

## Elements and principles of design in scenic design in *Ghana's Most Beautiful Reality TV Show*: An aesthetic evaluation

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**Abstract:** Scenic design or set design are expressions used interchangeably to mean the creation of scenery backgrounds for theatre, film and television. Scenic design in theatre, film and television are practically similar in approach and shares the same qualities. The major difference is the spaces in which the scenic designs are constructed and mounted in theatre, film and TV for performance. Spaces in theatre includes the proscenium, thrust, arena, found or created spaces. In contrast, spaces in film includes location or studio whereas spaces in tv comprises of studio. Therefore, to create the scenery, in theatre the scenic designer has to consider the sightlines of the audience whilst the designer in film and TV must consider what camera's lens sees. This study examined the elements and principles of design in scenic design in TV3, *Ghana's Most Beautiful* reality show 2017, and assessed the aesthetics of the elements and principles of design in scenic design in TV3 *Ghana's Most Beautiful* reality show 2017. Qualitative research approach was employed for this study using descriptive and interpretive methods. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used in selecting the show based on its unique design concept and the participants. Data collected employed observation and interviews. The show was observed and pictures collected which elicited the data. Also, five (5) member audience who watched the show throughout to the final stage were interviewed. Data were analysed using visual and thematic analysis. The paper argues that a good combination of appropriate elements and principles of design in scenic design gives meaning and add some form of believability to the show. Findings revealed that appropriate combination of elements and principles of design inculcated in the scenic design defined the mood, themes and established the locale of the show. This attracted some audience members and made it enjoyable to watch.

**Keywords:** Elements and principles of design, GMB, Reality TV show, Scenic design

### 1. Introduction

Plethora of scholars have different opinions about the terminology scenic design. Klingelhofer (2017), views scenic design as the art and skill which employs the visual language of space and imagery to communicate ideas to an audience. Millerson (2013) notes that scenic design involves the creation of scenery that reflects on a programme. Generally, set or scenic designs enable to define characters, motivates their abilities to act and enhanced by other elements such as music and lighting. The set may also help in creating the mood and tone, emotions to ignite an action in the story world (Bergfelder *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, the scenic design for every performance or production needs to depict the appropriate atmosphere to an audience. For instance, the audience must be able to identify whether is a comedy or reality show. Gillette (2000) mentions that scenic designers are mainly responsible for the creation of an atmosphere that involves the scenery or backdrop. He or

she takes charge of the visual background and its functions. Likewise, Malloy (2015) refers to the scenic designer as the one who is usually responsible for the arrangement of an atmosphere for a character. It must be noted that the scenic design backdrop also gives details and meanings to the entire show in theatre, film and television. Therefore, aside theatre and film, scenic design plays a vital role in every television production, whether the programme is shot in the studio or recorded on location for television broadcast. The major role of the television medium is to inform, educate and entertain. Further, it enables to nurture and shape a society in a positive or negative manner.

The emergence of digital television medium has made television viewing a huge part of our life. Apart from the programmes of different genre shown on our television channels, reality television has become a craze among the local TV audience. In recent times, there has been a proliferation of reality television shows on several TV screens in Ghana. For example, *Talented Kids*, *Ghana's Most Beautiful*, *Date Rush*, *MTN Hitmaker*, *Miss Malaika Ghana* and *Di Asa*. Particularly, such shows can be enjoyed on private owned television channels such as TV3, GH One TV and Antinka TV, based in Accra. According to Barton (2009) as cited by Conteh (2021) the urge to watch reality shows on television has become a craze among audience and this has changed the dynamics in broadcasting. It's influence on the youth is very huge and commands more viewership among them. In their study, Wilfred *et al.* (2019) found that reality shows have high demand on television screens as a result of lack of content and as television networks find it problematic to keep up with audience demands (Conteh, 2021). Reality TV shows includes a mixture of other genre elements in the likes of game shows, documentary, soap opera, talk shows and talent shows. They are mostly unscripted programmes with non-professional actors in non-fictional situations (Corner, 2002). Also, reality television shows record real people as they perform and live their lives as things unfold (Nabi *et al.*, 2003). In that respect, reality television as a genre is considered as one of the current trends in broadcasting. Lovelock (2019) revealed that it was developed as a solution to the less demand of products and services provided in the television market in the 1980s and 90s due to its low budget nature as compared to other television programmes. Thus, producing reality TV shows is very cheap and attracts more viewership. For instance, such shows hardly hire professional actors and also professional writers to write scripts or produce scripts.

