

**AN EXPLORATION OF THE CULTURAL INFLUENCES
OF THE WORKS OF PIUS WARITIMI**

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**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
BENIN CITY**

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF FINE
AND APPLIED ARTS, FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES,
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FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD
OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A) DEGREE**

JANUARY, 2025.



DECLARATION

I declare that this work is based on personal research undertaken by me in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Faculty of Environmental Science, University of Benin under the Supervision of Prof. John Oghene.

FAMOZOR, PEREKEBINA JEREMIAH
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DATE



CERTIFICATION

We, the undersigned do certify that this research was carried out by PEREREKIBINA JEREMIAH FAMOZOR with MAT No. ENV2006517 in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts. This work is adequate in scope and qualifies for the partial fulfillment for the Award of BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A) DEGREE of the University of Benin.

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Project Supervisor

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PROF. OSA DENNIS EGONWA
External Examiner

DATE



DEDICATION

This project work is dedicated to God Almighty for grace, mercies and sustenance through this journey.



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I would like to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who has supported me throughout the completion of this project.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	i
Declaration	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	ii
Certification	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	iii
Dedication	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	iv
Acknowledgements	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	v
Table of Contents	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	vi
List of Plates and Images	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Abstract	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	viii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Statement of the Problem	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Research Questions	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Aims	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Objectives	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Influences on Arts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8
The Roles of African Arts Tradition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
Contemporary Nigerian Art	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
Pius Waritimi and Cultural Identity	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY



Methodology -	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11
---------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

CHPATER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF THE WORKS

Artwork 1: The Fisherman's Parlour	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
13									
Cultural Influence and Interpretation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
15									
Artwork 2: Executive Stool-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17
Analytic Explanation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
19									
Artwork 3: (S)Hell	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
Description of the Artwork-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	21
Cultural Influence in the Niger Delta Region	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
22									
Artwork 4:	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	23
Artwork 5:	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	26
Description and Analysis of the Artwork-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	27
Artwork 6:	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	29
Description and Analysis of "Traditional Couple"	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
30									
The Concept of Marriage and Communal Bonding	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
31									
Artwork 7:	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	34
Visual and Material Description	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	35
Cultural Influences Reflected in the Artwork	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	36



CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Findings	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	37
Cultural Resonance and Environmental Commentary	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	37
Conclusion	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	39
Recommendations for Future Projects	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	39
Contribution to the Field of Art History	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	40
References	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	43

LIST OF PLATES

Plate 1: The Fisherman's Parlour (1)	-	-	-	-	-	-	13
Plate 2: The Fisherman's Parlour (2)	-	-	-	-	-	-	14
Plate 3: Executive Stool (1)	-	-	-	-	-	-	17
Plate 4: Executive Stool (2)	-	-	-	-	-	-	18
Plate 5: (S)Hell	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
Plate 6: The Lumbering Man	-	-	-	-	-	-	23
Plate 7: Traditional War Canoe	-	-	-	-	-	-	26
Plate 8: Traditional Couple	-	-	-	-	-	-	29
Plate 9: The Seat of Activism	-	-	-	-	-	-	34



LIST OF IMAGES

Image 1: The Artist Picture (1) - - - - - 41

Image 2: The Artist Picture (2) - - - - - 42

ABSTRACT

This project delves into the rich cultural influences that shape the artistic expressions of Pius Waritimi, a prominent sculptor from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Waritimi, often referred to as "The Master Carver of the Niger Delta," has made significant contributions to the field of sculpture, blending traditional techniques with contemporary themes. This exploration focuses on seven of his notable works, each reflecting distinct cultural narratives and artistic philosophies.

As an academic, Waritimi has influenced a generation of artists, integrating cultural narratives into art education, thereby ensuring the continuity of cultural practices. The first chapter talks about the background, statement of problem, research problem, aims and objectives and the scope of the study. The second is a review of literature text of Waritimi. The methodology used in this research project which was a one-on-one interaction with artist Waritimi as regards to his works. The findings talks about exposition of some of his works such as; The Fisherman's Palour, Executive Stool, (S)hell, The Lumbering Man, Traditional War Canoe, Traditional Couple and The Seat of Activism.

Conclusively, through this exploration, the project aims to illuminate how Waritimi's works not only serve as artistic expressions but also as cultural commentaries that engage with themes of identity, tradition, and innovation. By analyzing these seven works, the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of cultural influences in shaping contemporary African art.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Pius Obudu Waritimi was born in 1955. He hails from Aleibiri community within Ekeremor Local Government Area of Bayelsa state Nigeria. During the academic years of 1978 to 1982 he was a graphic major at the University of Nigeria Nsukka as he earned his Fine and Applied Arts degree. After finishing his education he served at the Owerri location of the Nigerian National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in 1983.

