

The Artists Quilt

For the quilt that I designed, I tried to use many symbols and colors that accurately portray some of the reasons why 3 different African artists make their art pieces. Not only that but, what are some colors that are prevalent in the African flags means, and what are some of the underlying reasons why African artists make the work that they do.

First, the colors. In the quilt, around the border and covering the entire back there are triangles and squares filled with different colors. These colors have different meanings in African culture. The shapes were inspired by the artist Faith Ringgold, and the colors were colors that are commonly found in African flags, and in the traditional clothing that many Africans wear. For example, Kente cloth which is woven in Ghana.

Blue- Represents peace, love and unity

Red- Generally represents that blood that was shed during slavery

Gold/yellow- Symbolizes the sun where they get their wealth

Marron- Means healing

Black- Represent the color of their skin

White- Shows peace and peacefulness

Green- Represents the fertile land of the continent and in each country

In the center of the quilt design I have the countries of 3 African artists that I decided to highlight for my quilt. These artists are Peju Alatise from Nigeria, Aboudia Abdoulaye Diarrassouba from the Ivory Coast, and Gonçalo Mabunda from Mozambique. I have the shapes of the countries that these artists are from in the middle of the quilt.

In the background I have the colors black, brown, pink, and purple. I used the color black in the background because black represents the color of their skin, and the other colors represent the backdrop that many of these artists have to live with since they are from Africa. The artist Peju Alatise said, "In my opinion, art from Africa remains still largely burdened by negative social, political and economic realities from its mother continent, hence, is unable to be judged by its own merit and without negative bias or condescending patronage. However, Africans must take the responsibility upon themselves to project their own art and learn to value them as one of their greatest cultural exports."

Because of that I used the brown purple and pink to represent the negative social, political and economic realities that Peju Alatise mentioned. I also made the background almost overshadow the foreground to represent how, as she said, these realities that many African artists live with overshadow their artwork.

In the middle of the piece I have the three countries and on the far left I have the country Nigeria.

I put a large mouth in the middle of the country to incorporate the African aesthetic of “resemblance of human beings.” According to my research, “Artists seldom portray particular people, actual animals, or the actual form of invisible spirits. Rather, they aim to portray ideas about reality, spiritual or human, and express these ideas through human or animal images.” (<https://static.lib.virginia.edu/artsandmedia/artmuseum/africanart/Elements.html>)

I also put the large mouth in the middle to show why Peju Alatise makes her work, and how she views the art space in Nigeria. She said, “Nigerians in general like a good laugh and would deal with the gravest of issues with humor. They will laugh at the deplorable state of education; make a joke of the nepotistic governance of the president and his wife; draw cartoons of the pedophilic senator who decides what becomes of our constitution. Nigerians are known for laughing at their circumstances rather than changing them. This syndrome is what FELA calls ‘suffering and smiling.’ Yes, I need to use this humor to make my subject-matters approachable.” Peju Alatise uses the problems of her country to make art and to share the messages of corruption that is in her country.

The navy blue stripes represent “the nepotistic governance of the president and his wife”, the lime green background represents the “circumstances” that Nigerians laugh at. The green shapes representing lost children show “the deplorable state of education” in Nigeria, and the blue stripe shows “the pedophilic senator who decides what becomes of our constitution.”

All of this together is how I tried to represent her art and who she is. She uses her talents and humor to hide a lot of the bigger issues that she faces in her country. And she views that many people in her country also do the same thing of hiding the reality of what is going on underneath humor.

I wanted the Nigeria section to be pretty colorful because when looking at her art, it is pretty colorful and I saw that she paints and sculpts humans or human-like figures.

Next to Nigeria is Ivory Coast. Aboudia Abdoulaye Diarrassouba painted through the civil war.

The bright orange shapes represent not only the civil war but the destruction and fear that many people faced at that time. He stated, “While some artists chose to flee the civil war, I decided to stay and continue working despite the danger. I worked in an artist’s studio right next to the Golf Hotel [Ouattara’s headquarters during the post-electoral crisis], I could hear the bullets zipping through the air while I painted. When the shooting got too heavy, I hid in the cellar and I tried to imagine what was going on. As soon as things calmed down I would go back upstairs and paint everything I had in mind. Whenever I was able to go outside, I would paint everything I saw as soon as I returned. But the real life fear was with us every moment. ”

The first civil war in the Ivory Coast lasted from 2002-2004. The fight was between the president and the “New Forces”. Several countries were involved including America and Russia. According to BlackPast.org, “The main belligerents of the conflict were the central government of the Ivory Coast, led by President Laurent Gbagbo and supported by France and the United States. Gbagbo also recruited the Young Patriots of Abidjan militia, Liberian mercenaries and pilots from Belarus. The insurgents, led by Guillaume Soro and called the Forces Nouvelles de Côte d’Ivoire (the New Forces) were supported by Russia, Bulgaria, and Burkina Faso. More than three thousand soldiers, militia members, and civilians were killed in the conflict. In 2004 United Nations peacekeepers, mainly soldiers of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) entered the Ivory Coast but were unsuccessful in stopping the fighting.” One of the reasons why there was a civil war was the religious background at that time in Ivory Coast. The northern part of the country was mostly Muslim and southern part was mostly Christian. One of the presidents before was able to keep the peace between the two regions, but the following presidents were not as successful. Both sides would eventually sign a peace agreement in 2007, but that would only last so long before the second civil war in 2011.

