

Full Length Research Paper

Visual illustration using printmaking as a medium: A case study of coronation ceremonies of kings among the Yoruba of South West Nigeria

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Coronation ceremonies are traditional rites to formally install kings to the throne of their forefathers as community leaders who are symbol of authority between their people and the outside world. The funfairs that accompany these ceremonies are worth documenting using printmaking as a vehicle of visual and historical expression. The prints represented in this paper are expression of myths and mythologies demonstrating African culture, which stands out as sacred. This discourse also relies on oral testimonies, written and archival documents. The materials used for the execution of the prints are rubber, wood, plate, offset printing inks and glass, which records the events as an alternative to the use of photographic documentation.

Key words: Coronation ceremony, kingship, mythology in prints, cultural expression.

INTRODUCTION

Coronation ceremonies within the royal court in Africa are well cherished traditional activities to celebrate acceptability of an individual to the throne of traditional ruler ship of a community of people. The kings popularly referred to in the Yoruba kingdom as “*oba alaye*” or “*kabiyesi*” are the custodian of the people’s authority and custom. The custom and behaviours of different ethnic society towards coronation ceremony within the South Western Nigeria was under study and interpreted in printmaking as unique media of communication different from the traditional use of photography.

The use of printmaking was explored to tell the stories of coronation ceremonies in Yoruba traditional societies as a mode of production and reception of public art. It is an artwork and its encounter with the audience was that which the prints attempt to represent within the dialogue on changing contest and local history (Oladumiye, 1999). The project is meant to keep public artwork alive through either first hand or second hand testimonies. One of the

sacred customs of the Yoruba’s is the coronation of the kings which is shrouded in mystery and the rite of performance is made synonymous with the leadership, which has its origin in Ile-Ife; the ancestral home of the Yoruba’s. The divinity and royalty of this institution was further emphasized and applauded by both Ojo (1996) and Lloyd (1960) and Ojigbo (1971) especially the fame, power and integrity of the traditional process. This paper further explained the methodology adopted at making the prints and the result analysed before a conclusion was drawn.

Alade (1950) states that kings are deity, a negligible shade lower than a high ranking angel. They are referred to as the death lieutenant of God; terror personified and the supreme judge who deals ruthlessly with bad citizen. They are termed powerful spirits who are not looked up to directly in the eyes by their subjects for fear of being harassed. It is believed that the kings are the legitimate representation of their kingdoms (Adepegba, 1995). The

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activities as itemised below:

1. As the father of all in the community, he is superintending over irrespective of religion, social status and gender inclinations.
2. As the custodian of the people's culture, he oversees the traditional festivals such as yam festival, masquerade festival etcetera.
3. He is the judge that is highly respected to resolve conflicts among his subjects without giving room for appeal and the chief security officer of his domain.
4. He confers chieftaincy title to deserving subjects within his community who show exception to community service and human development.

Statement of the problem

A lot of research had been carried out on the traditional institutions in Nigeria with highlight on the regional peculiarities as influenced by culture and religion. It was observed that printmaking had been engaged in by a lot of artists in Nigeria, but there seems not to be many literatures that attempts to research into the expression of printmaking with scientific approach in presentation, a gap this study attempts to fill.

Significance of this study

The introduction of some mass communication media, such as Television, Video, internet has corrupt once traditional culture so much that youth find it difficult to give a vivid account of important cultural activities in their local communities as against foreign music and football. This essay becomes very imperative as an attempt to return Nigerians back to their roots using printmaking, which may readily catch attention better than conventional photographs. It should further document the processes of ritual ceremony at installation of Kings in Yoruba South West, Nigeria (Appendix 1).

Definition of terms

Printmaking: This is an artistic design and manufacture of prints as woodcut or silk-screens.

Relief: Is about sculpture consisting of shapes carved on a surface so as to stand out from the surrounding background.

Mix Media: Is way of using different materials to accomplish a particular design in form of a unit.

Coronation: Is a ceremony marking the investiture of a king has the following social cultural and monarchical

monarch or their consort with regal power, specifically involving the placement of a crown upon his or her head and the preservation of other items regalia.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted both historical and quasi experimental design method. The primary data was collected from oral testimonies and observations made from visit to places, which include the following:

1. The Nigerian Chieftaincy and Kingship affairs within the States located in the South Western Nigeria;
2. The National Arts and Cultural Centres in custody of written and archival documents.