Waritimi holds masterful status as both a woodcarver and visual artist and people call him “The Master Carver of the Niger Delta.” His career as an artist started with his foundation of the Otobo Gallery inside Port Harcourt which acted both as exhibition venue and engagement facility for the community. The artist uses his art to depict socioeconomic issues across the Niger Delta together with issues of poverty and corruption and environmental degradation.

During his professional career Waritimi made considerable contributions to public art through his creation of the “Lady Justice” sculpture which stands in Yenagoa Bayelsa State. Lady Justice stands out through her Garment choice of traditional African attire which deviates from



Western Justice symbols.

Waritimi dedicates his time to teaching at two educational establishments: first at the Rivers State College of Education then at the Niger Delta University (NDU) in Amassoma, Bayelsa State. The dual role of teaching and artwork creation enables him to mentor upcoming artists and continue inspiring pioneers from the Nigerian art industry. He is now fully into art making and creation following his resignation from NDU 2022.

The accomplishment of Waritimi in the artistic field gained recognition through several awards. He received the title “Master Carver of the Niger Delta” during his participation in Artmiabo International Art Festival (AMIAB) 2024. His award at the Artmiabo International Art Festival (AMIAB) 2024 proves how much he influences contemporary art practices while demonstrating his progressive methods of sculpture.

Pius Waritimi stands as a central figure in Nigerian art. Through his works he expresses both the beauty of Nigerian cultural heritage while tackling urgent social matters so he stands as an important figure in Nigerian artistic development.

The exploration of Waritimi’s works provides insight into how cultural influences shape artistic expression in the Niger Delta. His art not only reflects personal experiences and societal challenges but also serves as a medium for cultural preservation and commentary. By examining the cultural



influences in Waritimi's works, this project aims to contribute to the understanding of how art can be a powerful tool for social change and cultural identity in Nigeria.

Characterizing Waritimi's art enables understanding of cultural forces which direct artistic creativity in the Niger Delta region. Through his artistic work Waritimi showcases both his life narratives and national social issues while maintaining a platform for cultural representation and social observation. This project analyzes cultural elements across Waritimi's works to enhance our knowledge of art as a transformative force for societal shifts and Nigerian identity preservation.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Waritimi expresses cultural heritage through his artistic work which finds origin in his region's social-political landscape as well as its environmental characteristics. His title as "Master Carver of the Niger Delta" accompanies participation in ArtMiabo International Art Festival (AMIABF) yet systematic academic research about his cultural impact on his artworks remains insufficient.

Key Issues to Address:

Cultural Representation: The subject matter of Waritimi's sculpture work illustrates stories about the Niger Delta through its exploration of environmental degradation alongside social justice and indigenous cultural



practices. Scientific investigation of how these relevant themes link with national cultural stories while determining their influence on regional background identity remains scarce.

Artistic Techniques and Materials: The creative choices involving materials and technical approaches Waritimi uses with wood carving prompts researchers to investigate these craft techniques' cultural relevance. The study of traditional artistic practices which combine with current artistic approaches reveals developmental pathways of cultural identity in the Niger Delta region.

Socio-Political Context: Waritimi's artwork represents the conflicts as well as environmental problems gripping the Niger Delta region. Studying how socio-political elements effect his creative choices together with the local and international audience perception of his artwork remains essential. This study aims to fill the existing gap by analyzing the interplay between his artistic expressions and the cultural, social, and political landscapes of the Niger Delta, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of contemporary African art.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

How do Waritimi's work reflect and preserve the cultural heritage of the Niger Delta region?

What cultural symbols and themes are most prominent in Waritimi's



works and how they relate to the traditions of the Niger Delta?

1.4 AIMS

The research examines Waritimi's artwork to analyze how his art showcases and protects and reshapes traditional values from the Niger Delta region. This research investigates the dual role Waritimi plays through art to establish both cultural identity and indigenous artistic maintenance.

1.5 OBJECTIVES

1: To Analyze the Artistic Techniques and Styles of Pius Waritimi

Researchers will investigate the distinctive artistic methods along with the styles which Pius Waritimi uses in his sculptures. The project investigates Waritimi's artwork to identify the direct impact of wood sculpture training and cultural background on his artistic style while understanding his embedded cultural storytelling.

2: To Examine the Cultural Themes Represented in Waritimi's Sculptures

The research goal determines the identification followed by critical assessment of cultural elements found within Waritimi's sculptures. The analysis tracks the cultural elements of the Niger Delta through Waritimi's artwork as it showcases local traditions as well as traditions and rural and urban social dynamics hence deepening knowledge about Nigerian artistic heritage.



3: To Investigate the Impact of Waritimi's Work on Contemporary Nigerian Art

The research investigates the diverse impact Pius Waritimi's artistic achievements have on contemporary Nigerian art practitioners as well as the Nigerian art community. This section examines how his artistic methods have advanced artistic approaches within Nigeria through both sculpture and public art works.

