

The Nature of Matter: An Inherent Element in the Interpretation of a Work of Art (Three-Dimensional)

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Abstract

In the arena of contemporary culture, the interpretation of a work of art is often based more on elements such as the thought of the artist, his influential reputation, and the theme or subject (such as the title of the work) than on the simple technique used (procedure, materials, and equipment) (Bal & Bryson, 1991). However, it is essential to recognize that often overlooked techniques contain fundamental elements necessary for creating and analyzing a work of art. One crucial aspect of a piece of art is the matter (medium) from which it is made. Therefore, it is wise to consider this element for a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of the work. After an in-depth analysis of matter as a critical element in interpreting a work of art, we understand that matter, in its natural state, does not communicate directly by transmitting information. “The material is crafted through the skill of the artist”. The artwork may undergo transformation during the modelling process based on its art form. It acquires the capacity to arouse impressions and awaken sensitivities in the contemplator or the art critic (Chari, 2021). By mastering his technique, the artist manages to transcend the raw material to give it new life and a deeper meaning. By creatively manipulating the material, the artist manages to express emotions and ideas and elucidate concepts that transcend material limits to touch the soul of the contemplator. Thus, artistic technique serves as the vehicle for transforming the material into a multi-layered form of artistic expression. Through this research article, we explore how the nature of matter suggests information for the interpretation of a work of art. This is demonstrated by illustrating how the artist’s selection of materials influences the viewers’ understanding and reception of the artwork. One of this article’s critical points is that the material is not simply passive support but can have a role, a capacity to act, which influences the aesthetic and conceptual perception of the work. Thus, the choice of materials is not accidental because they transmit messages and

emotions, enriching the understanding of art. Therefore, we settle on the three-dimensional work of art, which occupies space. The examples of painting given here direct our reflection towards sensitivity to the colors of materials. Our reflection on the nature of matter encourages an integrated approach to art, linking aesthetic analysis to a deep understanding of materials and their impact on the meaning of the work. Consequently, we emphasize that the nature of matter in art is much more than a technical issue; it constitutes a fundamental element of aesthetic and conceptual interpretation. By exploring this dimension, researchers and art “amateurs” enrich their understanding of works and their artistic practice, highlighting the complexity and richness of the interactions between works of art and the materials used to create them.

Keywords

Matter, Material, Interpretation, Impact, Meaning, Three Dimensional, Aesthetic, Conceptual, Contemporary, Symbolic, Emotional, Techniques

1. Introduction

When selecting the materials for creating a work of art, it is essential to be very careful. The aesthetic quality of the work depends on it, and more importantly, the meaning of the message that comes from the work is closely connected to the nature of the material it is made from (Christensen et al., 2023). We need to pay more attention to the importance of choosing materials. In that case, we risk harming the entire creative process, which can lead to a loss of coherence between the symbolism of the material and the meaning of the final work. Let us remember that each material element contributes significantly to the artistic expression and the reception of the work by the viewer from the first stages of its conception.

Interpreting a work of art is a complex process involving many factors and elements. Among these elements, the material used to create the work plays a crucial role but is often neglected. Indeed, the material constitutes a fundamental element that influences not only the creation of the work but also its meaning, its emotional impact, and its reception by the public (Szubielska & Imbir, 2021).

By examining the nature of the material in its raw state, we can hypothetically determine the value it would contain after its transformation into a work of art. Such analysis is conducted during the design stage, requiring an in-depth exploration of the creative process before commitment. Indeed, taking into account the initial state of the material before and throughout the creative process is necessary because the material is the medium whose plasticity gives assurance to the artist (Figures 1-3). Depending on their area of expertise, each artist uniquely approaches the material. For example, modelling techniques in sculpture differ considerably from those used in ceramics. Likewise, applying specific ceramic pigments, such as glazes, has distinct nuances compared to using pigments in painting. Therefore, it is essential to recognize these technical requirements to fully

appreciate artistic processes' diversity and complexity.



Figure 1. Clay.



Figure 2. Plastic.



Figure 3. Metal.

In his book “The Materials of the Artist and their Use in Painting: With Notes on the Techniques of the Old Masters” (1926), Max Doerner explores the importance of materials used in artistic creation. He highlights how the nature of the material influences not only artistic technique but also the perception and interpretation of works of art by the public. By focusing on the Old Masters’ choice of materials, Doerner highlights the significant impact that material can have on the meaning and aesthetic value of works.

In her article “Understanding Materiality and Human Experience through Creative Artistic Exploration” (2007), Cordula Hansen addresses the question of materiality in contemporary art. She shows how modern artists advantageously use specific materials to convey messages and emotions through their works. Hansen

highlights how the nature of matter can be a crucial element in constructing the meaning and reception of works of art, thus emphasizing its essential role in artistic interpretation.

Looking at the intersection between materiality and artistic perception, David Joselit, in his book “After Art” (2012), demonstrates how contemporary artists’ material choices influence how the public interprets their works. Joselit put forward the idea that matter can act as a medium in its nature, shaping the way art contemplators and critics engage with and understand works of art. This perspective highlights the importance of considering material as a fundamental element in analyzing and interpreting works of art.