Secondary data was collected from previous literary materials on the subject and other sources relied upon were the print media, photographs and video clips taken from agencies that have direct link with culture and chieftaincy affairs

Coronation ceremonies and material analysis

Printmaking is basically a creative process of obtaining a graphical impressions, transform in ink or paint in block, plate or mesh on a two dimensional surface. It is usually referred to as a creative reprographics medium. In spite of the fact that printmaking production had been hindered by dearth of materials for its practice in Nigeria, this study made use of various printmaking media to illustrate coronation of kings. Using the following medium:

- i. Relief (wood/Surface)
- ii. Intaglio
- iii. Serigraphy
- iv. Etching and
- v. Monographic prints (glass)

All the above media were used to present variety of ideas and complex emotions as the artist prints indicate. Both mechanical and manual processes were adopted for the mass production of stereotyped designs as discussed below in the story line through the first print titled "Divination" to the last titled "Judgement".

RESULTS AND VISUAL ANALYSES

The execution of Plates 1 to 14 was carried out under a studio condition and the use of colour was carefully selected to create harmony, even when some plates (6, 9 and 11) were in mixed media with combination of woodcut, rubber plate, monographic glass and serigraphic prints. This project attempted achieving some level of balance in the use of space, contrast in colour combination to bring out highlights and creation of emotion as indicated in Plates 3, 8 and 14. This work has been motivated by works of great printmakers like Bruce Onabrakpeya, Bankole Ojo, David Dale, Moses Unoka, Olaniyi Ojo and Jacob Afolabi. Oladumiye (2004) a student of Irein Wangboje (1930 to 1998) expresses how



Plate 1. Consultation of the oracle.

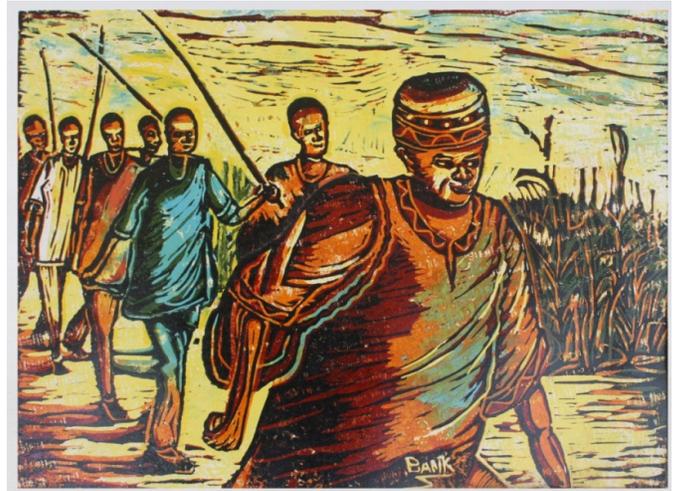


Plate 3. Canning from the Farm.

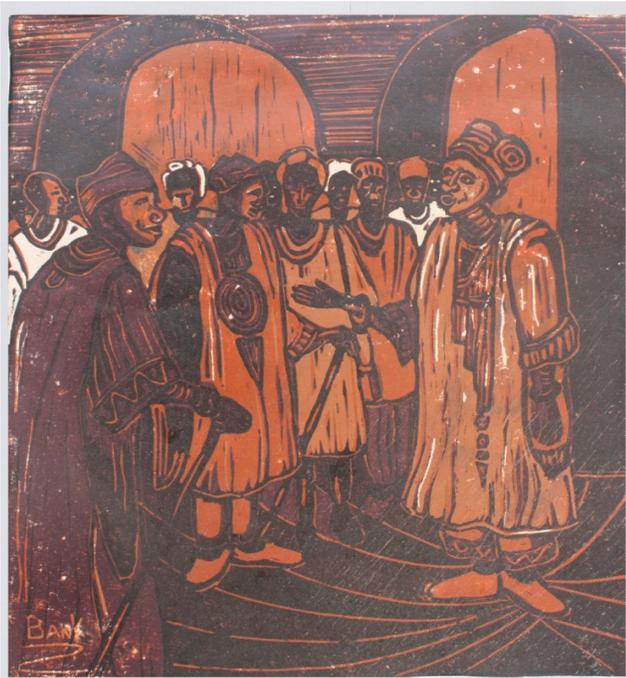


Plate 2. Informing the rightful man to the throne after divine revelation.