4: To Explore the Role of Public Art in Cultural Representation

We evaluate the cultural meanings and societal messaging behind Waritimi's public art works including his famous Bayelsa State mural "The Lady Justice" in this segment. It will investigate how public art serves as a medium for cultural expression and community engagement.

5: This research assesses Waritimi's work acceptance in both local artistic environments and global artistic communities.

The way Pius Waritimi's works gain reception is the focus of this evaluation between local audiences and those present worldwide. Through evaluative research the study examines awards and exhibitions alongside critical assessments from ArtMiabo International Art Festival to establish his standing within the global art community.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY



This research investigates the cultural forces which guide Pius Waritimi's artistic practice as a Nigerian sculptor in contemporary times. Research tracks how Waritimi's cultural heritage combined with traditional customary beliefs and life experiences led to his artistic motif development and aesthetic expression. Through an examination of Waritimi's works the research identifies and critiques cultural components together with symbolic elements and motifs to interpret their complete meaning which mirrors his audience's traditional beliefs.

The research limits its scope to evaluate specific artistic works from Pius Waritimi's portfolio with focus on how these artworks express Nigerian culture while retaining traditional artforms. The research evaluates his artistic contributions to both Nigerian art market trends and broad cultural dialogue about modern collective identity.

The research uses artist-provided primary information together with research into previous work along with artwork images and expert perspectives from Nigerian art specialists. The research uses Waritimi's sculptures as a framework to explore the relationship between his creative expression and cultural heritage in extensive detail.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The presence of cultural influences reveals how artistic production responds to the social values and historical legacies that dominate specific societies. Artist Pius Waritimi demonstrates how essential cultural heritage becomes to artistic creation in Nigeria's diverse and politically dynamic socio-cultural environment. The research explores available literature concerning cultural elements in art together with African artistic traditions and modern Nigerian artists to establish groundwork for Pius Waritimi's work analysis.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON ART

Studies of art and culture's relationship form a substantial foundation in both art historical and cultural studies investigations. Through its status as a cultural artifact art duplicates the core values and social ideas together with communal lived experiences (Gombrich 2000). The arts benefit from this two-way partnership between heritage and modern expression in the art of artists who base their work on cultural connections. Through their study Smith (2016) demonstrates that African artworks provide more than visual appeal because they maintain historical memories alongside individual and spiritual identities.

Through his artistic practice Waritimi explores cultural narratives at their deepest level including those unique to the Niger Delta region.



According to Okeke-Agulu (2015) contemporary African artists straddle between tradition and modernity to make artwork which melds present techniques with previous cultural expressions. The analysis of Waritimi's artworks depends crucially on this fundamental notion because he frequently combines modern artistic approaches with traditional Nigerian symbols.

THE ROLE OF AFRICAN ART TRADITIONS

African art develops from the ritualized practices, cultural customs and spiritual doctrines practiced by African peoples. According to Aniakor (1983) symbolism functions as the core principle of African art through meaningful signifiers in form texture and color elements. Waritimi joins several contemporary African artists who incorporate their Niger Delta cultural heritage into their artistic practice.

We need to analyze Waritimi's art looking through his traditional African background that impacted his entire artistic formation. The strong shapes together with detailed designs in his artwork maintain the visual characteristics of indigenous Nigerian artistic traditions. According to Moyo (2019) the ability of African art to adapt applies to Waritimi's work because his creations show how the Niger Delta's cultural identity advances over time.

CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN ART

Nigerian contemporary art today presents a merger of local heritage wisdom combined with worldwide artistic traditions. Artist Pius Waritimi



actively shapes contemporary artistic development through his reinterpretation of traditional narratives while using modern visual elements. According to Edewor (2018), Nigerian artists use their artwork to connect with social issues, identity and cultural history so they maintain roles as cultural representatives.

The artistic works created by Waritimi connect with both domestic Nigerian audience and international viewers in the same way famous arts remain important for Nigerian society and worldwide. Through themes about environmental arransia veridad cultural preservation and community identity his works address issues vital for modern-day discussions according to Okeke -Agulu (2015).

PIUS WARITIMI AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Few scholars focus on Waritimi's productions yet his work falls under the broader examination of Nigerian contemporary art studies. Waritimi takes ideas and resources from the Niger Delta's authentic cultural quantities as this environmentally threatened region holds distinct cultural traditions. According to Onwuegbucha's research (2016) the artwork of Niger Delta artists illustrates the interlocking connection people share with their natural setting.