## **2. Problem statement**

In a research, Azuah *et al.* (2020) explored the beauty standards as cultural projection in the *Ghana's Most Beautiful* beauty pageant TV show. It was observed that the show occasionally diverged from its goal of projecting the Ghanaian culture. Again, Azuah and Apau (2020) ran another research on the role played by fashion in *Ghana's Most Beautiful* show and its contributions. It was revealed that fashion played a vital role and has the ability to change society through the activities in *Ghana's Most Beautiful* reality show. Moreover, Dennis (2018) researched on the traditional and cultural aesthetics in the 2013 edition of *Ghana's Most Beautiful* and observed that cultural artefacts have the ability to educate Ghanaians about our culture and ideologies in them. It was also realized that the show presents a fair playing field for all contestants. On the other hand, Koomson (2016), in another research conducted on *Ghana's Most Beautiful*, 2014 edition, examined the meanings of four *Adinkra* symbols and how they can be employed in scenic design in reality TV shows. He recommended that scenic designers must study and understand the meanings of *Adinkra* symbols and use them in their scenery to promote the Ghanaian culture and heritage. As presented above, there is a dearth of research on the elements and principles of design in the scenic design in *Ghana's Most Beautiful* reality show. That said, this current study examines the elements and principles of design in scenic design for TV3 *Ghana's Most Beautiful* 2017 reality TV show and analyses the aesthetics in the elements and principles of design in scenic design for TV3 *Ghana's Most Beautiful* 2017 reality

TV show. Therefore, this study intends to fill that aspect of the gap in scholarship on the use of elements and principles of design in scenic design for reality TV shows.

### **3. Literature review**

#### **3.1. Design as core in art**

Design is a way of thinking and solving problems (Pentak & Lauer, 2016). Design provides an idea of action to improve a certain condition. In fundamental terms, it involves the use of design elements in an organized manner. Norman (2013) further explains that design refers to how everything functions in nature as well as the collaboration between nature and technology. Therefore, when the final product of a design comes out well, the results become amazing. When the product is designed and produced haphazardly, it becomes useless and obsolete. That product forces us to behave based on its needs instead of our needs. According to Runkle (1985) as cited by Andrew (2014) the appearance of every design object constitutes several elements and principles of design in the likes of colour, line, shape, dot, rhythm, repetition, harmony and contrast. Thus, the combination of two or more of these elements against their principles in any design defines the beauty in them. Every scenic design is based on elements and principles of design (Allen & Macdonough, 2017). Understanding the use of these elements make an individual appreciate beauty. In the opinion of Gillette (2012), design can be explained as an interpretation of a plan for a particular idea for a production. These include the drawings that depict the design concept as well as creating the entire set. It is therefore noted that every scenic design must be ruled by elements and principles of design. Wolf and Block (2014) asserts that a scenic designer needs talent and a knowledge of how to combine elements and principles of design in a composition. He or she needs conceptual and creative thinking of interpretative design skills to be able to create an atmosphere for a show. Hence, a meaningful organization of elements and principles of design to form a composition. This would enable us define the visual language of design and create a three-dimensional or two-dimensional space for viewers. It is noted that the visual language of design is built on certain fundamentals, that is, elements and principles of design. All humans prefer to live in harmonious environs. Therefore, by using your senses such as the eyes, nose and ears you are able to perceive whether your surrounding is in order or not. This encourages you to put that place in order. Designers, for that matter, combines certain elements and principle in any design to achieve harmony (Evans & Thomas, 2013). There are several kinds of elements and principles of design, below are some selected for the purpose of this study.

#### **3.2. Elements of design**

Benedetto (2012) highlights that generally elements of design do not function properly when placed on their own. They perform beautifully when joined in the right and make a production successful. The following explains some characteristics and functions of elements of design:

- **Line:** Line is defined by the form of an object. Line gives direction and outline. In scenic design, lines can define the space as well as the outline and define the shape. Similarly, lines create shapes in two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms. Lines can be straight, spiral, curved, horizontal and vertical.
- **Shape:** Shapes are created by lines. Shapes are usually in the form of geometrical figures such as squares, triangles and circles. It provides symbolic ideas to an audience and enables us to create an outline for actors' movement.
- **Colour:** Colour is basically the impression light creates on the human eye. In that regard, colour creates a lot of emotional responses. It can change the dynamics of every shape. Colour in theatre, film and television may come from sources such as the paint applied on the entire background walls and the light transmitted to the illuminated set.