In contrast to these three authors, Max Doerner, Cordula Hansen, and David Joselit, to make our contribution in another way, this research article approaches the subject from a definitional perspective, which leads to analyzing the nature of the material as an inherent element to the interpretation of a work of art while highlighting its importance and implications in the process of artistic creation, analysis and understanding. If the three were limited to the work composition, they based themselves on the final result. However, we were interested first in the process of creation, the genesis of the work, and then in the analysis and understanding, even the interpretation of the work of art.

Through this approach, we have highlighted the role of material in the sensory experience of art. The texture, color, transparency, or opacity of the material can influence how the viewer or art critic perceives the work physically and emotionally. These material characteristics can provoke different sensory and intellectual reactions depending on the cultural and historical context, thus enriching the interpretive dimension of the work.

The nature of matter as an inherent element in interpreting a work of art raises fundamental questions about the relationship between artistic rendering and the used materials. So, the question is, how does the material influence the aesthetic perception and the symbolic meaning of a work of art? This question is the main one that guides our reflection on the importance of material in artistic interpretation. There are others of equal importance. Although secondary, these questions concern the reflection’s content and the technical aspects of the creative process. In response to the question of how these technical aspects influence the perception of the work and how the public interprets it, we provided elements of answers that shed light on opinion. This in-depth analysis allowed us to fully grasp the importance of the material in the language of artistic interpretation.

Our reflection on the nature of matter as an inherent element in interpreting a work of art aims to enrich our understanding of artistic creation and its reception. By highlighting the importance of material in the creative process, we hope to open new perspectives through art on how materials shape our aesthetic appreciation and understanding of the world around us.

This research article on “The nature of matter, an inherent element in interpreting a work of art” is significant in Aesthetics. By highlighting the crucial role

of material in the perception and meaning of artworks, this article enriches our understanding of artistic creation and its impact on art amateurs, professionals and the public.

The objectives of this article are:

1) Raise readers' awareness of the almost ignored importance of material in interpreting works of art. By examining in detail how choices of materials influence the reception of works, our reflection on this subject helps to broaden our perspective on artistic processes and the meanings hidden behind artistic creations;

2) Encourage deeper reflection on the relationship between subject, matter and artistic interpretation. By highlighting the impact of material composition on the perception of works, it invites readers to consider new angles of approach in analyzing works of art and to explore the multiple dimensions of art beyond its simple visual appearance.

“The nature of matter, an inherent element in the interpretation of a work of art” is the title of our reflection. It is part of an approach aimed at deepening our understanding of art by highlighting the capital importance of the material in artistic creation and its impact on our aesthetic perception and interpretation of the work

2. Contextualization of the Subject

The nature of the material is a fundamental element to consider when interpreting a work of art (Karana et al., 2020). Indeed, the material used by the artist to create a work can significantly impact its meaning and perception. The analysis of the material allows us to understand the aesthetic and technical choices of the artist, as well as the intentions underlying his work.

When approaching a work of art, it is also essential to consider the historical and cultural context in which it was created. External influences, artistic movements prevalent at the time, and political or social events can all play a significant role in understanding the work (Dafermos, 2024). Indeed, the work of art does not exist in an isolated emptiness but is often a reflection of its time and the concerns of the society which saw it born (Figures 4-6).



Figure 4. Marble.



Figure 5. Wood.



Figure 6. Kaolin.

The public's reception of the work of art is an essential aspect of its interpretation. Each individual can perceive a work of art differently based on their experiences, emotions and knowledge. Audience reactions can enrich the meaning of the work by providing new perspectives and opening a dialogue about its scope and artistic value (Szubielska et al., 2021).

Therefore, it is essential to recognize that art is a universal language transcending cultural and linguistic barriers (Harvey et al., 2022). Works of art have the power to communicate common human emotions, ideas and experiences, allowing individuals to connect on a deep and intimate level. By understanding art as a whole and considering all of these elements, we can truly appreciate and understand

the richness and diversity of artistic expression.

Furthermore, the intention or philosophy of the artist is a crucial element to consider when interpreting a work of art. Understanding what the artist was trying to express, the emotions he wanted to convey or the messages he wanted to convey can shed valuable light on the work in question. The artist may have used specific techniques to reinforce his point or provoke particular viewer reactions. We will be careful not to highlight the artist's fame when interpreting his work because fame often influences the interpretation positively or negatively.

3. Importance of Material in Artistic Interpretation

It is essential to consider the role of materials in artistic interpretation. The material used by an artist to create a work of art plays a vital role in the viewer's perception and reception of it. Indeed, the texture, color, density and even fragility of the material contribute to the sensory and emotional experience of the observer. For example, a marble sculpture will convey a sense of solidity and durability, while an oil painting can evoke more fluid and vibrant emotions (Papa Christodoulou, 2023).

The material in a work of art can also convey symbolic or conceptual meanings. For example, using recycled plastic in an art installation can relate to environmental and sustainability issues (Ming & Saat, 2024) (Figure 7). Likewise, using raw and unconventional materials can express a form of rebellion or questioning of established norms. Thus, the material becomes a language in its own right, allowing the artist to communicate ideas and emotions subtly and profoundly (Figure 8).