The artwork of Waritimi combines indigenous materials together with traditional symbols which contributes to broader discussions about cultural



sustainability in *contemporary art worlds*. According to scholar Babatunde (2020) artists who use local materials and cultural storytelling help sustain cultural identity during modern global trends.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

To understand how Pius Waritimi's culture has influenced his artworks, I used simple steps to gather and study information. Since I had the chance to talk directly with the artist, it helped me learn about his ideas and inspirations firsthand. I also carefully observed his artworks to see the connection between his culture and his creations. Below are the steps I followed to complete this study:

1. Talking to the Artist

I spoke directly to Pius Waritimi to learn about his artworks. He shared stories about his inspiration, the meaning behind his works, and how his culture influenced them.

2. Studying His Artworks

I looked at Pius Waritimi's artworks closely to understand their designs, colors, shapes, and symbols. This helped me see how his culture is shown in his art.



3. Asking Questions

- I asked simple and clear questions, like:
- Why do you use these symbols in your art?
- How does your culture inspire your work?

4. Writing Notes

While talking to the artist and looking at his art, I wrote down everything I learned to remember important details.

5. Explaining What I Found

After gathering all the information, I explained how Pius Waritimi's culture has shaped his art and what makes his work special. This process helped me explore and understand the cultural influences in his works.



CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF THE WORKS

Artwork 1



Plate 1: The Fisherman's Palour (I)

Photograph: <https://www.instagram.com>

Date: 4th January, 2025



Plate 2: The Fisherman's Palour (2)
Photograph: <https://www.instagram.com>
Date: 4th January, 2025

Description of the Artwork

The Fisherman's Palour is an immersive installation which includes wooden furniture together with sculptural elements. All wooden items in the collection including seats and tables display an artistic approach through detailed organic designs that mimic waves and fish alongside common Ijaw fishing symbols. It comprises of a wooden chair curved wave-shaped

backrest for the fisherman and two benches for his visitors. A table at the middle and a side mirror with a fish frame and a fishing hook at the side. The mirror is a door to a transparent wardrobe. All having motifs and symbols of fishes, waves which describes the Ijaw people. The objects at the far left comprises of two wooden paddle (male and female), a net with wooden fishes that is harp-like with a special wooden base having motifs.

CULTURAL INFLUENCE AND INTERPRETATION

1. The Role of Fishing in Ijaw Culture

As an ethnic group in Nigeria's Niger Delta region the Ijaws combined their traditional fishing heritage with water-dependent economic activities. Fishing serves as a primary economic activity and it constructs social systems and reinforces customs while inspiring creative forms through its practitioner. The fundamental connection between water and Ijaw identity appears in Waritimi's artwork through its placement of fisherman symbols inside domestic spaces to demonstrate water's prime role in Ijaw collective identity.

2. The Symbolism of Wood and Craftsmanship

Artists from Ijaw use wood carving to shape typical shapes such as masks and canoe paddles and ritual objects (Ben-Amos, 1976). Through traditional wood techniques Waritimi develops practical furniture items that also show art elements that function as sculptures. Through their organic shapes and uneven textures the artwork matches natural structures to reflect



how people should harmonize with their *ecological* surroundings. Traditional Ijaw society attributes status through chair ownership thus the chair's wave-like shape might represent either a person's leadership abilities or ancestral position of power because chairs carry high social status in multiple African cultures (Erekosima & Saunders, 1988).

3. The Representation of Ancestry and Memory

The interior painting uses its subjects to present national thinking about personal heritage as well as *collective* memory and individual history. Portraits that appear in Ijaw art help descendants salute their ancestral roots and bridge temporal eras (Oguibe, 2002). The broken artwork's elements reveal key moments from Ijaw people's *collective* tradition which include ordinary life along with cultural practices and historic scenes.

4. Traditional Implements and Everyday Life

The wooden paddle within the installation gains critical importance because paddles function as fundamental waterway navigation tools throughout the Niger Delta region. Traditional paddles in contemporary art symbolize essential aspects including navigation movement trade survival according to Nkanta (2017). Through the use of pottery alongside floorboards the installation strengthens the sustenance theme together with preservation of cultural heritage.

Through The Fisherman's Parlour Pius Waritimi combines artistic



concepts in a powerful design which tells cultural narratives. Through its creative reinterpretation of common objects the installation honors Ijaw cultural traditions by displaying them in a contemporary format. Through traditional craftsmanship combined with symbolic imagery and spatial immersion people can participate in learning Ijaw heritage stories. Waritimi's multidisciplinary practice functions as both a cultural preservation effort and a dialogue initiative about how traditional art adapts in contemporary environments.

Artwork 2



Plate 3: Executive Stool (I)

Photograph: <https://www.instagram.com>

Date: 4th January, 2025



Plate 4: Executive Stool (2)

Photograph: <https://www.instagram.com>

Date: 4th January, 2025

Description

A regal wooden chair and table created with intricate carvings and lavish polished finish techniques. A carved Bayelsa State map appears prominently on the chair's backrest while its rays present a sense of cultural energy. The wood maintains a rich brown hue while the natural handmade carvings illustrate traditional techniques. The table which follows the chair displays a matching carved surface that appears linked to recognized facets of cultural identity in Bayelsa.

