic, *Threads of Memory* operates across four core dimensions:

Matricultural Symbolic System	**Nigerian Cultural Function**
Thread or thread-like lines	Symbolises connection and the transmission of knowledge, memories, and cultural practices across generations.
Interwoven or overlapping thread forms	Represents the relationships among individual, family, and communal memories that contribute to cultural continuity.
Female figures associated with the threads	Positions women as participants in the preservation, interpretation, and transmission of cultural knowledge rather than merely passive carriers of tradition.
Translucent and overlapping layers of Etimpaste	Suggests that memory is fluid and open to reinterpretation, allowing inherited meanings to be adapted to changing circumstances.

The above progression shows how the concept of matriculture works on increasingly large scales, from the body to the planet itself, and then to the temporal scale of memory. *Threads of Memory* links the idea of carrying the structures that already exist (*Bearer of Worlds*) to the idea of rewriting those structures (*Rewriting the Frame*). In the end, the painting makes clear that cultural memory is both an inheritance and a responsibility—to remember what is given to you, but also to decide what to pass down.

Rewriting the Frame



Title: *Rewriting the Frame*
Year: 2026
Medium: Etimpaste on paper
Dimensions: 12” x 8”

Rewriting the Frame represents the intellectual apex of the whole collection. Where previous works have analysed issues related to labour, embodiment, community, innovation, ecology, responsibility, and memory, *Rewriting the Frame* focuses on the system of representation itself. Instead of asking what women do inside cultural boundaries, it asks how women are positioned, valued, and represented within the visual frames that define those boundaries.

i. The Frame: Cultural Boundaries. The primary symbol of the painting, the frame itself, is the metaphor of cultural limits passed down through generations. In a literal sense, the frame is a definition of what is included and what is excluded; figuratively, the frame determines which roles are culturally legitimate and which kinds of work are unrecognized. To ‘rewrite’ the frame means to intervene actively

and assert that cultural conventions are historical and negotiable. This shifts the framework established in *Threads of Memory*.

ii. Memory preserves, Interpretation negotiates, Rewriting transforms. Continuity does not demand static repetition; instead, a cultural system maintains true vitality through its capacity to adapt, allowing women to act not merely as custodians of inherited tradition, but as active authors of its future.

iii. Redefining Agency, Anonymity, and Visibility: The motif of the reduction or the masking of the faces of women is an important one in the overall body of work. Although anonymity enables a subject to take on the archetypal quality of being universally representative, it also runs the risk of erasing individuality from a particular role-playing subject. *Rewriting the Frame* highlights this problematic in order to make an essential move forward:

Woman as Cultural Symbol : Woman as Cultural Subject : Woman as Cultural Author

Rewriting the Frame does not merely celebrate the contributions made by women through their labour; rather, it poses an important question: who has the power to dictate what constituents of women's labour are deserving of recognition?

iv. Material Permeability through Fluid Etimpaste: The process of execution is carried out using a dilute form of Etimpaste to give an effect similar to watercolors that have a translucent, fluid, and permeable quality. The selection of this medium is a direct reflection of the theme of transformation:

Impasto (*Milk Maids / Fruit-bearer*): Physical weight, effort, and accumulation
to
Translucency (*Bearer of Worlds / Threads of Memory / Rewriting the Frame*): Overlapping memories, permeability, and fluid boundaries.

The fluid nature of the dilute Etimpaste denies any form of boundary, thus visually proving the idea that culture and representation may be transformed.

Within the matricultural heuristic, *Threads of Memory* operates across four core dimensions:

Matricultural Symbolic System	Nigerian Cultural Function
The frame or framing structure	Represents inherited cultural boundaries that influence which identities, roles, and activities receive recognition.
The female figure in relation to the frame	Draws attention to how women are positioned within cultural systems of representation and how their identities may be shaped by those systems.
The visual relationship between the figure and the frame	Suggests the possibility of questioning or negotiating established expectations about women's social roles and cultural identities.
The act or visual suggestion of rewriting the frame	Represents women's agency in reinterpreting inherited cultural meanings and participating in the creation of alternative representations for the future.

The shift marked by *Rewriting the Frame* transforms female agency from participation within existing systems to direct intervention in those systems.

Discussion

Comparing Matricultural Patterns Across the Paintings

The early works (*Milk Maids*, *Fruit-bearer*) portray women actively involved in and maintaining cultural systems. *Rewriting the Frame*, however, extends the conversation by portraying women actively questioning and transforming the cultural systems.

Earlier Works	*Rewriting the Frame*
Women participate in cultural systems	Women question cultural systems
Women sustain inherited traditions	Women reconsider inherited traditions
Women carry cultural meanings	Women reinterpret cultural meanings
Women are represented	Women help shape how they are represented

Earlier Works	*Rewriting the Frame*
Cultural continuity is emphasized	Cultural change and transformation are emphasized

The difference demonstrates a movement from preserving and sustaining culture to questioning and transforming culture.