The artist's material manipulation is considered an act of transformation and creation. By sculpting, modelling, painting or assembling materials, the artist gives life to shapes and textures that transcend simple material reality (Panetsos, 2024). This ability to transcend raw material to create works of unique beauty and expressiveness underlines the importance of the material in the artistic process (Figure 9).



Figure 7. Plastic rubbish, M.F.A Botulu.



Figure 8. Kaolin, pigment, M.F.A Stanis Mbwanga Ebikya.



Figure 9. Bronze, Dr. Meno.

The material can also be a way for the artist to explore and push the boundaries of their artistic medium. By experimenting with new materials, combining unexpected textures or rethinking the physical properties of matter, the artist can open new avenues of expression and innovation. Thus, the importance of the material in artistic interpretation lies not only in its capacity to arouse emotions and meanings but also in its potential to nourish creativity and the evolution of contemporary art (Figures 10-12).

4. The Matter as the Basis of the Work of Art

4.1. Definition and Role of Matter in Artistic Creation

In artistic creation, matter refers to the physical materials the artist uses to give form to his work. These matters can be as varied as paint, wood, stone, metal, fabric, or modern digital media. The material selection is functional and expressive, with each material carrying distinct aesthetic, symbolic and tactile qualities

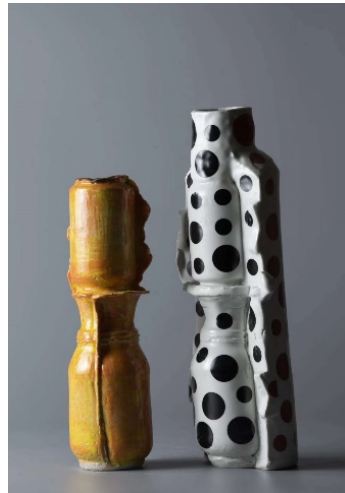


Figure 10. Mixed, M.F.A Mbembo.

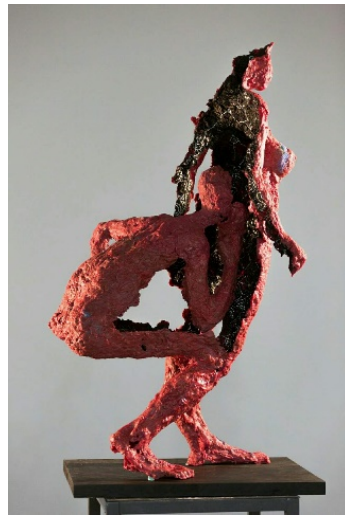


Figure 11. Recycled matter.



Figure 12. Recycled metal, M.F.A Kouassi.

(Glăveanu, 2020). The choice of material becomes a fundamental artistic decision that profoundly influences the contemplator's perception and reception of the work (Özdilek, 2023).

The role of matter in artistic creation is multi-dimensional.

1) Firstly, it is the medium through which the artist expresses his ideas, emotions, and concepts. For example, the choice of a rough or smooth texture can influence the way a work is perceived and felt;

2) Secondly, the matter can give a tactile dimension to the work, allowing the viewer to interact with it physically, thus reinforcing the sensory and immersive experience;

3) Third, the matter can also be loaded with symbolic or cultural meanings, enriching the work's conceptual content and contributing to its artistic and historical context.

The material plays an essential role in the durability and preservation of works of art over time. Material choices can affect the long-term stability and resistance of the work, thus influencing its conservation and historical value (Krauklis et al., 2021). In summary, the material is much more than just a means of creation in art; *it is an essential visual language, a substance that gives substance to the artist's ideas and enriches the aesthetic and intellectual experience of the contemplator.*

4.2. Impact of the Matter on the Perception and Emotion of the Contemplator and the Art Critic

The impact of the matter on the perception and emotion of the contemplator and the art critic is profoundly influential in the artistic experience. Each matter carries a texture, color, brilliance, or opacity that catches the eye and elicits distinct emotional responses (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008). For example, a smooth, cool marble sculpture can evoke a sense of permanence and majesty (Figure 13), while a hand-moulded clay work can convey a sense of fragility and humanity (Figure 14). Thus, the material becomes a medium through which the artist communicates subtle nuances of emotion and meaning.

Personal and cultural considerations often influence the reaction of the contemplator or art critic to the material. For example, wood can evoke warmth and tradition. For example, wood can evoke warmth and tradition (Figure 15), metal



Figure 13. Marble.

can suggest modernity and resistance (**Figure 16**), and glass can symbolize fragility and transparency (**Figure 17**). These considerations enrich the understanding and interpretation of the work, transforming the aesthetic experience into a rich and multi-dimensional interaction between the work of art and the viewer.

The matter's texture significantly influences the perception of a work. A rough surface can invite touch and tactile exploration, intensifying the contemplator's or art critic's physical engagement with the work (Zuo et al., 2014). Likewise, a polished, shiny surface can capture light alluringly, creating visual effects that captivate and delight. Thus, the matter's texture informs and influences how the viewer interacts with the work of art.



Figure 14. Clay.



Figure 15. Wood.



Figure 16. Metal.



Figure 17. Glass.