ANALYTIC EXPLANATION

1. **Symbolism:** Waritimi created this symbolic yet functional furnishing work by exploring the Ijaw and Niger Delta cultural themes, he designed this piece to articulate Bayelsa State's feelings of patriotism alongside its heritage and identity traits.
2. **Identity:** Territorial identity manifests through the carved map on this object alongside radiating lines which possibly represent the Bayelsan people's influential heritage across governance and oil exploration and resource control activities.
3. **Cultural Influence:** Niger Delta indigenous woodworking traditions inspire the artwork which involves carving traditional canoes and designing palaces and masquerades. This furniture piece uses wood and its refined rustic appearance to achieve cultural originality through a union of traditional craftsmanship and present-day



usefulness. Maintaining a dynamic irregular form the table presents an organic natural link which could derive from Bayelsa's riverine setting.

Waritimi's artistic vision on this piece combines cultural symbols and modern working methods for protecting Ijaw cultural heritage. This piece connects history with artisan craftsmanship through its singular presentation to make a statement while delivering unique practical functions.

Artwork 3



DESCRIPTION OF THE ARTWORK

This is an oil rig like structure of metal and wooden components displaying skulls at the summit. The wooden skulls with bead-like decorations surrounding it are resting at the top of the metal yellow frame. A text on the artwork reads "Shell is the killer" to directly link the Shell Oil Company with environmental destruction and sociopolitical difficulties in Niger Delta. The artwork rests on a red foundation that might represent either risk or hardship or opposition to systems of power.

ANALYSIS OF THE ARTWORK

Through Waritimi's sculptural work, the visualization of oil exploration damages in the Niger Delta region achieves a robust criticism. The featured skeletal skull displays death while depicting suffering and damage caused by oil extraction in this topside position. Through its wooden construct the artwork connects to traditional African sculptural forms yet the yellow metallic rig's framework illustrates industrial progress and foreign corporate activities. Through their cultural and spiritual practices beads traditionally held significance but their presence symbolizes the native



cultural decline triggered by environmental destruction and corporate exploitation.

The message written on the skull authorities that multinational oil companies particularly Shell are responsible for environmental breakdowns in the area. Through pairs of opposites the artistic creation presents the rivalry between natural existence (wooden skull) and industrial intervention (metal rig).

Cultural Influence and Environmental Pollution in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta possesses rich oil deposits but has endured prolonged environmental destruction because of historical industrial causes such as petroleum spills along with gas emissions and forest destruction which multinational oil companies generated. Through its presentation the artwork depicts the distress experienced by local people whose life pursuits based in fishing and farming have undergone severe damage from pollution. The artwork represents numerous human deaths caused by pollution diseases in addition to conflicts alongside government repression of environmental activists.

African traditional cultures associate skulls with two spiritual components: ancestors and ceremonial sacrifices. Through this symbolism the skull leads viewers to imagine the numerous lives which became secondary to



corporate disregard and governmental decreasing response. The oil industry produces economic wealth that fails to reach indigenous communities while using the beads as a symbol for this most crucial problem.

Through his artwork Waritimi effectively combines artistic practice with political activism while delivering socio-political statements. Through this artwork the artist seeks to increase awareness on Niger Delta environmental injustices and generate action while alerting viewers about industrial consequences toward people and their culture.

Artwork 4.



Plate 6: The Lumbering Man

Photograph: <https://www.instagram.com>

Date: 4th January, 2025

Description of the Artwork

A wooden sculpture shows a man who stands on top of a floating platform made from log pieces. With a tall pole in his hands this floating character shows his movement through watery elements. Additionally the artwork shows a miniature hut that rests upon the wooden platform. This wooden artwork features materials that celebrate its natural rustic look which maintains an environmental connection in its design.

Cultural Influences in the Niger Delta Region

The artistic work draws deeply from the cultural foundations and environmental surroundings which characterise the Niger Delta region which primarily consists of riverine and mangrove ecosystems. Several cultural elements can be analyzed in relation to the piece:

Water-Based Lifestyle: Waterways extend across the entire Niger Delta region alongside its vast network of creeks together with mangrove swamps. The boat operation with an oar demonstrates standard transportation practices within Ijaw and Itsekiri and Urhobo communities who need canoes to explore their waterways while fishing and trading.

Fishing and Subsistence Economy: People who live in the Niger Delta mainly follow fishing as their main occupation because this scene matches the fishing activities that take place in their region. A solitary rafter represents a fisherman who is a familiar sight throughout riverine socio-economic spaces

where basic wooden rafts and boats serve as their primary means of sustaining an income.