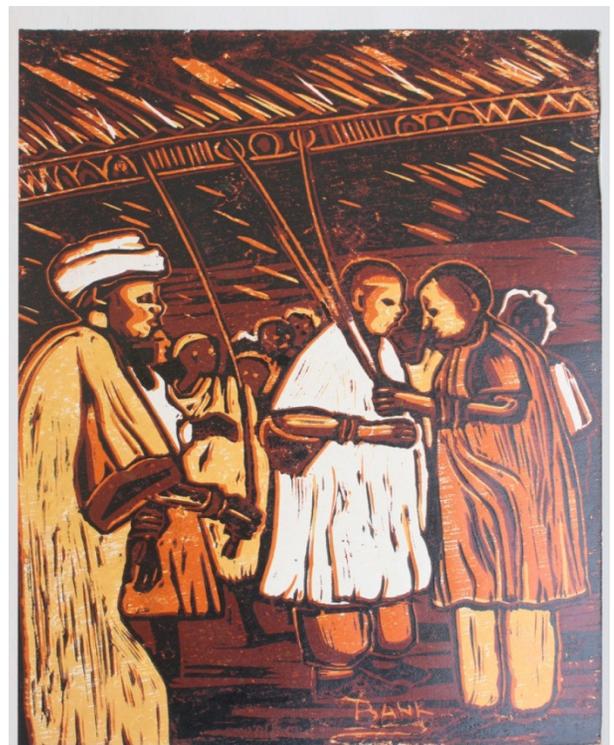


Plate 4. Demonstration of Kingship before installation.

his style of printmaking has been greatly influence by his article on Wangboje, The Paragon of Printmaking

Technique and Creator of Ori-Olokun Experimental Workshop. He also borrowed from the figures of Onabrakpeya prints, which are vertically and horizontally arranged showing lyricism, which goes beyond the immediate reach and casual viewer.



Plate 5. Transferring of generational authority.

Divination

The *Ifa* oracle (traditional consulting deity) has a lot of role to play in the selection of a king in Yoruba land. Having obtained necessary information about the candidates, a stone or cowries is given a special marking for each candidate. The chief in charge will whisper the name of the candidate to the stones or cowries, all of which are then handed over to the heads of *Ifa* priest who will consult the oracle. After careful examination he hands over the stone or cowry, which promises to be most potent to the community, the name of the person is then announced by the high chief.

This print illustrates the duty of *Ifa* Oracle in the coronation of a new king. The *Ifa* Oracle has the ability to discover things to come and to uncover past event and secrets. The instruments used to carry out divination are made of shells of some hard nuts, or seeds tied in four rows of four shells each. These are found on the tray of the *Ifa* priest as expressed in the print executed in rubber media in Plate 1.

Information

The information in coronation of Kings involves the announcement by the high chief of the name of the candidate, which *Ifa* has selected to be the king through her divinations (Plate 2). After the announcement of the king elected, he is immediately taken to the farm for

subsequent coronation rituals. After the *Ifa* oracle had been consulted the rightful man to the throne is picked, the man picked would be informed and he would leave the town to a designated farm.

Arrival

After getting to the farm, he is arrested by the other chiefs waiting for him to be given thorough caning as one of the rites of performance; He is thereafter escorted back to the High Chief's palace where the next ritual ceremony is carried out.

A sunny afternoon was created in this print with absolute concentration on those following the king with canes conspicuously highlighted. The cast shadow of the people on the ground was an indicating of a sunny day, while the prospective king was seen in the front carrying his bags with so much seriousness expressed on his face. This selected person to the throne was been humiliated without minding his well to do status before he was elected, because they know that after few days' time they will be his subjects; This means that they must prostrate for him, obey his laws and order without question.

Arrival rite

After the King must have been empowered with various kinds of supernatural power, he had to show it by demonstrating some of them before his installation (Plate 4). The king is believed to be given the specially preserved heart of his predecessor to eat, thereby taking over completely the dynasty of the previous kings. It is therefore manifested on him as one being, one spirit and father of the kingdom. He had now become transformed beyond an ordinary man. The new king has the capacity of calling upon his forefathers while conducting the affairs of his divine office.

Eating of the heart

The King is seen in white garment holding the heart of the former king in his hand while the chief priest is looking at him performing this rite (Plate 5). In front of them is the pot inside where the heart was being kept. The colours used for the visual are cool and the two men in the print were in semi-circle. This is to show a sense of unity between them. The chief priest have horns of bulls in his hands called *Ase*, one of the powers given to the king immediately after eating the heart of its predecessor is known as *Okan* in Yoruba language. While he is eating

the heart of his predecessor, every other person will prostrate in submission and shout in unison by saying "may the king live". As from that time, he becomes recognized as the rightful king to the sacred throne.