We will remember that matter in art is not limited to its utilitarian function but acts as a powerful visual language that modulates the perceptions and emotions of the viewer. Through its physical and symbolic qualities, the material enriches the meaning and aesthetic impact of the works, thus offering an immersive and emotionally charged artistic experience.

4.3. Examples of Works Highlighting the Material as a Central Element (Matter)

The examples we have given of works of art that emphasize material demonstrate their ability to transcend simple form and explore the intrinsic qualities of the materials themselves. From sculpture through ceramics to contemporary installations, these creations challenge the traditional limits of art by highlighting the texture, color, density, and even fragility of materials. They invite deep contemplation of physical substance and its narrative potential, often revealing powerful metaphors about the human condition, the changing nature of reality, and our intimate connection with the material world around us.

The choice of artists and works that were selected took into account the:

- 1) Criteria and nature of the matter.
- 2) Relevance and their philosophy.

4.3.1. Criteria of Choice and Nature of the Matter

Artistic Medium: Different artistic works highlight the material in distinct ways. For example, ceramic glaze uses texture and pigment density as critical visual elements (**Figure 20**). Likewise, sculpture often plays with the material's texture, weight, and shape (**Figure 19**).

Historical and cultural context: The materials used in works can often reflect the resources available at a specific time and in a particular region. For example, mediaeval European art often used materials like wood and stone, while modern and contemporary art may use synthetic materials or advanced technologies.

Symbolism and metaphor: Materials are sometimes used symbolically to convey ideas or emotions. For example, marble can symbolize solidity and durability

(**Figure 4**), while glass can symbolize fragility and transparency (**Figure 17**).

Conceptual approach: Some contemporary works focus on the material as the main subject, conceptually exploring its physical and aesthetic properties (**Figure 18**).



Figure 18. Kouassi.

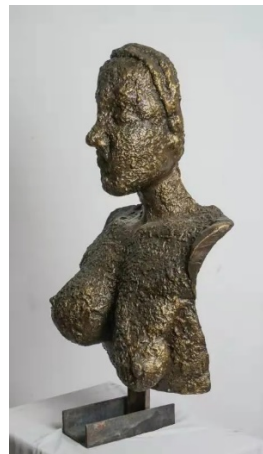


Figure 19. Meno.



Figure 20. Mbembo Syntiche.

Sensory and aesthetic impact: Contemporary artists often use the texture, color, and shape of materials to create rich sensory experiences and aesthetically influential works.

4.3.2. Relevance and Philosophy

Exploration of material properties: These works allow in-depth exploration of materials' physicality, sensory, and aesthetic properties. They encourage us to consider what we see and feel through touch, texture, and sometimes even the materials' smell.

Reflection on the nature of art: By highlighting the material, these works question traditional notions of beauty and form in art. They challenge aesthetic conventions and open new avenues for artistic expression (**Figure 21**).



Figure 21. Recycled materials.

Evocation of symbolic and metaphorical concepts: People can load matter with symbolic and metaphorical meanings. For example, transforming a raw material into a work of art can symbolize processes of change or metamorphosis in human or social life.

Dialogue with the environment and sustainability: In a time where sustainability and environmental impact are becoming primary concerns, the conscious use of materials in art can catalyze our relationship with nature and natural resources.

Encouragement of innovation and experimentation: Artists who emphasize material as a central element are often at the forefront of artistic innovation, seeking new ways to use traditional materials or modern technologies to create new aesthetic and emotional experiences.

5. Artistic Technique and Materials

Technique, in the field of art, is much more than a set of processes used to create a work of art; it represents the essential stage of the plastic approach. From the conception phase to the final production phase, the artist uses the technique that gives shape to his ideas, his imagination, and his inspiration. It should be emphasized that, although technique is often discreet in the artistic process, it is essential to understanding the work. Indeed, the artist's proficiency brings nuances and subtleties that enrich the meaning of the work, offering a more profound and illuminating perspective for contemplators and art critics (Mace & Ward, 2002).

It is common for contemplators or art critics to become engrossed in a piece of art, losing sight of the artist's technique, materials, or creative processes in favor of the visual rendering. Their fascination stems from the work's emotional and aesthetic impact, which evokes feelings of admiration and contemplation in them. However, this attraction should differ for artists and art critics, as they possess in-depth field knowledge. The interpretation or analysis of a work of art by an artist or art critic is based on their combined knowledge of art history, aesthetics, the philosophy of art, and technology. Their understanding of art goes well beyond that of simple contemplators, allowing them to provide more prosperous and nuanced analyses based on in-depth expertise in the artistic field (Shanken, 2002).

Therefore, it will be necessary to recognize that interpreting a work of art without considering the underlying technique would constitute a fundamental error, even a flagrant shortcoming by the artist or the art critic. Through careful observation of details, the plastic approach reveals essential elements on which to rely to enrich the interpretation. When addressing the question of technique, it must be emphasized that the clarity and precision sought in this article highlight the importance of the subject and all the materials and techniques used in creating a work of art, each carrying within itself a profound meaning.