Architecture and Shelter: The raft's small shelter duplicates the appearance of stilt houses combined with floating structures which traditionally exist in certain Niger Delta areas. The built infrastructure sits above floodwaters to protect residents while locating them near fishing areas.

Symbolism of Survival and Adaptation: Through its design the artwork presents embedded ideas about preservation and change along with the powerful bond people maintain with their environment. Through his deliberate pole usage the figure represents the Niger Delta peoples who remain successful despite confronting environmental problems like erosion and flooding and petroleum pollution.

Artistic Expression of Indigenous Identity: Traditional Niger Delta sculptural arts employ natural untreated wood combined with manual craftsmanship to honor regional maker traditions. Usually this artwork showcases simple day-to-day moments while honoring traditional indigenous lifestyle practices.

Through the artwork *The Lumbering Man*, Waritimi has documented the Niger Delta life which depicts basic water-centred existence alongside survival techniques and heritage traditions. Its material components together with form and subjects exhibit the environmental characteristics and economic patterns and artistic methods of the region creating a meaningful



artifact for examining cultural and historical evolution.

Artwork 5.



Description and Analysis of the Artwork

Multiple individuals occupy a mixed-media canoe sculpture which displays activities that fill the boat. Active figures paddle the craft while standing posing figures hold flags that display Nigeria's national flags among them. This artwork utilizes wood and fabric together with organic material which contributes to its earthy handmade design appearance. The figure positioned at the front of the canoe functions as both a dramatic statement and symbolic representation possibly symbolizing battle and self-



abandonment.

This artwork presents an open composition which narrates three interconnected ideas of movement along with unity that builds strength throughout time. Through their active postures combined with communal paddling activities led by dominant figures the artwork portrays an overarching theme of team work and historical remembering and cultural connections. This piece likely references significant cultural practices and historical events in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Cultural Influences in the Niger Delta

The sculpture draws its deep inspiration from the traditions combined with historical legacies of the Ijaw people together with the Kalabari and Itsekiri ethnic groups who maintain strong identification with Niger Delta waterways. Through the lens of cultural symbolism the canoe functions as a vessel of both mobility and ritual values as well as economic exchange and adaptive resilience.

Water Spirit Festivals and Ceremonial Canoe Processions: The Owu-Aru-Sun Festival from the Kalabari people stands as the principal element influencing this sculpture. The group holds a grand celebration through its Owu-Aru-Sun Festival that honors their late elders by using decoratively adorned canoes to carry participants dressed in costumes during sacred rituals (Horton, 1969). Water festivals in the Niger Delta reveal the profound



spiritual together with community-based importance of boats.

Arguably one of the Ijaw people's most significant cults known as Egbesu relies on warrior deities to carry out rituals where canoe symbolism illustrates life pathways and links between personal realms and transcendent domains (Alagoa, 2005).

Economic and Social Roles of Canoes in the Niger Delta: For people living in the Niger Delta Territory canoes provide essential means to fish as well as elements for trade and day-to-day transportation. Waterways are critical to many communities in the Niger Delta because canoes function as adaptable markets and mobile transportation systems alongside representing local strength (Alagoa, 2005). Probably this carving exists to honor all those who travel by canoe across these waters for their daily work.

This object interprets many aspects of Niger Delta culture through its design including sacred practices and social beliefs as well as political fights throughout history and present-day concerns. Through its visually powerful design the canoe embodies community depth and resistance strength together with survival ability making the piece a rich representation of Niger Delta cultural heritage and resilience.

Artwork 6.



Description and Analysis of “Traditional Couple”

A wooden sculpture shows two abstract human figures standing next to each other in the artwork named “Traditional Couple.” The objects maintain an elongated shape while their heads simplify and their male form includes hollowed-out geometric patterns. The female figure displays curving lines



throughout her shape which highlights both the waist dimension and the traditional *costume* she wears. The piece takes its authentic cultural spirit forward through both the wood's rugged appearance and restrained decorative elements.

Through its paraphernalia the statue shows marriage relationships together with societal stereotypes about gender characteristics in the prevailing culture. The male figure contains cavities which symbolize various societal obligations whereas the female figure presents herself as a solid and free-flowing shape that indicates maternal character alongside domestic importance for women.

Cultural Influences in the Niger Delta Region

Ancestral reverence and woodcraft traditions of the Ijaw people and Kalabari people exist alongside the artistic representations of family traditions throughout the Niger Delta region which includes ethnic groups such as Ijaw, Kalabari, Itsekiri and Urhobo. The artistic themes within this creative piece correspond to the cultural beliefs and social practices as well as traditional art concepts of the area.