Destiny

The destiny is tested here by trying the Kings faith and asking him to choose one out of the items kept in the basket, which would determine his reigns as the king of the town. That is, salt, honey, pepper, gun, cutlass and snail. Calabash of salt and honey are pointing to pleasant governance and prosperous administration accompanied with prosperity in the town. The choice of pepper, cutlass, gun predicts evil reign, which might be associated with war, bad omen, while Snail is meant for peace in the town.

Plate 6 depicts two calabashes placed on a pedestal decorated with traditional motifs. On the pedestal are a gun and a cutlass, one of the calabashes is in the hand of the Oba. These materials with the contents inside them represent destiny in Yoruba mythology.

The composition represents the Yoruba cultural motifs, which form the background of the pictures. The relationship between the calabashes, the gun and the cutlass with the floor and the pedestal appears poetic and it arouses the viewers' imagination towards a spiritual symbolism. The high point of the coronation ceremonies is the climbing of the mound with his eldest daughter who will be crowned along with him. The eldest daughter would in future act as regent whenever her father passes away and this necessitated her crowning. The climbing of the mound signifies the real transformation and resurrection from an ordinary being to a deity.

Crowning the king

Plate 6, 7, 8 and 9 addresses the issue of coronation. In this composition titled crowning the king, the king was sitting on a royal throne, about to be crowned by the king makers. At the left and right hand side of the background are crowd watching the ceremony at a distance (Plate 7). In this scene there was a sensation of a fullness of life as depicted by the way the king is sitting patiently, in an implacable business atmosphere. An immense dignity is also shown through the reflection of light from the throne to the king.

The congregation

The congregation is made up of the people in the town during the coronations that came around to celebrate with

the newly crowned king, all the chiefs and the members of the town (Plate 8).

This print invigorates a vibrant and joyful atmosphere indicating visibly bright evening. The combination of sense of light with a feeling for the weight of the figure was carefully explored. The visual sensation of colours and the light harmony is reflected on the crowd who are in a dancing procession with the king as shown in the print. This confirms that the African Kings are treated as flamboyant people.

Instrument of power

The instrument of power and authority are the crown and the bead, which depict the most important instruments of power in the Yoruba race.

These two symbols or objects of king's authorities are set against a background of a human silhouette. The crown which has a predominantly brown background is accompanied with numerous designs of light brown background, designs in light brown and yellow. The crown is a veiled type and surrounded with beads. Beads have always been prominent in the regalia of the king and this custom of wearing masses of beads still persists. Ceremonial beads are worn in multi rows; some close to the neck, while others extends down to the navel (Plate 9).

Instrument of office

Crowns of various styles have long been an important part of the king's costume. There are crowns like pill-boxes; covered with rows of large beads and those like tasa shaped crown or brimless tongs. Usually an upstanding emblem arises from centre, front or top of the crown. This denotes the importance of the wearer (Plate 10).

Depending on wealth of the king, a royal family can own many crowns of different shapes. Some of these may be modern and other antiquity. As represented in the print, many crowns are completely covered with ancient coral beads. The crown in the picture is called layer type of crown. It is fully a beaded crown rendered in brisk red against a dark background. Under it is the cow's tail referred to as *irukere* in Yoruba language, which is usually spotless white. This symbolizes peace and grace. It is an important dress regalia, which the king carries at all time. Peter and Christine (2006) outlined guides on print making provided a significant insight into the various production techniques adopted for these prints. This combination of different media, which brings one design technique on top of the other as exhibited on this print,



Plate 6. Determination of Destiny.



Plate 7. Investiture with regal power.

makes identification of a particular method somewhat difficult.

Staff of authority

The beaded staffs of authority or sceptre are always in custody of the chief messenger at any proceedings. It is to emphasize the authority of the king. The print was rendered in light brown with the beads being shown on the staff (Plate 11). The medium of execution is rubber sheets.

Celebration of power

Plate 12 depicted the king sitting on his throne. The palace was built with ancient pillars with traditional motifs and around the top of the throne is adorned with beautiful motifs. The king is seen as the father of all and the representative of the gods on earth. In the Yoruba culture, respect for the king is highly elaborate and cherished. Here the women generally kneel down for the king as a support while men prostrate for the king as mark of respect as shown in plate 12A and B.

The three elders

Plate 13 was rendered in wood cut relief. The three elders have only two legs depicted with round motifs showing oneness. The print is decorated with African traditional motif. At the background of this picture is the street light pointing to the city been administered.