5.1. Diversity of Techniques and Materials Used in the Visual Arts

Contemporary art demonstrates extraordinary diversity regarding artists' techniques and materials to express their visions and elucidate their concepts. Painters, for example, explore many mediums such as oil paint, acrylic, watercolor, collage, and even mixed techniques combining different types of paint. Each medium offers unique texture, vibrancy, transparency, and durability possibilities, allowing artists to explore various visual effects and sensations.

Sculpture uses various materials, from traditional marble, bronze, and wood to contemporary materials such as metal, glass, plastic, and even recycled materials. Each material brings distinct aesthetic properties, unique technical challenges, and creative opportunities. From the monumental size of public sculptures to the reduced size of gallery pieces, the sculpture offers a rich and varied expanse of three-dimensional form.

An incredible diversity of techniques and materials, surpassing cultural and historical boundaries, characterizes ceramics. This diversity highlights a wide range

of technical and aesthetic possibilities in contemporary and historical ceramic art, enriching artistic expression and attesting to the creative adaptability of ceramists throughout the ages. Traditional methods like hand modelling and pottery throwing coexist with contemporary innovations such as experimental glazes and specific firing techniques like raku (Figure 22). The materials vary greatly, from raw clay to fine porcelain, offering unique texture properties, color, and final results. This diversity not only enriches artistic expression but also testifies to the creative adaptability of ceramists throughout the ages, highlighting a vast palette of technical and aesthetic possibilities in contemporary and historical ceramic art.



Figure 22. Raku.

The art of copper foil embossing presents a fascinating array of techniques and materials used to create sculptural and decorative works of great finesse. Artists often begin by carefully tracing a design onto the copper sheet before using specific tools such as punches, chisels, and pushers to sculpt the details and designs into relief. Varied methods, such as direct embossing, where the metal is pushed from back to front to create reliefs, or stamping, where designs are pressed into the sheet, allow for diverse artistic expression. An infinite variety of aesthetic and stylistic possibilities are available in this research, as well as traditional art that originated in ancient civilizations and evolved into inventive contemporary forms. Complementary materials like patinas and varnishes enhance contrasts and enrich textures (Figure 23).



Figure 23. Naguy, DR Congolese artist.

Contemporary artists are not limited to traditional mediums but also integrate innovative practices such as digital art, video art, and conceptual art. Digital art, for example, uses advanced software and technologies to create interactive works, multimedia installations and immersive experiences that question the boundaries between visual art and technology (Moin Namini, 2005).

The diversity of techniques and materials used in contemporary art reflects the evolution of artistic practices and the ability of artists to push the boundaries of creative expression (Sullivan, 2006). This richness and variety offer contemplators a dynamic and stimulating artistic experience where exploring new forms, textures, and mediums helps enrich and expand our understanding of art and its meaning in the modern world.

5.2. Influence of the Material (Matter) on the Artistic Technique

The influence of material on artistic technique is profound and varied, influencing not only how a work is created but also the form it takes and the emotion it arouses in the contemplator and art critic. Each material has unique physical properties that require specific technical approaches from the artist. For example, oil paint allows for complex blends and subtle color transitions due to its smooth texture and ability to be worked over an extended period, while watercolor, with its pigments diluted in water, requires precise mastery of water control to create effects of transparency and fluidity.

In sculpture, the choice of material dictates the technique to be used by the artist. Marble sculpture, for example, requires considerable precision and expertise to shape volumes and fine details while considering the stones' properties, which can be fragile and prone to cracking. In contrast, metal sculpture can involve welding and forging techniques that exploit the malleability and strength of metal to create sturdy, complex shapes.

In ceramics, the influence of the material on the artistic technique is profound and diverse. The very nature of clay, with its properties of plasticity, texture and reaction to fire, guides and conditions the technical choices of ceramists. For example, the porosity of different clays can influence how the glaze adheres and reacts when fired, determining the final results in terms of color and final results (Carbajal et al., 2007; Zhang & Wei, 2024). Likewise, the chemical composition of enamels and glazes varies depending on the types of clays used, which influences their behavior and appearance after firing. Ceramists exploit these characteristics to experiment with turning, hand modelling, and various decorative methods such as glazing, sgraffito (Figure 24) or slip painting (Figure 25). The ceramic material is the artist's medium and an integral part of his creative process, shaping the aesthetic and technical possibilities that define each unique ceramic work.

The influence of the material on the artistic technique in the art of embossing on copper leaf is crucial and determining. Through its malleability and resistance, copper foil allows artists to work with precision and create detailed and complex reliefs. Manipulating this material requires the skillful use of specialized tools such



Figure 24. Stanis DR Congolese artist.



Figure 25. Stanis.

as punches, pushers, and chisels, each influencing the depth and texture of the reliefs obtained. The reaction of the copper to the different movements and techniques of direct embossing, where the metal is pushed from the back to the front, or stamping, where the designs are pressed into the foil, is essential to achieve varied artistic effects. In addition, patinas and varnishes allow one to play on contrasts and highlight sculptural details. Thus, by its nature and specific characteristics, copper leaf guides and enriches the artistic practice of “repoussé”, providing fertile ground for innovation and creation in this ancient and meticulous art.