The Concept of Marriage and Communal Bonding

The people of the Niger Delta view marriage as sacred which leads to



their practice of grand traditional marriage ceremonies. The Ijaw together with Kalabari people organize their marriages through various milestones starting with family talks right through dowry exchanges followed by spiritual rituals (Horton, 1969). Each gender figure depicted in the statue represents different family duties in marriage since males traditionally watched over families while females sustained the family line.

Kalabari people use the Iria ceremony to teach young women about marriage and adult life according to Alagoa (2005). The statue reflects Niger Delta cultural preferences which honor both traditional partnerships among men and women and expected social gender assignments.

2. Wood Carving Traditions and Ancestral Worship

Wooden sculpture represents a strong cultural heritage of the Niger Delta region where people use it for ancestral shrines and public spaces. The Urhobo people honor their deities through Edjo which are wooden sculptures used to symbolize protection and fertility and guarantee continuity of life (Ekeh, 2007).

Through Ekine masquerades the Ijaw culture showcases their wooden artistic representations to celebrate mythological accounts alongside social structure and historical stories according to Horton (1969). "The Traditional Couple" could symbolize ancestral beings that embody family values while providing guidance and continuous support to future generations.



3. Symbolism of Geometric and Abstract Forms

The male figure's abstracted geometric features that include hollowed-out sections bring together contemporary African art elements with conventional artistic values. Amongst the Itsekiri and Isoko population symbolic abstract representation appears throughout their carved artwork to illustrate religious together with intellectual notions (Alagoa, 2005). The geometric openings on the sculpture might depict societal functions of men and their leadership position as well as their marital duties.

The female sculpture displays a complete flowing body shape which symbolizes both beauty and fertility alongside maternal characteristics. The concepts of home foundation and community balance through women as per Ijaw and Kalabari cultural beliefs find support through Osaghae's (1995) research.

4. The Influence of Traditional African Dualism

African traditions work through dualities to show the universal relationship between contradictory elements like male and female roles as well as physical and spiritual existence and life and death symbolism. According to Ibeji observed in Niger Delta cosmology there are traditional dual pairings that include twins matched with complementary deities and ancestral spirits (Ekeh 2007). The double composition of this artwork depicts the cultural principle which values balanced unity.



Kalabari culture uses paired statues during ritual ceremonies to depict married couples after death since this represents ongoing partnerships between partners in the afterlife (Horton 1969). The metalwork stands the possibility of symbolizing spiritual entities in addition to showing present-day relationships without depicting current human beings.

The wooden piece "Traditional Couple" serves as a deeply symbolic representation which carries cultural messages about marriage customs alongside gender roles as well as ancestral respect and community beliefs found in the Niger Delta region. The artwork presents abstract expressive techniques to show male-female energy balance and traditional union responsibilities with spiritual meanings about dualism in African culture. By incorporating wood carving traditions, marriage symbolism, and spiritual influences, the artwork becomes a testament to the enduring cultural heritage of the Niger Delta.



Artwork 7



Plate 9: The Seat of Activism

Photograph: Pius Waritimi

Date: 3rd January, 2025

Descriptive and Analytical Analysis of the Long Chair

The long chair from the image features three materials: wood with engraved symbol and metal to construct a powerful socio-political work of art. A story about environmental activism and battles in the Niger Delta

emerges through the visual presentation of Ken Saro-Wiwa's face together with the Shell Oil Company logo. Functionality does not describe this chair since it operates above utility as a placeholder for themes involving protest movements and oppressions while exemplifying human tenacity.

Visual and Material Description

The seat combines organic components with steel elements to present an unusual frame. Wooden planks along with metal create the unpolished and disturbing appearance of the chair. The selection of materials for this piece expresses themes about suffering, staying power and memory especially when considered within the framework of the Niger Delta where environmental destruction and human rights breaches have taken place (Obi, 2001).

Through his portrait artist Waritimi memorialized Ken Saro-Wiwa who remained a symbol in the history of Niger Delta activism. Through his facial representation the artist creates a dual purpose that honors the deceased while conveying his political significance as a symbol of insurgence (Manby, 1999).

This viewer experiences drastic contrasting images of Shell Oil Company's official sign combined with Ken Saro-Wiwa's portrait which symbolizes conflicts between multinational enterprises and native people groups. Since the initial criticism Shell has received blame for destructive



activities within the Niger Delta including oil spills and human rights crimes along with environmental pollution (Pegg, 2019).

Cultural Influences Reflected in the Artwork

1. Material Symbolism and Indigenous Artistry

The artistic practice of Niger Delta art makes use of existing debris combined with recycled materials to create artwork that showcases stories about fighting against oppression. The artistic approach of this work follows traditional narrative craftsmanship which utilizes bones, wood and corporate symbols (Okeke-Agulu, 2015).

The connection between wood and bone natural components stands opposite Shell's industrial emblems to represent the indigenous culture's struggle against foreign business activities.