Overall Thematic Developments of the Paintings as a Series

When the paintings are considered together, they form a connected progression rather than a collection of separate ideas. Each work focuses on a different aspect of women's cultural experience:

i. *Milk Maids* — Labour and visibility
ii. *Fruit-bearer* — The female body and provision
iii. *Beauty in Diversity* — Cultural difference and solidarity
iv. *The Innovators and the Space Fish* — Knowledge and innovation
v. *Hands That Hold the Earth* — Ecological care
vi. *Bearer of Worlds* — Responsibility and care
vii. *Threads of Memory* — Memory and cultural transmission
viii. *Rewriting the Frame* — Agency and authorship

The process can thus be seen as one moving from labour and care to agency and transformation of culture. *Rewriting the Frame* links the series through the central question it poses: Who has the authority to define women and their role in culture? The piece shows that women must not only be part of culture but also part of its definition.

From Bearing to Becoming

One common theme found in *Milk Maids*, *Fruit-bearer*, and *Bearer of Worlds* is that of women as carriers and nurturers. In *Milk Maids*, women carry objects which serve both to nourish and earn a living. In *Fruit-bearer*, the female figure serves as the source of nurture, fertility, and nourishment. And in *Bearer of Worlds*, carrying extends to the social and cultural obligations that keep societies thriving. Not only do these three models of reality demonstrate that carrying is more than just physically transporting something, it also means having responsibility, nurturing, and maintaining life and culture.

However, it is important to note the conflict created by the paintings: women often receive cultural recognition for their roles as caregivers and, as a result, the weight of their

individual identities and desires might be ignored. The paintings capture both sides of the story.

From Individual Labour to Collective Strength

The paintings also depict a transition from individual labour to collective cooperation. That is, *Milk Maids* shows women's physical labour and their involvement in the mundane economy. *Beauty in Diversity* expands from individual representation of women to the representation of women from various cultures, working and moving collectively. The painting implies that cultural diversity does not automatically lead to division. Rather, women can retain their own identity and work together. This concept is expanded in *The Innovators and the Space Fish*. There, women are depicted collectively as collaborators, inventors, and creators of knowledge.

Thus, the process can be simply described as:

Individual labour → Collective power → Cooperative innovation.

This demonstrates that matricultural agency is not just about nurturing existing community, but also involves working together to make new opportunities.

The Female Body: Symbol and Individual

The female body is a significant element in several artworks, specifically *Fruit-bearer* and *Bearer of Worlds*. In the artwork *Fruit-bearer*, the body is used to signify nourishment and fertility, while in *Bearer of Worlds*, the body conveys the role of women in carrying the burden of social and cultural life.

However, the manner in which the faces of the women have been represented in some of the artworks poses a significant question. That is, the lack of representation of individual women's facial features in the artworks makes the figure represent the larger category of women. At the same time, though, it makes the individual woman invisible. Thus, through the comparison, we find a significant contradiction: A woman may be visible as a cultural symbol but not as an individual.

It is this contradiction that helps us understand the significance of *Rewriting the Frame*. The artwork takes the discussion from the level of representations of women to their agency.

From Caring for People to Caring for the Earth

The concept of care is also explored through the paintings. *Milk Maids* explores the concept of women caring for people by feeding them. *Beauty in Diversity* explores the concept of women caring for society as a whole. *Hands That Hold the Earth* broadens the definition of care from a human-oriented approach to include care of the environment. The progression is, thus:

Caring for people → caring for communities → caring for the environment

Hands That Hold the Earth is crucial in this sequence because it brings together the concept of care and responsibility in the context of matriculture and care of the environment. The environment, in this case, is not just a source of resource but something that needs to be protected**.** This supports and enhances the ecological angle of the study.

Bearing, Remembering, and Rewriting

In the later works, there is another significant evolution involving *Bearer of Worlds*, *Threads of Memory*, and *Rewriting the Frame*. *Bearer of Worlds* centres the individual bearing responsibility and *Threads of Memory* deals with remembering and passing cultural knowledge from one generation to another. *Rewriting the Frame*, though, asserts that inherited knowledge is not static and can be changed with every generation. This evolution can be formulated in the following way:

Bearing → remembering → rewriting

The meaning of this for personal and communal growth is significant, as it means that cultural continuity does not imply preserving everything as it is. Instead, cultural knowledge can be both preserved and rethought according to changing conditions. Thus, matriculture implies continuity and change at the same time.

Cultural Difference and Unity

In *Beauty in Diversity*, the artist reveals another important aspect – the differences between women of various ethnicities. The painting does not imply that these differences disappear; the women are different, yet united. Thus, the painting indicates that matriculture can embrace diversity and difference. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing that women's cultural experiences should not be considered as singular or unified. Culture, ethnicity, history, environment, and social factors may play a role in any individual woman's cultural experience.