The civil war definitely affected the country. “Fighting continued into 2004 despite ongoing peace negotiations in the French town of Linas-Marcoussis. In one incident on November 4, 2004, Ivorian president Laurent Gbagbo called for air strikes against the rebels. Two days later, an Ivorian Sukhoi Su-25 warplane mistakenly bombed a French military base near Bouake, killing nine French soldiers and an American aid worker. After the attack the French government began to withdraw its support for the Ivorian central government and in retaliation for the attack, destroyed most of the remaining planes in the Ivorian Air Force.” (<https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/first-ivorian-civil-war-2002-2007/>)

As Aboudia Abdoulaye Diarrassouba said, there was a lot of conflict and fear in the entire country. I used the pink shapes to show his willingness to paint and to get his art out there. Some of the pink shapes overlap the orange shapes, but overall the orange shapes overpower almost the entire piece. I did this because I want to show the pain and fear that he mentioned. War is never pretty or easy and I wanted to show that in the orange shapes taking over everything but also pushing everything out causing confusion and disruption.

According to Forbes the country's civil war affected many things unrelated to the war during and after the war. From cocoa prices, foreign workers, remittances, reconfigured trade, diminishing markets, criminal activity, and food security. I'm sure that these things also affected his artwork even after the war.

However, Aboudia Abdoulaye Diarrassouba didn't just paint the civil war. "My work is similar to that of a journalist writing an article: I was simply describing a situation, in order to create a record of my country's recent history. But even before the crisis I worked on similar themes, childhood in the streets, poorness, child soldiers. I'm an ambassador of the children - they do writings on the walls, their wishes, their fears, I'm doing the same on my canvas. I'm like a megaphone for these children."

He has seen the pain of war but also the pain that the children in his country face everyday. Almost similar to how Peju Alatise sees the poor education in Nigeria.

I used the light purple shapes to show the children who are suffering and who are in poverty. The green lines represent the child-soldiers and the white space represents all the empty children who have suffered in the Ivory Coast and in Africa in general. Seeing the civil war and the pain that so many children face is what shapes Aboudia Abdoulaye Diarrassouba's art. He mostly makes his work off of his experiences and these are the experiences that he has. However, he also understands that he has a platform and a voice to go with his experiences. That is why he speaks out for the people who couldn't in the war and for the children who are too young or are not able to speak out for themselves.

Lastly, on the far right I have the country of Mozambique. Gonçalo Mabunda is a very interesting artist because he makes his sculptures from old war weapons. Things like grenades, bullets, helmets and more.

He says, "Trying to represent each [person] who died with this same material ... If we destroy the weapons, the same weapon's not going to kill any more." (That was on his artistic mission)" Gonçalo Mabunda makes art because he understands the brutality

of war. He is also an anti-war activist. Because of his work there have been thousands of weapon pieces found.

There is not a lot of research or information on who he was as a person, but I suspect that he was in support of Pan-Africanism. According to the American Historical Association, "Although the end of colonialism occurred shortly after the end of World War II, it would be a mistake to assume that the calls for independence by Africans began in the aftermath of the defeat of Nazi Germany and its racism. Demands to liberate Africa from colonial status began at least as early as the end of World War I and the Versailles Peace Treaty. That treaty was based on the ideal of self-determination--the belief that people should decide their own form of government and that world peace hinged, at least in part, on the principle that no people should be ruled by an "outside" group (one not of the ethnic background of the citizenry itself).

Pan-Africanism was the attempt to create a sense of brotherhood and collaboration among all people of African descent whether they lived inside or outside of Africa. The themes raised in this excerpt connect to the aspirations of people, the values of European culture, and the world of African colonies."

Pan-Africanism is the belief that the people who are African or who come African descent should be one. They should not be fighting each other and definitely not killing each other. Pan-Africanism is also an entire movement. There is a Pan-African flag, colors, and a symbol. Even some of the movements here in America like the Black Lives Matter movement that are inspired by the Pan-Africanism movement.

I used the orange in the background to represent war just like I did in the Ivory Coast. I used a human-like figure with an orange star shape on its chest in the country to represent the countless number of people who have been tragically affected by war.

The shape that I used was inspired by Henri Matisse. (He is not African or related to Gonçalo Mabunda.)

The green shapes represent Gonçalo Mabunda's anti-war activism. The green shows that we can prosper and grow without war. We do not need to kill one another to be better or to be successful. The light brown stripes represent all the ways that Gonçalo Mabunda has positively affected the world. His work has been shown in various museums, and I think that it should be showcased more. He recognizes just how detrimental war is and he uses his talents and gifts to advocate for a peaceful world.