The material also influences the aesthetic and emotional effects of a work. Natural materials like wood or terracotta can evoke a connection with nature and warmth or authenticity. In contrast, industrial materials like concrete or steel can convey a sense of modernity, strength or coldness. These material qualities help shape the viewer’s perception and emotional experience of a work of art, influencing its resonance and impact (O’Sullivan, 2001; Szubielska et al., 2021).

Overall, the influence of material on artistic technique goes beyond simple functionality and extends deep into the realm of creativity and artistic expression. The choices of materials made by the artists determine the working methods and technical challenges to be overcome and enrich the work with a unique sensory and emotional dimension that enriches our understanding and appreciation of art.

5.3. Evolution of Artistic Practices Linked to the Material

Improvements in artistic practices related to materials have been marked by significant changes throughout art history, reflecting technological advances, material innovations, and new artistic perspectives. Initially limited by available resources and traditional techniques, artists gradually explored new territories by expanding materials and approaches.

During the 20th century, for example, conceptual art emerged as a significant movement challenging established norms of artistic creation. Conceptual artists have often used unconventional materials and novel processes to convey abstract ideas and social commentary. This period saw the use of found materials, such as Marcel Duchamp's ready-made, where everyday objects were elevated to the status of art by their simple presentation (Smith, 2010) (Figure 26).



Figure 26. Fountain.

At the same time, digital technologies have opened up new possibilities in artistic creation, allowing artists to explore mediums such as digital art, virtual reality, and 3D printing. These advances have transformed how material is conceived, manipulated, and presented in contemporary art. Artists now use 3D modelling software to create virtual sculptures, print 3D works with painstaking precision, or explore the boundaries between the real and virtual worlds through interactive installations (Walters & Thirkell, 2007).

Additionally, sustainability and environmental consciousness have also influenced the material choices of contemporary artists. Using recycled materials, recovery techniques, and sustainable practices has become a growing concern among designers keen to reduce their ecological footprint and raise awareness of contemporary environmental challenges (Hsiao, 2023; Ljungberg, 2007).

By the way, cultural diversity has enriched the palette of materials used in contemporary art, with artists exploring the craft traditions of different cultures, incorporating local materials and specific craft practices into their works to express unique cultural identities and challenge traditional Western artistic standards.

The evolution of artistic practices linked to the material illustrates a dynamic and constantly evolving journey influenced by technical innovations, conceptual

reflections and contemporary concerns. This continued exploration of materials and techniques broadens contemporary art's horizons and enriches our understanding of the complex relationship between material, creativity and artistic expression.

6. Analysis and Artistic Interpretation

6.1. Theoretical Approach of Artistic Interpretation Based on Matter

The theoretical approach of artistic interpretation-based matter can cover several theoretical approaches that explore how the materials used by the artist influence the meaning and reception of the work. Here are some of the main approaches:

1) Semiotics of materials: This approach considers that each material has an intrinsic and symbolic meaning which can be deciphered through a semiotic analysis. For example, marble can symbolize grandeur and permanence; glass can evoke fragility and transparency. Semiotic material analysis explores how artists use these material meanings to communicate ideas and emotions (Bellentani & Panico, 2016);

2) Materialist theory: This approach emphasizes the artwork's materiality, examining how the physical properties of materials (texture, color, shape) influence the perception and experience aesthetics of the contemplator. Materialist theorists are interested in how materials act as mediators between the artist, the work, the contemplator, and the art critic, thereby shaping the aesthetic and cognitive reception of the work (Rowley, 2015);

3) Material ecology: This approach considers material choices' ecological and ethical impact on artistic creation. Environmental artists and theorists examine how materials used in art can reflect and influence our relationship with the natural and urban environments. Material ecology encourages the responsible use of resources and reflection on the ecological consequences of artistic production (Phillips, 2015);

4) Historical and traditional approach: This approach examines how artistic traditions and historical practices have influenced the choice of materials and artistic techniques. For example, the study of materials in medieval or Renaissance art reveals specific techniques and symbolisms associated with materials such as gold, ink or stone, which are often used in religious or political contexts (Yonan, 2011);

5) Technological and contemporary approach: This approach explores how modern technological advances have expanded the repertoire of materials and techniques available to contemporary artists. Digital art, 3D printing, synthetic materials and new technologies have transformed how artists conceptualize and create their works, opening new avenues for artistic experimentation and innovation (Walters & Thirkell, 2007).

These theoretical approaches demonstrate the diversity of perspectives through which artistic materiality can be explored and analyzed to enrich our understanding

of the material in the visual arts as a complex and multidimensional medium.

