

DESIGN AND AESTHETICS IN CARNIVAL ARTS: A STUDY OF FUOYE THEATRE AND MEDIA ARTS 2025 CARNIVAL OF PLAYS.

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Abstract

Design and aesthetics are essential artistic elements of carnival arts globally. This study critically explores the roles that design and aesthetics play in the execution of the FUOYE Theatre and Media Arts 2025 carnival of plays, examining carnival arts beyond the planning and performance stages. It highlights the importance of design and aesthetics embedded in costumes, makeup, and float designs. Using a qualitative participatory observation method, the study employs an autoethnographic qualitative research approach and Mikhail Bakhtin's carnival theory as the theoretical framework. The study reveals that design and aesthetics in carnival arts not only showcase artistic beauty but also enhance carnival spectacles, audience engagement, and in-depth meaning creation. This research emphasizes the importance of aesthetically considered design as a crucial element in carnival arts, whereby meaning is conveyed beyond performance and stimulates audience engagement and appreciation. The findings contribute to an in-depth understanding of how design and aesthetics operate in carnival arts and how they can enrich cultural experiences.

Keywords: Design, Aesthetics, Carnival Arts, FUOYE, Carnival of Plays

Introduction

Design and aesthetics are crucial elements of carnival arts, which define the visual and emotional attractiveness of a performance to an audience. The FUOYE Theatre and Media Arts 2025 carnival of plays, a vibrant, participatory, and inclusive exhibition of art and culture across the FUOYE campus, offers a rich environment to explore the role of design and aesthetics. This study underscores the important roles that an aesthetically considered design (costume, make-up, and floats) plays in carnival performances, focusing on the FUOYE Theatre and Media Arts 2025 carnival of plays. Furthermore, the study highlights design and aesthetics as key elements in conveying the underlying meanings embedded in carnival performances while also fostering audience engagement and appreciation. By examining the relationship between design (costume, make-up, and floats), aesthetics, and performance, this study is aimed at contributing to a rich understanding of the significance of carnival arts.

Methodology

This study employs an autoethnographic qualitative research approach, combining autobiography and ethnography, involving the researcher's active participation in the costume, make-up, floats design, and carnival procession in the FUOYE Theatre and Media Arts Carnival of Plays 2025 while reflecting on their personal experiences to explore broader social and cultural phenomena, such as cultural identity and community engagement. Primary data are derived from firsthand involvement in carnival preparation and the procession, which includes documented media (photographs, videos, and a documented departmental catalogue), while secondary data include relevant books, journal articles, and online resources that support the study's objectives.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival, integrating an autoethnographic qualitative research approach for data analysis. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival, as elucidated in *Rabelais and His World* (1965) and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929, reworked 1963), is a robust theoretical model for the study of FUOYE Theatre and Media Arts Carnival of Plays 2025 with an autoethnographic qualitative research approach. This response underscores the major concepts of Bakhtin's theory, how they have been applied in the case of the FUOYE Theatre and Media Arts Carnival of April 3, 2025, at Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Oye-Ekiti campus, the inclusion of autoethnography in researching the carnival, and a conclusion on how relevant the theory is, with reference to the analysis.

The theory model conceptualizes carnival art as a temporary space for the suspension of societal norms and hierarchies, fostering subversive, communal, and playful engagement. Importantly, the carnivalesque in the model is characterized by the suspension of hierarchies, where social distinctions like class or status are dissolved, and equality among participants. Laughter, described as universal and ambivalent, while masks and costumes allow participants to adopt alternative identities, symbolizing transformation during festive events.

Application of Mikhail Bakhtin's Theory of Carnival to FUOYE TMA Carnival of Plays 2025

The FUOYE TMA carnival of Plays 2025, a vibrant, Participatory, and street audience engagement parade promoting a two-week festival of theatrical performances, harnessed Bakhtin's

carnavalesque principles. The carnival fosters engagement by uniting students, lecturers, and the University management leaders in a shared celebration, with students leading performances and creative designs, temporarily equalizing roles. Laughter and humor were evident in the festive atmosphere, with dances and skits evoking smiles and cheers from the onlookers, aligning with Bakhtin's liberating laughter. Costumes, make-up, and float designs aided meaning, color, while representing cultural figures (e.g., Igbo motifs in Ebubedike play icon) during the carnival procession.