Clarion call

The king's trumpeter is a character and a separate entity in the administration of the Kings. In the morning the trumpeter will blow to greet the king and to alert the king's house-hold that another day has commenced. In the afternoon and in the evening the sound of his trumpeter is always being heard in the kingdom by everybody. Plate 14 depicted African style of dressing, the trumpeter's dress was adorned with traditional motifs. The motifs show the beauty in African Culture especially African dressings. The trumpeter is wearing special dress adorned with traditional man motifs showing the richness of African tradition.

It is an evening scene showing the sun set and the evening transparency being exhibited in the print. The print was exhibited in wood cut and relief. This combination that brings one design technique on top of

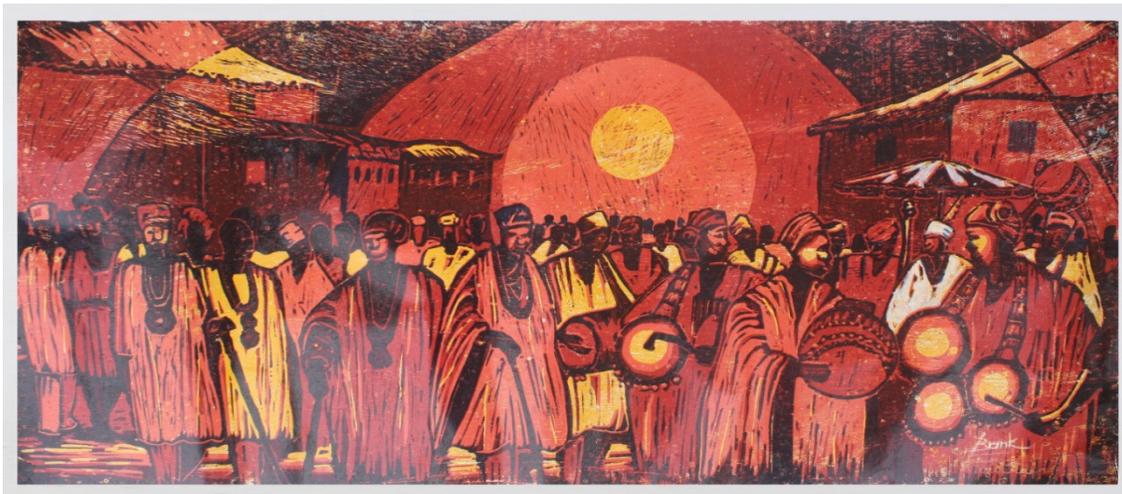


Plate 8. Coronation ceremony accompanied by drumming.

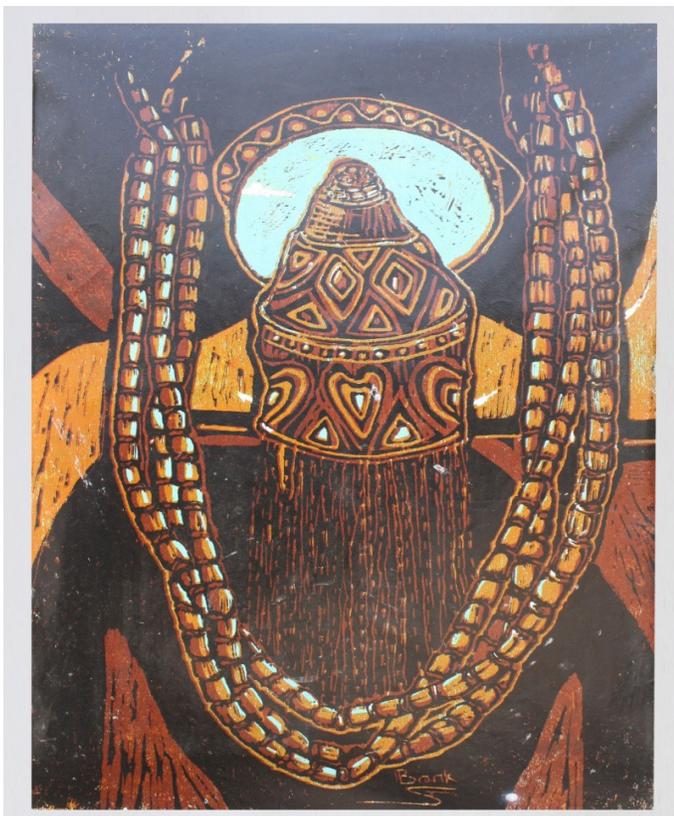


Plate 9. The Symbol of Power (The Crown and the Bead).