6.2. Methodologies for Analyzing Material in a Work of Art

The analysis of material in a work of art can cover different methodologies that examine the physical, symbolic and contextual properties of the materials used by the artist. Here are some commonly used methodologies:

1) Physical Property Analysis: This methodology examines the physical characteristics of materials, such as texture, color, shape, gloss, and translucency. The objective is to understand how these properties contribute to the sensory perception of the work of art by the viewer and to the creation of the visual effect desired by the artist (Karana et al., 2009);

2) Semiotic Analysis: This methodology explores the symbolic and cultural meanings associated with the materials used in the artwork. It examines how material choices can convey particular messages and concepts based on their historical, social and cultural context. For example, choosing gold can symbolize wealth and power, while wood can evoke simplicity and naturalness (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001);

3) Contextual Analysis: This methodology considers the context in which the artwork was created and the circumstances surrounding the artist's choice of materials. It includes the study of contemporary artistic practices, artistic influences, and stylistic conventions that may have shaped the artist's decisions regarding materials (Rose, 2022);

4) Technology Analysis: This methodology uses scientific techniques and analysis to examine materials more deeply. It may include laboratory analyses, such as spectroscopy, microscopy, and carbon dating, to identify the components, structure and authenticity of the materials used in the artwork (Borg et al., 2020);

5) Ecological Analysis and Sustainability: This methodology evaluates the environmental impact of the materials used in the artwork. It examines sustainable material choices and conservation practices that minimize the ecological footprint of art production while emphasizing the importance of environmental responsibility in art (Sang, 2024).

These material analysis methodologies allow researchers, curators and art enthusiasts to deepen their understanding of the artistic choices and intentions behind the specific use of materials in a given work of art. They help to enrich the interpretation and appreciation of works of art by revealing the material and symbolic dimensions that compose them.

6.3. Impact of Material (Matter) on the Meaning and Reception of the Work

The impact of the material on the meaning and reception of a work of art is very profound and momentous, influencing how the contemplator and the art critic perceive the work and the interpretations it gives rise to. Here are some critical aspects of this impact:

1) Symbolic and cultural significance: Each material carries symbolic and cultural connotations that enrich the meaning of the work. For example, using marble in sculpture can evoke grandeur and permanence, while clay can suggest fragility and humanity. The artist can use these symbolic associations to communicate specific messages and concepts, thereby influencing how the viewer interprets the work (Krippendorff, 1989);

2) Sensory and emotional experience: The texture, color, brilliance, and other physical qualities of materials directly influence the sensory experience of the viewer and art critic. For example, a smooth, shiny surface can seductively capture light, while a rough texture can invite touch and tactile interaction. These material characteristics help create emotional atmospheres and elicit varied affective responses in contemplators (Cho, 2021);

3) Historical and technical context: The choice of materials is often rooted in historical and artistic traditions and specific techniques that shape the aesthetic and form of the work. For example, oil painting techniques allow for distinct effects of light and texture that determine the visual quality of the work and influence its reception by contemporary audiences (Smith, 1970);

4) Innovation and artistic experimentation: Technological advances and the evolution of materials have opened new avenues for artistic experimentation. Contemporary artists regularly explore new mediums and materials to push the boundaries of artistic creation and express innovative ideas. For example, using industrial materials or digital techniques can radically transform the traditional perception of art and offer new aesthetic and conceptual perspectives (Rahat et al., 2023).

In fact, material plays an essential role in artistic creation by influencing the work's meaning, emotion and aesthetic experience. It enriches the understanding and appreciation of art as a complex visual language, allowing artists to communicate profound ideas and engage the contemplator in a sensory and emotional dialogue with their creation.

6.4. Illustrations and Choice of the Sculptural Work to be Interpreted

We based ourselves on the works of a sculptor to illustrate the statements made in this article. Our approach is to demonstrate that the material, by its nature, functionality, and symbolism, contributes enormously to interpreting the work of art. Unfortunately, the contemplator, the art critic and even the artist do not often consider it. During interpretation, the material is pushed to the background; it is only mentioned to outline the artwork's composition. However, an interpretation worthy of the name would take this into account. Below, without mentioning the author's name or the title, we briefly describe a work of art to see if indicating or specifying the material from which the work is made reveals meaning.

“In the middle of an exhibition hall, a work of art needs an information sheet

(there is no information on the identification of the artwork) lying on the floor. It is assumed to be a statue of a pregnant woman due to the protuberant belly and, unfortunately, holed. The statue presents the bust of a woman with swollen and slashed breasts, without a head, neither upper or lower limbs (**Figure 28**). The sculpture is made from bullet casings”.



Figure 27. Death pills.

The scene described in the above paragraph reveals a macabre situation that the artist denounces through his artefact (**Figure 28**). Such a representation of the life-bearing woman of whom she is the guardian does not leave the contemplator or the spectator indifferent. Everyone will read it according to their apprehension of the scene, but they will not evade the cause of this atrocity because it is revealed by the material that the artist used to create the work. Do “bullet casings” carry a meaning? Do they transmit a message (**Figure 27**)?

The choice of works to illustrate this research article was not made at random. Since we had opted for works in sculpture, here are the few elements on which we based our interpretation concerning the artefact:



Figure 28. Silhouette efface.



Figure 29. Statue details.



Figure 30. Encore un effort



Figure 31. Sans titre.



Figure 32. Machetes house.



Figure 33. Paradise children.



Figure 34. Foundry.