Etimpaste and the Development of the Visual Language

The application of Etimpaste in the paintings also shifts and contributes to the ideas in the artworks. In the earlier paintings, the thick application of Etimpaste results in a rough texture that is appropriate for themes such as labour, the body, weight, and physicality. In the later paintings, Etimpaste was made more fluid to create a softer and transparent effect like watercolour. Such techniques contribute to themes such as memory, ecology, relationship, and transformation. The progression in the materials used therefore can be described as:

Rough and thick → weight, labour, and physicality
to
Soft and transparent → memory, relationship, and transformation

Thus, the materials are not separate from the ideas in the paintings. The materials contribute to the ideas expressed in the artworks.

From Representation to Transformation

Overall, taking into account the whole sequence of paintings as a whole, we can see a process of development in the depiction of the female protagonist.

This process can be represented as follows:

Visibility → Recognition → Agency → Reinterpretation → Transformation

i. *Milk Maids* demonstrates the visibility of work done by women.
ii. *Fruit-bearer* draws attention to the cultural connotations of the female body.
iii. *Beauty in Diversity* shows solidarity among women despite their cultural differences.
iv. *The Innovators and the Space Fish* portrays women as creators and innovators of knowledge.
v. *Hands That Hold the Earth* depicts women as agents of environmental responsibility.
vi. *Bearer of Worlds* portrays the social and cultural responsibility of women.
vii. *Threads of Memory* discusses the function of women in transferring culture.
viii. Finally, *Rewriting the Frame* is moving towards representation, authorship, and transformation.

Therefore, it could be said that the main thematic development in the series lies in the transformation of the artist's representations of the roles of women.

Main Findings from the Comparative Analysis

This analysis of the works of art illustrates four important features of matriculture embodied by the works:

1. Matriculture is relational
   The significance of women is illustrated by their material and symbolic relationships to family, community, other women, cultural history, and the natural world, among other things.

2. Matriculture is productive
   Women are not mere recipients of the culture. Women are shown to produce and sustain knowledge, memories, cohesion, creativity, food, and ecological balance.

3. Matriculture is both empowering and constraining
   The paintings acknowledge the significance of women's nurturing and sustaining role in life, yet they also reveal that this role imposes important demands on women.

4. Matriculture is capable of change
   The paintings illustrate that cultural continuity does not mean staticity. Cultural meanings can be remembered, rethought, and reinvented.

Final Comparative Statement

Together, the paintings reveal that matriculture is not just the process of maintaining the traditional roles of women within the culture. The transition from *Milk Maids* to *Rewriting the Frame* is thus not only a series of paintings but an evolution in how the matricultural subject is understood. She is both the woman who holds the world in her hands and also the woman who has the power to rethink and recreate it.

This kind of analysis emphasizes the main thesis of the research in which visual art has the capacity to act as a practical means of identifying and encoding matriculture. It is through the process of painting that cultural values and meanings become evident and hence are available for analysis, questioning, and even redefining. Therefore, the artist's studio is not merely a site where culture finds representation, it is also a site of cultural inquiry.

Conclusions

In this study, we aimed to investigate the potential of studio-based visual practice as a vehicle of consciousness raising and transformative activity. Throughout this analysis of matricultural imagery and material experiment, it has become evident that artistic activity is not simply representational, but that it is inherently an act of intervention.

Through the examination of *Milk Maids*, *Fruit-bearer*, *Threads of Memory*, *Bearer of Worlds*, *Hands That Hold the Earth*, and *Rewriting the Frame*, the female body becomes revealed as economic infrastructure, cultural symbolism, archival mnemonics, and an ecologically vital agent. Together, the artworks question the essential role of female labour, embodiment, and caregiving economies, which - while central to cultural existence - are often over looked in Nigeria.

With thick impasto Etimpaste in the earlier paintings, weight and labour are emphasized; their dense material quality embodies the accumulation of historical survival economics. In contrast, the later paintings featuring a thin and diluted Etimpaste incorporate notions of fluidity, permeability, and the rewriting of epistemologies. This particular dialectic is key to the arguments presented in the paper. In creating a dynamic tension between dense and translucent Etimpastes, the studio becomes a think tank for social theory. Sustainability, instead of being approached from an external perspective, becomes a process inherent in the work because the medium itself acts in opposition to extractive modes of art making, further anchoring the ethics of the images themselves.

The works confront hierarchy in visual culture by placing domestic, agricultural, and reproductive work – usually at the margins of art making - back into centre stage. In the end, however, the matricultural transition from the studio into society is no mere metaphor, but an actual process that comes about through material, compositional, and symbolic decision-making. Visual art, according to the theory presented above, is an area where existing cultural discourses are interrogated, reinterpreted, and turned into something that is more conducive towards sustainability. This study has proven beyond doubt that studio practice can produce not only aesthetically new forms but also epistemologically new ideas through its engagement with the culture at large.

Biography

Etim Ekpenyong Mfon is a visual artist and researcher whose practice explores culture, sustainability, and social consciousness through painting and alternative materials. He is

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