

MIXED MEDIA TECHNIQUE IN GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATION

Felix Onaiwu Osaigbovo
Department of Fine and Applied Arts,
University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.
osaigbovo.osaigbovo@gmail.com
Collins Ogieva Izogie
Department of Fine and Applied Arts,
Federal College of Education (Technical)
Asaba, Delta State.

Abstract

Illustration has existed since prehistoric times, either as an independent expression or ancillary to the creation of other art forms. During the Stone Age in Africa, Asia, and Europe, realistic animal drawings with religious connotations were incised in bone and painted on rock surfaces and cave interiors in Altamira cave in Spain, Lascaux in France and Sulawesi cave in Indonesia. Illustration, over the years has passed through several modifications ranging from printmaking, paintings, textile designs and graphic pen and ink illustration and these modifications have to do with various artists deviating from the usual and bringing into focus extraneous additives into their works. This paper ex-rays mixed media from history and how it has been applied by various artists in graphic illustration up to contemporary times.

Key Words: Illustration, Mixed Media, Technique, Assemblage, Photograph

Introduction

Art generally is the expression or creation of things in visual form. The branches of art include painting, textiles, ceramics, sculpture, graphics and metal design. Over time, artists in these various areas have evolved styles and techniques in the execution of forms. In sculpture for instance, sculptors execute their works with different media and techniques such as realistic, abstract and relief. Realistic sculpture involves casting, moulding or carving forms and figures that have life semblance to the subject under reference, while abstract sculpture uses visual language of shape and form to create a composition which may exist with a degree of independence from visual references in the world. In most cases, abstract artists in whatever areas are expressionistic in ideas and execution as they freely exercise their freedom to create images that are out of the usual. Ceramists use clay and its allied materials to create and fabricate different works of ceramics. Painters are busy with forms of paints like acrylic, oil or water colour to create interesting scenes and portraits using techniques such as impasto and flat. This applies to other areas of art; interestingly almost all aspect of art has their peculiar mixed media styles. Mixed media technique in painting happens to be at the forefront in the practice as exemplified in the works of old masters like Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) the cubist and Georges Braque (1882-1963). The technique has become widespread as artists developed increasingly open attitudes to the media of art. Essentially art can be made of anything or any combination of things as most artists combine found objects to works of "plastocast" in printmaking and this in turn gives the work a new look and feel.

Mixed media art refers to a visual arts form that combines a variety of media in a single artwork. For example, if an artist draws with pen and ink, paints over it with acrylic or water colour, and then add some highlights in marker pens then stick some coloured fabric pieces onto it, that is a typical mixed media art. Mixed media art is art laden with exceptional creativity in the sense that it brings to focus those elements that are not the usual in the presentation of works of art.

The art world is diverse and complex. From the beginning of time, human beings have felt the need to express themselves, their beliefs, and the world around them through artistic endeavours as diverse as the artists themselves. In the twenty-first century, these different techniques have been discovered and studied. This allows modern artists, whether professionals or hobbyists, the ability to choose the medium that is right for their purposes. However, for many people, choosing just one approach to art it is restricting. Therefore, mixed media art comes in handy as it allows the artist some diversity in the expression of his freedom of execution.

The Concept of Mixed Media:

Egonwa (2011) describes media in as materials used for the creation of works of art. He further says they range from graphite pencils, through crayons, pastels, water colour, gouache, paper, clay, plasticine, oil paint, enamel paint, cloth, polyester, iron, bronze, wood and cement. The 20th century has witnessed the production of artworks with all manner of materials which has hitherto never been contemplated in the past. This innovation arose as a result of the fact that artists sought for new ways of expressing themselves in order to stand out in their various areas of practice.

Various authorities have defined the concept "Mixed Media" differently and at different times. The Microsoft Encarta (2009) defines mixed media as the art of using different artistic media in such techniques as painting, photography, and collage, in a single composition or work of art. Wikipedia (2015) sees it as "artwork in the making of which more than one medium has been employed", while Collins Dictionary (2013), defines mixed media "as the integrated use of different forms of media especially within the arts". Generally, media refers to the materials used in the execution of any work of art so when the medium exceeds one it becomes mixed media. It is a technique involving the use of two or more artistic media such as ink and pastel or painting and collage that are combined in a single composition. These definitions tilt towards the something, the application of two or more media in a single piece of artwork. Originally, mixed media technique was not very much in practice in the area of graphics. Graphic design practices were done manually before the digital revolution. The advent of computer changed design into digital practice but research and wider knowledge gave birth to the idea of mixed media.