1) Historical and cultural context: The end of the twentieth century marks Congo, the end of Mobutu's reign (President of the Republic of Zaire 1965-1997), and the beginning of the Eastern War, which lasted for decades. The artist becomes a peace activist and defender of human rights;

2) Techniques and materials: Through assemblages, sometimes in welding, in composition, the artist uses live bullet casings, recovered on the battlefields to create works (**Figure 27**);

3) Themes and subjects: The central theme is peace; it appeals to everyone for collective understanding and encourages harmonious cohabitation between communities and ethnic groups. The subjects represented repeatedly are the man and the woman whom he considers masters of society and guarantors of human values (**Figure 33**);

4) Innovations and artistic contributions: In the DRC, *Freddy Tsimba* is the first artist who has made war materials and bladed weapons, the materials for artistic creations to spread the message of peace (**Figure 27**);

5) Critical reception: Freddy Tsimba, through his commitment is considered a revolutionary artist since he leads a fight against anti-values, campaigns for human rights and condemns the atrocities of the war which continues in Congo Kinshasa. Loved by friends of peace, repeatedly rejected or incarcerated by warlords, this artist has never given up. The House of Machetes (**Figure 32**), an emblematic work intended to highlight the function of this work tool, was a project which was refused in China, Germany, Belgium and Rwanda for purely political reasons;

6) Influences and inspirations: The artist has detached himself from academic influence because he finds that the art of this school is conventional and normative; the foundry technique, on the other hand, influences his work (**Figure 34**). He owes his inspiration to the events which marked the end of the twentieth century in Africa, particularly in Congo Kinshasa;

7) Evolution of style: Apart from the academic period and the one before, the artist's style asserted itself in 1996, when he decided to use bullet casings as his material;

8) Place in art history: His sculptures often embody historical narratives and collective experiences, notably the consequences of armed conflicts in the DRC (**Figure 29**). It seeks to raise awareness and recall of traumatic events (**Figure 31**) while providing a space for healing through art;

9) Iconography and symbolism: By transforming instruments of destruction into works of art, *Freddy Tsimba* seeks to promote reconciliation and hope in societies marked by war and division. His sculptures are often seen as symbols of resilience and reconstruction (**Figure 30**);

10) Comparisons with other artists: Unlike other sculpting artists, Freddy Tsimba ardently addresses contemporary social issues such as poverty, corruption and economic inequalities through his works. He uses art as a social and political commentary while appealing to a collective conscience for change.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Summary of the Main Points Discussed

“The nature of matter, an inherent element in the interpretation of a work of art”, is the subject of our reflection. Having observed that in most cases, when it comes to interpreting a work of art, the artist himself, the author of the work, the art critic or even the contemplator do not often take into account the material element, an essential element which enters into the composition of the work; so, we

decided to question the history of art, the philosophy of art, aesthetics and the technology of art on this subject for some understanding.

Our reflection treats the subject in the field of visual arts and, more precisely, that of three dimensions. Apart from painting, we were more interested in sculpture, ceramics, and embossing (copper leaf) to expose the elements available to sight and touch, which have volume and occupy space.

This research article explored how matter forms the essential foundation of any three-dimensional work of art. We demonstrated how material choices influence artistic creation and aesthetic perception by focusing on artistic techniques and materials. Through in-depth analysis and artistic interpretation, we shed light on how artists use various materials to express ideas, emotions, and concepts and how viewers decode these material choices to enrich their aesthetic and intellectual experience.

7.2. Perspectives and Recommendations for Future Research

To enrich the subject “The nature of matter, an inherent element in the interpretation of a work of art”, students or independent research fellows are free to approach the question of the materiality of the work as they wish. Any contradiction can only enrich our reflection, especially since we have no claim to have exhausted all the material. During our research and through the reading of the works that we had consulted, we realized that there are countless avenues of investigation that we suggest perspectives and recommendations for future research:

1) Psychology and perception: Research fellows will be able to analyze how the materiality of a work of art influences the perception and interpretation of viewers, focusing on aspects such as texture, brilliance, color and shape;

2) History and evolution of artistic materials: Research fellows will be able to examine how evolving technologies and scientific discoveries have shaped the choices of artistic materials across different eras and cultures;

3) Semiotics and symbolism: Research fellows will be able to analyze how the materials used in a work of art carry specific symbolic and semiotic meanings and how these meanings can vary depending on the cultural context;

4) Sustainability and Conservation: Students will explore the challenges of conserving modern artworks made from non-traditional materials or materials that degrade over time, integrating material science and conservation perspectives;

5) Analysis techniques and methods: Through future research, develop new analysis techniques to study the composition of artistic materials in a non-destructive manner, allowing an in-depth understanding of artistic creation processes;

6) Ecological art and sustainability: Researchers will be able to examine how contemporary artists integrate environmental concerns into the choice of materials and how this affects the interpretation of their works;

7) Critical theories and materiality: Teachers and researchers will be able to explore critical theories that examine materiality as a central element in the analysis and understanding of contemporary works of art;

8) Collaborations between artists and scientists: Universal cultural policy can encourage interdisciplinary collaborations between artists and scientists to explore new possibilities for artistic creation using innovative and sustainable materials;

9) Comparative studies: Researchers, artists, and art critics will be able to compare the use of materials in different art forms (e.g. sculpture, painting, digital art) to understand how materiality influences aesthetic and symbolic perception in each context.

By exploring these avenues of research, it would be possible to understand better how materials influence artistic creation and its interpretation and how they reflect the social, cultural and environmental concerns of our time.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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