The carnival's multicultural aesthetics, incorporating Yoruba, Igbo, and other Nigerian traditions, embodied polyphony, allowing diverse cultural voices to coexist as seen in (Bakhtin, 1984b). As a chronotope, the carnival transformed the Oye-Ekiti campus into a festive space on April 3, 2025, suspending academic routines within the Department of Theatre and Media Arts for creative expression. These elements recognize the role of carnival as a subversive yet regenerative cultural event.

In conclusion, Bakhtin's carnival theory serves as a powerful framework for an autoethnographic study of the FUOYE Theatre and Media Arts Carnival of Plays 2025, highlighting its role as a catalyst for subversion, cultural expression, and communal renewal. The application of Bakhtin's framework unfolds how FUOYE Theatre and Media Arts 2025 carnival of plays fosters cultural identity, students' creative talent, and community engagement. Importantly, the participation of the students, lecturers, and researchers in design (costumes, make-up, and floats) or performance provides a lens to examine the cultural and aesthetic dynamics of the carnival and the representation of Nigerian traditions, aligning with Bakhtin's concepts. This approach not only enriches understanding of the FUOYE Theatre and Media Arts Carnival but also demonstrates the relevance of Bakhtin's theory to contemporary African cultural events.

FUOYE TMA Carnival: An Overview

The Federal University Oye-Ekiti, established in 2011, has a Department of Theatre and Media Arts within its Faculty of Arts, with a focus on fostering adequate learning and training for students in the rudiments and practice of choreography, performance aesthetics, and other aspects of Theatre Arts.

FUOYE TMA carnival of plays emerged in 2024 as a key initiative of the then Head of Department, Dr. Tosin Kooshima Tume (A senior Lecturer and an award-winning playwright) as a vehicle to promote practical theatre education, combining public performances and academic projects.

FUOYE Theatre and Media Arts carnival of plays started in the Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Faculty of Arts, on 15 May 2024 at FUOYE's Oye main campus. The carnival is a vibrant, participatory, and inclusive exhibition of theatrical performance, students' creativity, and cultural dynamism, with the engagement of lecturers in the department and the entire University community. The carnival reflects FUOYE's commitment to advancing Arts and culture, aligning with the University's broader mission of innovation and transformation.

FUOYE TMA carnival of plays started as a prelude to showcase the performance of 10 selected dramatic texts by the final-year students as their respective project performance plays, alongside practical production workshops for the lower-level students under the supervision of lecturers in 2024. The carnival, which started in 2024, has now emerged as an annual event in the department and the entire University community to celebrate students' academic, creative, and cultural prowess.

FUOYE Theatre and Media Arts Carnival of Plays 2025: An Overview

FUOYE TMA carnival of plays, organized by the Department of Theatre and Media Arts (TMA) at Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE), as an annual continuation of the tremendous success of the 2024 carnival, an initiative of the then Head of Department Dr Tosin Kooshima Tume, is a vibrant exhibition of artistry and cultural dynamics in Arts held on 3 April, 2025 at the FUOYE campus. This annual carnival is a highlight of the department activities, showcasing the creative talent of students (lower-level, final year, and Postgraduate) in costume, make-up, and float design in theatrical performances while engaging the university community in a celebration of the Arts.

The 2025 FUOYE Theatre and Media Arts carnival was directed by Dr Tosin Kooshima Tume (Head of Department) and coordinated by Emmanuel Godwin Kalu (2024 Postgraduate Class Representative), and other lecturers in the department. The event served as a prelude to announcing the series of theatrical performances by the final-year and the lower-level students scheduled for April 7 to April 17, 2025, featuring two performances daily at 12:00PM and 2:00 PM respectively

in FUOYE Arts Theatre. The carnival aimed to promote the upcoming plays, ticket sales, and foster community engagement with support from brands and students through the festival parade.

The 2025 carnival features students and lecturers dressed in colorful costumes representing theatrical icons, abstractly designed costumes from nature, recycled materials, and well-constructed group floats for the carnival parade. The event includes dance performances, distribution of flyers advertising the upcoming festival of plays, and ticket sales to prospective audiences.