- **Texture:** Basically, it refers to the tactile and visual aspect of form. Surfaces of form may be smooth, rough and coarse. In scenic design, texture is able to catch, interject and replicate light.
- **Light:** Largely, it may not be considered as an element of design but plays a relevant role in scenic design. Therefore, it must be part for the creative process right from the beginning and not an afterthought. Light reveal form, create designs and helps in portraying simulated environments (Wolf and Block, 2014).

### 3.3. Principles of design

According to Benedetto (2012), principles of design represent the rules for placing the above elements together to achieve harmony and permeate effective communication. In simple terms, the elements of design define the “what” and the principles of design expresses the “how” of any design and art work. Below are some characteristic functions and principles of design:

- **Harmony:** Harmony in design produces a peaceful environment. It brings about a kind of order in every scenic design.
- **Balance:** Balance in design provides an equal visual weight in pictographic terms. In pictorial balance, we refer to horizontal balance as the right and left picture having similar objects. Vertical balance may also be considered in similar scenario. There are two types of balance known as symmetrical and asymmetrical. Symmetrical balance is achieved with similar objects in any design whereas asymmetrical balance is attained with dissimilar objects. Balance in any scenic design creates some form of comfortability in the audiences’ eye.
- **Contrast:** Contrast depicts about form and interest. For instance, in every scenic design, objects placed in the background and foreground must have some form of variations.
- **Variation:** Elements repeated in any scenic design creates boredom. The addition of one or two objects to the design may break the monotony and attract a lot of attention.
- **Emphasis:** Every design has a focal point. An emphasis on an aspect of the entire design indulges the audience’s attention. Designers can establish contrast by combining elements and principles of design to show emphasis.
- **Rhythm:** Rhythm in design is defined by a repetition of objects or to some extent altered ones. Control is accomplished through repetition. A design may include a repetition of a curved or horizontal stripes of lines. The lines in this manner may appear to be thick or thin.
- **Gradation:** Gradation in scenic design offers a sensation of movement. By using gradation, a sharp and clear distinction in an entire design is reduced (Wolf and Block, 2014; Pentak and Lauer, 2016). Evans and Thomas (2013) notes that placing together the elements against the principles of design makes a design functional. A bit of creativity involved in such combination does not make it only useful but appealing to the human senses.

### 3.4. Reflection on aesthetics in scenic design

Aesthetics can be explained as a taste or sense of beauty. The term originated from the Greek word *aisthiti* meaning perception through the senses. The expression of an aesthetic view is based on experiences and relativity of an object. Therefore, individuals may see the beauty of an object from different angles based on their understanding and experiences (Bo *et al.*, 2018). In the opinion of Peiro (2013), the term aesthetics is derived from the branch of philosophy. It is used to describe the sensitivity and style of any art work. It must be noted that the term aesthetics can also be used in the design and fashion specializations and not only philosophy. Therefore, in scenic design, the beauty in the backdrop can be achieved through the visual interpretation of the particular genre. For example, the entire background of a tragedy show would not come with a green or blue colours.

Neither could satirical staged show come with royal colours such as purple or violet (Johnson, 2004). Therefore, every scenic design must be functional and enable the performers utilize the set properly. In explanation, Millerson (2013) expresses that the design must be suitable for the character placed in front. If it is an audience show, seats provided for viewers in the studio must be comfortable and feel at ease as they sit on them to enjoy the show. The scenic design must provide enough spaces for easy movement, accessible entrances and exits and accessories that are going to be used by the performers on stage. Also, the scenic design must provide the performers with flexible movement within the entire set.

#### **4. Research methodology**

The research approach was qualitative and employed descriptive and interpretive methods. This approach was selected to capture the understanding of occurrences based on experiences of individuals. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used in selecting the show and the research participants. Source of data was the entire scenic design of the show. In addition, data collection methods employed observation and interviews. The show was observed and pictures were collected to elicit the data. Pictures collected by the researcher served as data for analysis. Also, five (5) member participants representing part of the audience who watched the show throughout to the final stage were interviewed. They consisted of (3) males and (2) females. Data gathered were analysed using visual and thematic analysis.