Mixed media art developed in the twentieth century as postmodern artists began to bend the rules of traditional arts such as painting and sculpture. However, mixed media art can be found throughout time as long the artwork has more than one type of material or medium. It is classified as mixed media art. Roland (2011), postulates that, mixed media art is popular among both professional artists as well as hobbyists who enjoy "crafting" projects such as collage and card making. Many people may also know mixed media art as assemblage art, a term which refers to both professional and hobby activities relating to the mixed media concept. Many popular pieces completed using mixed media art are collages, altered objects and books, 2D and 3D assemblage, greeting cards, journal and bookmaking.

The use of the term "mixed media" came into existence around 1912 when artists such as Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Georges Braque (1882-1963) began using collage and assemblage in their works. They were not however, the first mixed media artists on the scene. In the Byzantine Empire (330 to 1450 AD), artists often use gold leaf on their paintings, frescoes and mosaics (Gosh, 1999).

The history of mixed media is as intriguing as any other aspect of art. Mixed media covers a wide spectrum of art. Although initial mixed media art was collage and adding materials to two dimensional paintings, it has grown to include art made entirely of recycled materials, broad use of everyday materials and installation art, as noticed by Marshall, (2010). By this exposition mixed media really began to come into its own during the early 20th Century. Prior to this time artist who preferred canvas and paint began to explore adding different materials to their paintings. These early forays into mixed media include the early piece *Seated Harlequin* (1901) (Fig. 1) which was simply oil on canvas mounted on cork board.

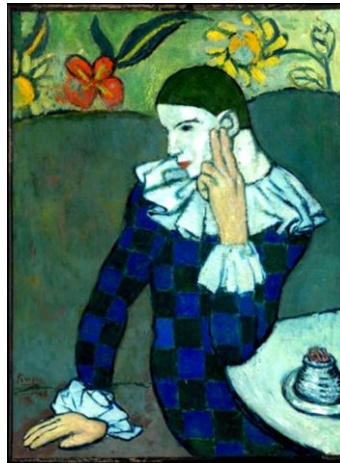


Fig. 1, Pablo Picasso, Seated Harlequin, Mixed Media, 1901

By 1912 Picasso was creating works such as *Man with Hat and a Violin*. In that piece he utilized newspaper collage and charcoal and joined pieces of paper.

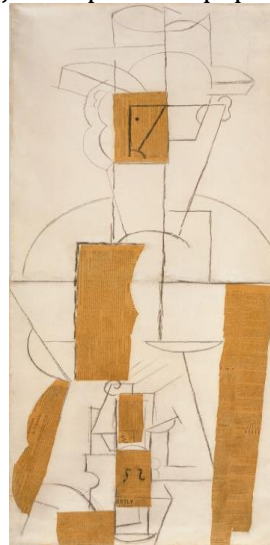


Fig. 2, Pablo Picasso, Man with hat and a violin, Mixed Media, 1912

Woman in White (fig. 3) was another early exploration with mixed media. It was a mixture of crayon, water colour and oil on canvas. This mixture created an interesting effect that was almost charcoal like in appearance.



Fig. 3, Pablo Picasso, Woman in White, Mixed Media, 1923

Picasso is, in fact, credited, at least in part, with the invention of collage. Mixed media didn't really start to come into its own until the mid-20th Century. The movement away from canvas based art was due in part to the American government supporting public art as part of the Works Project Administration during the Great Depression. (Stephen and Ballance, 2001) and a new generation of artists coming into their own all contributed to the rise. Movement away

from the canvas and its inherent limitations and many artists began using found objects to create sculptures and other three dimensional pieces, as well as installation art which can include technological elements, and is generally more permanent in nature. Even those who stuck to canvas often began exploring by using multiple media on the same canvas.