The 2025 carnival of plays achieved a tremendously rich cultural identity, drawing cheers and participation from the University community. Finally, the carnival underscores Nigeria's rich cultural heritage with performances, costumes, props, and floats while reflecting diverse ethnic groups. Importantly, the carnival aligns with the Department of Theatre and Media Arts (FUOYE) goals of fostering cultural awareness and artistic expression as seen in previous departmental events like the 2023 induction ceremony, which soared beyond a Yoruba traditional point of view to embrace Nigeria's multiculturalism.

Design and Aesthetic in FUOYE TMA Carnival of Plays 2025

The FUOYE TMA Carnival of Plays 2025 directed by Dr. Tosin Kooshima Tume and coordinated by Emmanuel Godwin Kalu (2024 Postgraduate Class Representative), and other lecturers in the department, held on April 3, 2025, at Federal University Oye-Ekiti's main campus, was a vibrant, participatory showcase of theatrical artistry, with design elements such as costume, make-up, and floats playing a vital role in its aesthetic appeal. Organized by the Department of Theatre and Media Arts (TMA), the carnival served as a promotional street procession for a two weeks festival of plays scheduled (April 7–17, 2025) and was marked by colorful displays, cultural expressions, and creative designs that engaged the university community.

John Iwuh, in his assertion, posits:

Carnivals are essentially processional in nature through a conglomeration of activities, involving various forms of display and theatrical expressions. A carnival is an embodiment of color, versatility, and spontaneity of exuberant images in action (108).

Design in a carnival is not merely decorative; it's an integrated art process that conveys meaning, tells stories, and preserves cultural heritage. The process primarily functions at the level of costumes, make-up, and floats, and uses visual elements as a means of communicating a chosen theme to the audience. Importantly, design and aesthetics are one of the most valuable elements of theatrical and artistic appealing form display that must be properly considered for any carnival preparation, as both elements emphasize meaning, cultural norms beyond the selected theme of the carnival.

Costume Design

Costumes as an element of FUOYE Theatre and Media Arts 2025 carnival of plays are characterized as “colorful” and designed to represent theatrical icons, cultural figures, or characters from the upcoming plays of each group. Students and lecturers donned outfits that reflected Nigeria’s rich cultural heritage, likely incorporating traditional elements from Yoruba, Igbo, and other ethnic traditions, while some of the Abstract costumes were made from recycled objects and things from nature, given the department’s emphasis on multicultural and innovative representation. Bakare asserts that in any carnival, fabrics, colors, and accessories make bold statements and interpret the theme. Therefore, costume design is crucial, as it brings meaning and vitality to the celebration (130).

The 2025 carnival costumes also served the purpose of promoting the festival of plays that was to be held in the University. The colors served the purpose of attracting attention, and they also beautified the carnival festive life. The carnival design will combine the use of local textile materials (eg, Ankara, Adire) with dramatic elements (e.g., oversized forms, vibrant colors) and the use of recyclable materials. The students under the supervision of Mr. Emmanuel Godwin Kalu (2024 Postgraduate Class Representative) handled the entire process to further enhance the practice of inclusiveness in the TMA department curriculum in costume making. The costumes were colorful and provided a spectacle, which the crowd cheered for. They also served as proof that the department is able to combine traditional, eco-friendly objects with modern theatrical technology.

Make-Up Design

Carnival makeup is more than just a cosmetic adornment; it's a vibrant expression of cultural identity and tradition. Through bold colors, intricate designs, and the incorporation of gems and glitter, participants celebrate their creativity and honor centuries of history and resilience (www.culturismag.com).

FUOYE Theatre and Media Arts 2025 carnival of plays transcends beyond aesthetic appeal, serving as a celebration of cultures, themes, and traditions. Carnival makeup serves as a significant symbol of cultural pride and identity. The carnival make-up complemented the costumes, enhancing character portrayal, cultural identity, and adding to the festive theatricality and aesthetic appeals. They were a series of cultural and fantasy make-up on the faces of students and lecturers of the department to further enhance the ambiance of the carnival. The Make-up designs include vibrant colors, tribal patterns, fantasy face painting, or stylized designs to align with the cultural themes of the carnival.