#### **5. Results**

##### **5.1. Scenic design in *Ghana's Most Beautiful* 2017**

The *Ghana's Most Beautiful* show as a reality television defines core and meaning of beauty based on portrayal of cultural values within thirteen weeks. The show is intended to build togetherness among various ethnic groups in Ghana. According to Azuah *et al.* (2020), the pageant involves a Ghanaian woman around the ages of 20 and 30 years, born of Ghanaian parents. Usually, married women are also selected to participate. The *Ghana's Most Beautiful* 2017 scenic design was in two-fold. The first one was set up in TV3 studio, for all the episodes and the second for the grand finale show at the Accra International Conference Centre (AICC), Accra. The scenic designs involved the use of shapes and motifs to reveal the Ghanaian concept of African beauty. The entire eclectic idea was to promote our culture and heritage. Some of the building blocks in terms of materials used in the scenic design were plywood in 1/8" and 1/4" inches constructed into wooden flats, PVC banner prints or matt flex banner prints, woolen carpets and pattern cut-outs of *Adinkra* symbols from plywood, beautifully arranged at the edge of the riser. Similarly, the symbols are arranged as repeated patterns in the initial scenic design background. The symbols used includes Dwinnemmen ("ram's horns" humility and strength), *Akofena* ("sword of war" courage), *Nsoromma* ("child of the heavens" guardianship), *Okodeee* ("talons of eagle" bravery), *Kwatakye Atiko* ("hairstyle of Kwatakye", a war hero) and *Hye Wonhye* ("that which cannot be burnt" endurance). Agbo (2011) explained *Adinkra* symbols as ideographs that highlights historical events and serve as images which symbolizes some Akan cultural morals. Danzy (2009) adds that they are symbols in the form of formalized icons that conveys the philosophy of the Ashantis of Ghana.

Moreover, LED screens were provided to add some form technological feel to the entire sets. This allowed for several projections to be done involving visuals of the pageants and artiste invited to perform on the show. The sets were enhanced with lighting consisting warm and cool colours to set the tone for the show. The sets emulated the conventional three-walled approach of staging including the main backdrop in the centre and *wings* at the left and right, for the audience to have a view of from all angles. The scenic design was characterized with *brakes* to prevent it from looking two-dimensional in view, but, rather three-dimensional. Both sets had backdrops in vertical forms and *risers* in front. The main aim of the *riser* or *rostra* was for the beauty pageants



and musical artiste to exhibit their performances properly and efficiently. The surface covering of the riser employed carpet covering to enhance the design and prevent reflections of sound by performers' movements. For the two sets, sightlines of audience were factored into the designs for suitable viewership from varied angles. In addition, the camera angles were taken into consideration by the scenic designer so that movements included audience as well as parts of the scenery. The lighting design apart from illuminating the scenic design that defined the mood and atmosphere, was achieved with the use of different colours from the light. The lighting made the scenic design atmosphere attractive and conducive for the show.



**Figure 1:** Scenic Design at TV3 Studio B, Accra (Source: Albert Bervell)



**Figure 2:** Illuminated Scenic Design at the TV3 Studio B, Accra (Source: Albert Bervell, Scenic Designer)



**Figure 3:** Grand finale scenic design at the Conference Centre, Accra (Source: Albert Bervell, Scenic Designer)



**Figure 4:** Grand finale scenic design at the Accra International Conference Centre, Accra (Source: Albert Bervell, Scenic Designer)

### **Line**

The entire set was created with horizontal and vertical lines which forms the shape. The background vertical flats gave a feel of stability. Other forms of lines used to form the shapes enabled us define the Ghanaian sense of beauty and shapes of the pageants. This confirms the shows main idea of exposing the Ghanaian female beauty through our cultural values.

### **Colour**

The colours for the initial scene design was done in black, grey and gold. The black gives a feel of power and boldness. The grey gives a feeling of naturalness and neutrality whereas the gold represents our rich mineral resources.

### **Space**

The general scenic design in two-fold were designed appropriately to fill their entire spaces for camera movements and for viewers. Besides, the height of scenic designs differed from one to the other in the two spaces they were mounted. That is the scenic design in TV3 studio was a bit shorter than the one mounted at the Accra International Conference Centre. As affirmed by Ayuba and Onoja (2014), the height of sceneries in different spaces such as indoor and outdoor differs since the former has limitations in raising the scenery up high as compared to the latter.

### **Shape**

The lines enabled the scenic designer to create the shapes. Some of shapes emulated a woman's figure.

### **Light**

The colour of lights used in the scenic design were red, blue, yellow to create mood and generate emotions in the audience. Also, the light thrown on pageants and the musical performances created the added to the clear visibility of the show.