One such mid-century artist is Jasper Johns (b.1930) born in Augusta, Georgia. He briefly attended the University of South Carolina and Parsons School of Design before serving in the Army during the Korean War. Upon returning to the United States, Johns met Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008) another prominent mid-century artist and the two quickly struck up a relationship. They remained together until Rauschenberg's death. Professionally, Johns is most famous for his work with flags, as noted by Herbert (2000), which are often depicted prominently in his work. In fact, one of his most famous works is called "Flag" (Fig. 4). Johns' prints in particular are famous for their revolutionary content of everyday objects. As such, in addition to being one of the first true mixed media artists, Johns also helped drive forward pop art, minimalism and conceptual art. Johns relied on the viewer to interpret his art which allows for multiple interpretations and adds a layer of mystery to the true meaning of his art. He is probably one of the most influential living artists, not only within his genre, but within art as a whole.



Fig. 4, Jasper Johns, Flag, Mixed Media (Encaustic Oil and Collage on Fabric Mounted on plywood). 1954-55

Rhea Carmi (b. 1942) is another artist whose work has featured prominently through the mid-20th Century. Born in Jerusalem, she is still active at 76 years old. She is known for her stunning, lively work that often has bright colors and utilizes basic shapes in new ways. Most of her work are in mixed media and have included materials like old art supplies, nylons, natural materials such as seeds and leaves, tar, and various forms of cloth. Edwards (1990) noted that she was doing a mix of collage and paint on canvas. She explained that her works have featured prominently around the world. Some of her more interesting works include 'Barren Earth', made from tar, burlap, dirt, twine and paint on nine panels and her 'Enchanted Forest' series, which is evocative of various forests in different states of decay and in different seasons and Humanity's Struggles (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5, Rhea Carmi, Humanity's Struggles, Mixed Media, 1923

It is instructive to note that virtually all aspects of art are mixed media compliant for instance, in Sculpture; the mask titled "Egwali" (Fig. 6) by Franklyn Egwali (b.1963) was executed in Fibre

glass and raffia. Egwali, is an impressionistic sculptor specializes in sculpting stylized masks he calls "Entities". According to him, Entities are primordial elements that lived in the world before now but were transmogrified into "Entities"; his execution of these entities mostly female forms reminds one of the original Ife sculptors; in casting his works he adds other materials like medallions, pieces of metals, fabrics and raffia which are different from the original medium thereby achieving a mixed media effect as could be seen from figure 6 titled *Oghoye*. According to Egwali, Oghoye was one of the wives of a prominent chief in Benin but was conspired against by the rest women who plotted her execution. Oghoye was later transmogrified into a horrible spirit being that began to haunt and torment the whole household. Most of the "Entities" executed by Egwali are tales from history.



Fig. 6, Egwali, Oghoye, Mixed Media (Fibre glass and Raffia) 2005

Modern Mixed Media Art:

Modern mixed media art has seen a different sort of revolution in this millennium. In the past twenty years, installation art, usually sculptures in a public place or other long term showings of art have become more and more popular. This is due in part to an increase in commissions. Digital and narrative art has also become key components of mixed media as artists have come up with new ways to infuse technology, both within more traditional pieces and as a medium on its own. Mixed media is only going to continue growing and evolving in new ways. The past century has been pivotal in mixed media emerging as a staying force in the art world. Even as once revolutionary ideas like collage become more commonplace, there are many more artists waiting in the wings to take mixed media to a whole new level.

Today, mixed media continues to grow in popularity. Artists are using found objects, fabrics, graphite, fibers, beads, photographs and multiple paint forms in single works. Some contemporary artists, according to Philip (2010) known for their work in mixed media are John Baldissari (b.1931), Lawrence Weiner (b.1942) and Rosemarie Trockel (b.1952). These artists are masters in their own rights. Not only does mixed media incorporate a variety of media, but the art is as different as the artist. It is not just the famous or professional artists that are working with mixed media though; budding artists like students are already seeing the versatility of using more than one medium on a particular piece of artwork. In the context of pen and ink illustration, mixed media technique refers to the enhancement of a work of pen and ink with other media like pastel, gouache, water colour, charcoal and others to add colour to an ordinary black and white illustration so as to give it a pleasing effect. Ibe Ananaba (b. 1967) was originally a painter but has recently branched off into pure pen and ink renditions. He has gone a step further by introducing some solid materials into his pen and ink works; example is his work titled "The Professor" where he used tissue paper to represent the signature white hair and beard of Professor Wole Soyinka.