Aesthetically, the 2025 carnival of plays' make-up designs enhanced the visual storytelling, making characters more recognizable and adding depth to the carnival's cultural and theatrical narrative. It contributed to the overall vibrancy, ensuring performers stood out in the open-air setting.

Floats Design and Construction

Floats are decorative platforms built in a vehicle, like a truck or towed, serving as three-dimensional wheel figures designed to aesthetically complement the carnival procession, showcasing thematic designs related to the plays or Nigerian culture. The 2025 carnival of plays floats were designed by Theatre and Media Arts students with the exclusive supervision of Mr. Emmanuel Godwin Kalu (2024 Postgraduate Class Representative), incorporating vibrant colors, cultural symbols, and theatrical elements. For example, a float for OYA (goddess of the whirlwind) featured designs of a Yoruba goddess environment or Yoruba cultural motifs. The Floats served as moving stages, amplifying the carnival's visibility and creating a focal point for the procession. It aided grandeur, making the festive atmosphere more memorable and engaging for the FUOYE community.

Findings of the Study

The study, "DESIGN AND AESTHETIC IN CARNIVAL ARTS: A STUDY OF FUOYE THEATRE AND MEDIA ARTS 2025," critically explores the role of design and aesthetics in the 2025 Carnival of Plays. According to the study, design and aesthetics not only depict artistic beauty but also support carnival spectacles, audience participation, and meaning while executing the arts. It underscores the importance of aesthetically considered design as a critical element in carnival arts, which can convey meaning beyond the performance itself and create audience appreciation. Findings provide greater understanding of how such factors work in carnival arts and can enrich cultural experiences and appreciation.

Gap Covered

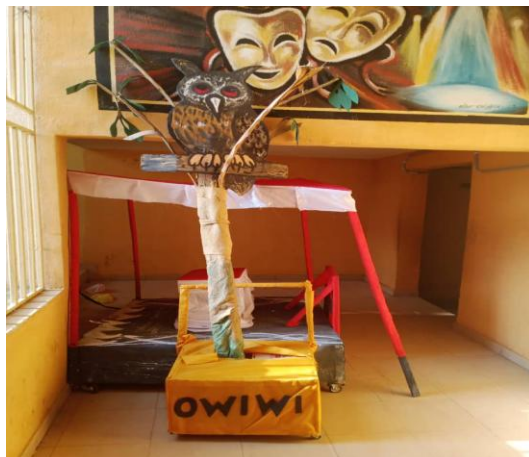
The study bridges the gap by examining carnival arts not only outside the planning and performance stages but also with a focus on design and aesthetic value in costumes, make-up, and float designs. It also demonstrates the relevance of Mikhail Bakhtin's carnival theory to contemporary African cultural festivals. The study enhances the comprehension of carnival arts through an examination of the relationship between design (costumes, make-up, and floats), aesthetics, and performance in FUOYE THEATRE AND MEDIA ARTS 2025 CARNIVAL OF PLAYS.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The focal point of this paper has been the attempt to present design and aesthetics as a crucial element in interpreting the theme of a carnival, as exemplified in FUOYE TMA 2025 carnival of plays. By leveraging the aesthetically designed carnival costumes, floats, and individual face painting, the theme of the carnival was effectively conveyed while representing and serving as an advert for the 10 different plays that will be produced in the festival of plays. This paper recommends that, as a carnival designer, your costumes, floats, and face painting must be relevant and unique. He/she must familiarize him/herself with the carnival's theme, objectives, and message to create designs that align with the overall carnival concept. Importantly, he/she must understand the need to gather references from various sources, including cultural heritage, mythology, and contemporary art, to inspire innovative designs.

The researcher hereby concludes that design and aesthetics in carnival art not only showcase artistic beauty but also enhance carnival spectacles, audience engagement, and in-depth meaning creation. Therefore, design and aesthetics must be effectively considered to enhance the visual appeal of a carnival art while maintaining the overall concept of the carnival. The above findings and recommendations will help carnival designers create effective, visually stunning, meaningful costumes, floats, and face painting that will pass and resonate with the carnival theme message to the spectators before drama, dance, or music is displayed, and enhance the overall carnival or event experience.

Floats Design for FUOYE TMA Carnival 2025





Abstract Costume Design for FUOYE TMA Carnival 2025







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