Plate 10. Symbol of Office.

the other makes identification of a particular method

somewhat difficult. Kayode and Ogunwole (2010)



Plate 11. Symbol of Authority.



Plate 12B. Women paying tribute to the new king.



Plate 12A. Men paying tribute to the new king.



Plate 13. Demonstrating the unity of the Elders.

express the quantitative analysis of some Nigerian wood



Plate 14. The King's Trumpeter.



Plate 15: Pronouncing Judgement.

species as local material in the execution of this indigenous printmaking.

The judgement

Among the monarchical activities of the King is delivery of Judgement. He is seen as the Chief Judge within the

jurisdiction of his authority. Those who were accused of robbery, kidnapping, murder, possessing of dangerous medicine and practice witchcraft were brought to the king in his palace for judgement. In an attempt to maintain security and avoid jungle justice from the perceived aggrieved people in the community, his intervention is sort as quickly as possible (Plate 15).

DISCUSSION

Coronation in Yoruba land is more seriously controlled by the king-makers in conjunction with the *Ifa* Oracles. The expression of the process in the print made the cutting and illustrative effort cumbersome and time consuming. This vigour was gone through so that the original intent is not lost. The role of *Ifa* oracle in contemporary times is more of theory than in practise. Some of the Yoruba kings are now being elected without consultation of *Ifa* priests. The monarchical system of coronation is no more as thoroughly observed in the selection of a new king as it was in the olden days. The Yoruba kingship and monarch is a representative system considered as a constitutional monarch (Lloyd, 1960). This is to say that Yoruba political system is termed to be representative of the past kings, which can only be determined through the *Ifa* divination, which may have been set aside by some Yoruba communities in selection of new kings. Afolabi (1967) said that, in the normal circumstances not more than one king rule over a Yoruba town at a particular time and the king has to pass through the nomination of *Ifa* divination.

Conclusion

Bruce Onabrakyea, a pioneer printmaker in Nigeria has emphasized that printmaking is no doubt one of the most difficult aspects of visual art, yet Nigerians still produce prints that are aesthetically pleasing and highly technical as demonstrated in these previously discussed prints with thematic expression of coronation ceremonies in south-western Nigeria (Appendix). The prints are treated in form of historical survey of African arts and culture by creative artists working in the field of visual art.

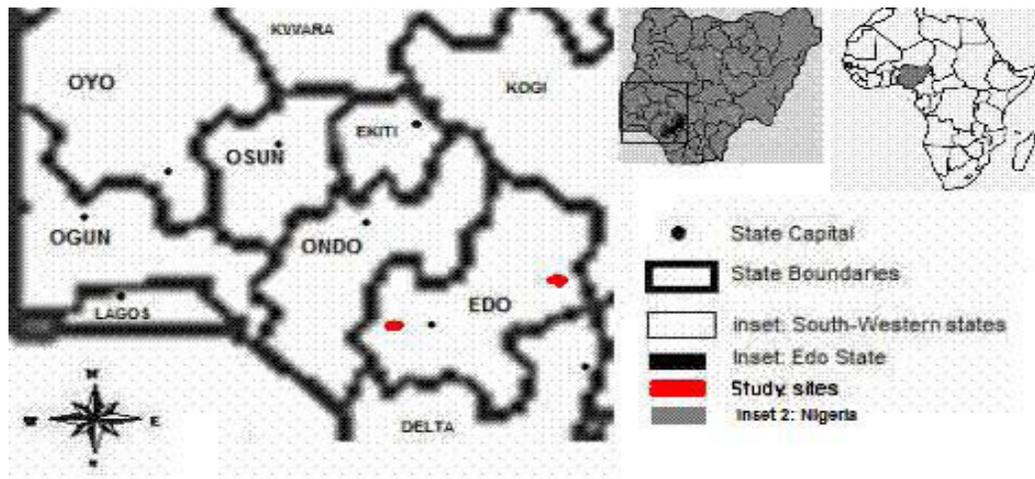
RECOMMENDATION

The greatest challenge that artist are facing in Nigeria is the attempt to confront the dilemma of managing artistic expression in the context of art, science and technology. This paper expresses art feeling through printmaking

within the premise of research that follows scientific procedures. It is therefore recommended that, more efforts should be geared toward research that expresses the artist mind to the audience that are scientifically and technologically based, especially in the area of verification of adopted methodologies.

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Appendix 1. The map shows the location of the south-western states and the study sites of some areas of the coronation ceremonies.