Fig. 7, Ibe Ananaba, The Professor, Mixed Media (Pen/Ink and Tissue Paper). 2015

Mixed Media Technique in Graphic Illustration:

Traditionally, an artwork of pen and ink comes in black and white but the introduction of mixed media technique allows the work in colour. Mixed media have become very popular amongst artists of various persuasions as it allows freedom of exploration and originality of ideas. It will not be a misnomer to posit at this point that the graphic artists that have particular interest in mixed media rendition are akin to the expressionist painters of old; the artist is not concerned with reality as it appears but with its inner nature and with the emotions aroused by the subject. To achieve these ends, the subject is frequently caricatured, exaggerated, distorted, or otherwise altered in order to stress the emotional experience in its most intense and concentrated form. Mixed media technique in graphic illustration is about using a combination of materials like acrylic, pen and ink with chalk or oil pastel highlights. Graphics generally apart from printmaking is about advertising. Over the years, before the advent of the computer, graphic artists did manual illustrations but the digital technology brought in its wake satellite technology and postscript designs with photos and clip art. Over time this weakened the dexterity and originality of graphic artists. Mixed media technique has revived the originality of the artist's self-expression without recourse to downloaded finished works from the internet. Graphics had thrived well in early times with the use of traditional methods and materials. The original concept of using paint and brush media could yield graphic results which only details that poster colour could resolve or capture.

Though graphic artists practicing solely with the traditional media are content with the degree of precision, sharpness and clarity that they can attain, contemporary techniques are producing designs and special effects that pose challenges to this contentment. Can the traditional concept of designing with paint offer the graphic solutions that this globalized age needs? Apart from designing, many aspects of graphics like colour separation, lithography and printing are now ICT driven. Poster colour-based work will not only be time consuming but also requires processes with additional cost implications. It is not certain whether employers will be anxious to employ a graphic artist whose scope is limited in terms of media knowledge and application. ICT empowerment through computer software admits even non-college trained practitioners into many aspects of graphic designing. This school of thought is also satisfied with the kind of visuals and the mini degree of originality that the computer programmers can generate and have restricted themselves to it. This concept also cannot provide solutions to some peculiar artistic effects that are still in demand today. Clients more often than not request for hand drawn or painted illustrations for peculiarity and as a matter of interest and choice.

In line with the above analogy therefore, a mixed-media approach will no doubt draw advantages from both schools of thought earlier mentioned. This is when the graphic artist can produce designs that will match both local and international standards. Only the training centers can provide the basic orientation and background needed for the propagation of this practice which will by natural sequence be developed further in the industries.

Computer interpolated mixed media technique is also a part of what the writer explained above. In achieving this all the areas to be done on computer like the font types, sizes and colour background demarcations are mapped out and the areas for the hand drawn illustrations are left blank. As the design comes out of the printer, the artist does the illustration first in pencil,

then in pen and ink, followed by any other suitable medium/media. A good example is fig. 8 below. The design is a poster for a festival featuring many aspects of our cultural activities. The illustration is the point of emphasis here. All the areas to be done with the use of the computer were designed and printed. The blank spaces are to host the illustrations which were done in pen and ink and charcoal. Normally, the fewer the media, the better, in order to prevent unnecessary over crowded finished work.