### **Balance**



**Figure 1:** Scenic design at TV3 Studio B, Accra (**Source:** Albert Bervell, Scenic Designer)



**Figure 3:** Grand finale scenic design at the Conference Centre, Accra (**Source:** Albert Bervell, Scenic Designer)

As seen above in figures 1 and 3, are the entire scenic designs that replicates the symmetrical form of balance. Whichever shape and motifs or form placed at the right are repeated at the left portion. In figure 1, there is an abstract woman figure placed in the middle that strikes a balance in the entire scenic design representing the logo of the show. Also, there are rectangular shapes of projections on both sides. Likewise, figure 3, which represents the scenic design for the grand finale show, had projection of array of lights seeping through patterns of wooden cut-outs unto the foreground with similar geometrical shapes.

#### **Texture**

Generally, surface textures of the scenic designs were smooth in nature, however, the riser for the scenic design construction had cut-outs arranged in front that gave a bit rough feel. Besides, the grey carpet exhibited some sort of smooth feel.

#### **Rhythm**

The entire design follows a certain kind of rhythm. In the background of the initial scenic design, different kinds of *Adinkra* symbols are seen in repetition all over the set.

#### **Harmony**

The entire designs gave a feel of harmony and presented some form of control in the elements especially in the shapes and patterns combined. For instance, the *Adinkra* symbols seen all over in the design. The entire scenic design's appearance is in harmony. As indicated by Evans and Thomas (2013), designers can utilize elements and principles of design to achieve harmony. Thus, the use of elements and principles of design in the scenic design for the show.

To summarize, it was observed that the elements and principles of design in the entire scenic design played a major role in TV3 *Ghana's Most Beautiful* 2017.

#### **Blue print**

Some participants were of the view that the elements and principles of design used in the background of scenic design defined the blue print and style of the scenic designer. Other participants were of the view that familiarizing themselves with some of the elements and principles of design in the scenic design from the beginning to end gave some form of good feeling.

#### **Theme and identity**

To other participants, identifying the themes were one of the reasons for employing elements and principles of design in the scenic design. They enabled the designer to create the background in the reality TV shows, thus, educating Ghanaians and the entire world about our heritage and cultural values. Also, to unite the country through presentation of such cultural values. Some participants who had knowledge about elements and principles of design presented, acknowledged that the lines, shape and colour of the set presented some form of identity to the show.

#### **Mood and Tone**

To most participants the elements of design, especially the colour used for the scenic design enabled to define the show's tone and mood. According to some participants, the colours of lighting for the entire set made it enjoyable and magnificent to watch.

#### **Locale**

Some participants were of the view that the *Adinkra* symbols used in the scenic design gave clue to the audience about the locale of the reality tv show. Therefore, presenting the Ghanaian identity and heritage on the international map. Repetition of the symbols gave some form of attention from audience. Thus, the show presented some sense of belonging making it beautiful and amazing in spectacle. Agbo (2011) confirmed this idea when he explained that *Adinkra* symbols serve as images that symbolize some Akan cultural morals. In my opinion, it gives the audience clue about the geographical location of the show.



## 6. Contributions to the body of knowledge

This study contributes to the ongoing discourses on scenic design in reality TV shows. It focuses on the proper use of elements and principles of design in scenic design in reality TV shows. Also, it considers the aesthetics of combining elements and principles of design in scenic design for reality TV shows. Therefore, it adds to the body of knowledge to scenic design for theatre, film and television in the Ghanaian space.

## 7. Conclusion

Reality television is one of the popular genres on television networks and channels locally, therefore, the scenic design that carries the show must look attractive. In *Ghana's Most Beautiful* show, 2017, it is observed that the elements and principles of design combined in the scenic design added some form of believability to the entire show apart from its beauty. The study's results also presents that the combination of the elements and principles in the scenic design projected the theme of the show, mood and enabled, the audience to define the blue print defining its originality. It is noteworthy, that the scenic design for the show is aesthetically pleasing to the human eye. Although, elements and principles of design forms the basis of every design, it must be selected and combined properly to give a certain kind of beauty in *look*. All the principles and elements of design combined and employed in the scenic design played a precise role in making it aesthetically pleasing to the eye. Lastly, this study shows that if a proper combination of some elements and principle of design are used in scenic design in reality TV shows, the more the show becomes good-looking, magnificent to an audience who would be glued to their seats to watch till the end.

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