2. The Seat as a Symbol of Power and Protest

Traditional African society uses chairs as symbols of power to keep them only for authority figures including elders and rulers and deities (Blier, 2015). The seat becomes a dual symbol in this context because it simultaneously acts as a leader symbol for Saro-Wiwa's activism and demonstrates his unjust passing through death.

The piece functions as a multi-faceted socio-political artwork by uniting historical remnants with cultural collectivism and environmental



defense strategies. The piece operates as a tribute and activist statement that highlights the enduring battles faced by Niger Delta communities. Through combining images of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Shell logo the artist enforces viewers to encounter the historical narrative of extraction while preserving the voices of oppressed communities.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This project, *An Exploration of the Cultural Influences of Pius Waritimi: A Critical Analysis of 7 Artworks of Pius Waritimi*, examined the influences his work has the culture of the Niger Delta region especially the Ijaws. Each work revealed unique approaches to conveying cultural, historical, and socio-political issues. The analysis highlighted the varied ways in which this artist engage with modern and traditional themes, reflecting the influence of culture, society, and environmental experiences. The *Fisherman's Palour*, *(S)hell*, *Executive Stool*, *The Lumbering Man*, *Traditional War Canoe*, *Traditional Couple* and *The Seat of Activism* showcased his specialty in woodcarving and his use of metal as medium to create powerful artistic statements.

The artistic accomplishments of Pius Waritimi expose the Niger Delta's rich cultural past and complicated social and political ecosystems. Waritimi



creates his wood carvings and sculptures to express narrative-based messages about threats faced by Niger Delta communities such as environmental destruction alongside cultural identity disputes and social fairness challenges.

CULTURAL RESONANCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMMENTARY

Through his art Waritimi makes connections to both traditional African practices and contemporary cultural challenges of the Niger Delta community. Through his artwork Waritimi includes symbols of natural elements beside symbols depicting the disruptive effects of oil drilling which triggered widespread environmental and social instability in his region. At the ArtMiabo International Art Festival “The Fisherman’s Parlour” demonstrated Waritimi’s ability to combine traditional fishing traditions with immediate environmental issues caused by gas flaring and industrial disruption in a compelling examination of opposing natural heritage vs modern exploitation.

Waritimi defends traditional cultural stories of Niger Delta while functioning as representative advocate for communities damaged by industrial developments. Through his artwork he uses poverty and corruption alongside environmental disaster subjects to engage actively in social beliefs via his powerful artistic devices. The artist format maintains high importance in regions whose cultural works directly support local struggles to obtain both rights and recognition.



Legacy and Influence on Future Generations

Waritimi's influence extends beyond his immediate artistic contributions; he has played a pivotal role in nurturing the next generation of artists through his academic involvement and community engagement. By running workshops and mentoring young talents, he fosters a culture of creativity that is rooted in the values and traditions of the Niger Delta. His dedication to utilitarian art, producing functional pieces alongside traditional sculptures, further emphasizes the importance of art in everyday life and its potential to enhance community well-being.

As the Niger Delta continues to grapple with the consequences of resource exploitation, Waritimi's work stands as a testament to the resilience of its people and their cultural heritage. His art not only captures the essence of the Niger Delta but also challenges viewers to reflect on their relationship with the environment and the socio-political structures that govern it.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Waritimi's artistic exploration is a vital contribution to the cultural tapestry of the Niger Delta. His works encapsulate the struggles and aspirations of the region's people, serving as a bridge between tradition and modernity. As we look to the future, the cultural influences embedded in Waritimi's art will undoubtedly inspire ongoing dialogues about identity, sustainability, and the role of art in advocating for social change.



RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE PROJECTS

Cultural Identity: Investigate how Waritimi's sculptures serve as a medium for expressing and preserving cultural heritage in a rapidly changing society.

Social Commentary: Analyze how his art addresses contemporary social issues, using cultural references to engage audiences and provoke thought.

Artistic Techniques: Examine the traditional and modern techniques employed by Waritimi, and how these reflect the cultural influences of the Niger Delta.

Methodology: An approach of a qualitative interview with Waritimi and the exposition of his art works.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD OF ART HISTORY

The exploration of Pius Waritimi's works offers valuable insights into the interplay between culture and art in Nigeria. His ability to weave traditional narratives into contemporary forms not only enriches the artistic landscape but also serves as a powerful reminder of the role of art in societal reflection and change. As such, Waritimi's contributions are essential to understanding the evolution of contemporary African art and its cultural significance.



The Artist (Pius Waritimi)



Image 1: The Artist Picture (1)

Photograph: <https://www.instagram.com>

Date: 4th January, 2025



Image 1: The Artist Picture (1)
Photograph: <https://www.instagram.com>
Date: 4th January, 2025

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