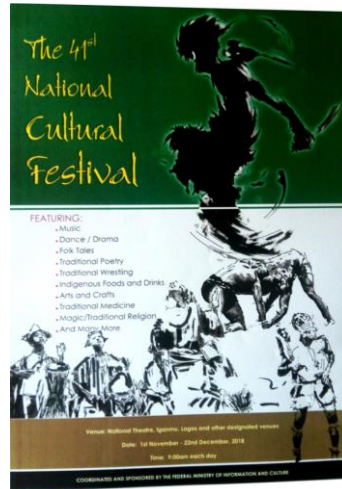


Fig. 8, Felix Osaigbovo, Advert. Poster, Mixed Media (Pen/Ink). 2015

Conclusion

As mixed media continues to evolve, the future holds a wide space for researchers and practitioners in this very interesting technique. Human affairs are persistently undergoing a new revolution that would be comparable to the industrial revolution that launched the machine age. Electronic circuitry, microprocessors and computer-generated metaphors threaten to alter our drawing and handmade illustrations on culture trademark, communication techniques and the very nature of artwork itself. Graphic and advertising design community, like many other spheres of human activity is continually experiencing philosophical changes and is responding to this new age of electronic circuitry by a participation in media graphics, systems design and computer graphics.

The tools as has happened so often in the past are changing with these relentless advances in technology but the essence of graphic design must remain unchanged. The essence is to give order to information, form to ideas and expression and feeling to artifacts that document human experience.

The need for clear and original visual communication to relate people to their economic, cultural, and social lives has never been greater. As people that shape messages and images, graphic artists have an obligation to contribute meaningfully to a public understanding of environmental and social issues. Graphic artists have a duty to adapt the new technology and to express their ideas by inventing new forms and new ways of expressing ideas without forgetting and dumping what obtains in the past. The periodicals and the books, vital communications tools of the industrial revolution will continue in the new age of electronic technology as art forms and graphic artists will help to define and expand each new generation of electronic media. The digital age must have a harmonious relationship with the analog age for a more beneficial finality.

The concept of mixed media technique in Illustration places graphic and advertising design in a wider cultural context, highlighting the key debates and issues that the practice implies. Theoretical essays discussed by today's leading graphic artists apply the cultural theory to the real-world practice of graphic design, helping students to develop sound critical judgment and informed strategies for generation of new ideas that accurately reflect the current *zeitgeist*. Consequently, Gombrich (1986: 474) wrote:

“Here, at last, we are back at the starting point. There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists – men and women, that is, who are favoured with the wonderful gift of balancing shapes and colours till

they are 'right', and rarer still, who possess that integrity of character which never rests content with half-solutions but is ready to forgo all easy effects, all superficial success for the toil and agony of sincere work. Artists, we trust, will always be born..." (P. 474).

But whether there will be art or not will depend on us, by our indifference or our interest and by our unfairness or our understanding. We must see to it that the cord of convention does not break and that there remains on opportunities for the artist to add to the valuable twine of pearls that is our heritage from the past. Concerted effort should be made to emphasize and encourage pen mixed media illustration technique right from the secondary school. As a matter of importance, this revival should start from this level of education.

At the university level, mixed media illustration should form a major aspect of graphic design. Synergy between the professionals in the advertising agencies and the Graphics Department of Universities should be encouraged. Professionals should occasionally be brought to the universities to give talks and hold workshops by so doing, the scope of illustration would be further widened.

References

- Edwards, T. (1990). *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*. Cheshire, London: Graphic Press.
- Egonwa, O.D. (2011). *Nigerian Art: Introductory Notes*. Ibadan: Ababa Press Ltd.
- Gosh, P. (1999). *Using Design*. London: Lund Humphries.
- Gombrich, E.H. (2009). *The Story of Art*. Oxford: Phaidon Press Ltd.
- Herbert, S. (2000). *The Visible Word*. New York: Hastings House Inc.
- Marshall, M. (2010). *Understanding Media*. New York/Toronto: McGraw Hill.
- Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia (2009). *Mixed Media*. Retrieved from [http://www. Microsoftencarta.com](http://www.Microsoftencarta.com) 20th April, 2015.
- Patrick Hanks (Ed) (2014). "Mixed Media" Collins Dictionary. vol. 12, Worcester: Harpers Collins Publishers.
- Philip, M. (2010). *A History of Graphic Design*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Roland, B. (2011). *The Rhetoric of Image*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Stephen, H and Ballance, G. (2001). *Graphic Design History*. New York: Allworth Press.
- Wikipedia (2015). "Mixed Media". Retrieved from: Free online Encyclopedia.[http://en.wikipedia.org/](http://en.wikipedia.org/Mixed Media) Mixed Media. 20th January, 2016.