MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

LUGBARA TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE: A VISUAL INTERPRETATION OF SELECTED CEREMONIES AND SYMBOLS AMONG THE ARINGA.

BY

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SEPTEMBER 2026

DECLARATION

I Gerile Ismail declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted to any other College or University for academic credit.

SIGNED..... DATE..30th September 2026

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2023/HD08/26552U

APPROVAL

This dissertation entitled: **Lugbara Traditional Marriage; A Visual Interpretation of Selected Ceremonies and Symbols of Traditional Marriage among the Aringa** was carried out by Gerile Ismail under our supervision.

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all those who guided me well in my education journey to see the best from me. A special dedication of this report should go to my late father Akuma Kelili and my mother Kemisa Drakai, including my son Yusuf Kelili.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION i

APPROVAL ii

DEDICATION ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS v

LIST OF FIGURES x

LIST OF ACRONYMS xiii

INTERVIEW AND FGD PARTICIPANT CODES xiv

ABSTRACT xv

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1

1.0 Introduction 1

1.1 Background of the study. 2

1.1.1 Historical perspective 5

1.1.2 Theoretical Perspective 10

1.1.3. Conceptual perspective 11

1.1.4 Contextual perspective 14

1.2 Statement of the Problem 16

1.3 Purpose of the study 17

1.3.1 Specific objectives of the study 17

1.3.2 Research Questions 17

1.4 Significance of the study 17

1.5 Justification of the study. 18

1.6 Scope of the Study 19

1.6.1 Geographical Scope 19

1.6.2 Content Scope 20

1.6.3 Material Scope 20

1.6.3.1Acrylic paints 20

1.7 Definition of Terms 22

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW 24

2.0 Introduction 24

2.1 Traditional Marriage Ceremonies among different societies 24

2.2 Symbols and their cultural meanings in traditional marriage 30

2.3 Visual interpretation and representation of marriage ceremonies and symbols through contemporary painterly 36

2.4 Literature gap 49

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY 50

3.0. Introduction 50

3.1 Research design 50

3.2. Research Approach 51

3.3. Study Population 52

3.4 Study Area 53

3.5 Sample study 54

3.5.1 Sample Size 54

3.5.2 Sampling technique 55

3.5.3 Sample procedure 55

3.5.4 Sample selection criteria 56

3.6 Socio-demographic characteristics of participants. 56
3.7 Data Collection Methods and instruments 57
3.7.1 Participant observation 57
3.7.2 Interviews 58
3.7.3 Library and documentary review. 59
3.7.4 Focus group discussion. 60
3.7.5 Studio Exploration 61
3.8 Pilot study of Research Instruments 62
3.9 Data analysis 63
3.10 Reliability and Validity 64
3.11 Ethical considerations 64
3.12 Limitations of the study 65
4. CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION 66
4.0 Introduction 66
4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis 66
4.1.1 Traditional Marriage Ceremonies among the Aringa Subgroup of the Lugbara 66
4.1.1.1 Courtship and expression of interest. 67
4.1.1.2 Introduction and Marriage Arrangements 68
4.1.1.3 Bride wealth Negotiation 69
4.1.1.4 Bride wealth Transfer 69
4.1.1.5 Marriage celebration (Aje) 70
4.1.1.6 Transferring gifts. 71
4.1.2 Marriage Symbols and their Cultural meanings among the Aringa Subgroup of the Lugbara 77

4.1.2.1 Bride wealth and its Symbolism. 77

4.1.2.2 Communal eating. 78

4.1.2.3 Songs and dances. 79

4.1.2.4 Mats or Stools 80

4.1.2.5 Roles of Elders, family members and the community. 81

4.2 Data interpretation 82

4.2.1 Visual interpretation of ceremonies into painterly forms 82

4.2.2 Visual interpretation of symbols into painterly forms 108

5.0 CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS 118

5.1 Introduction 118

5.2 Traditional Marriage Ceremonies among the Aringa Subgroup of the Lugbara 118

5.3 Marriage symbols and their cultural meanings among the Aringa 121

5.4 Visual Interpretation of Aringa Marriage 122

6.0 CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS . 125

6.1 Introducton 125

6.2 Conclusions 125

6.3 Contributions 126

6.4 Recommendations 127

REFERENCES 130

APPENDICES 137

APPENDIX I. OBSERVATION CHECKLIST 137

APPENDIX II.:FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE 141

APPENDIX III.:TRANSLATION OF THE FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE INTO ARINGA LUGBARA TI LANGUAGE. 146

APPENDIX IV:SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE 151

APPENDIX V:FIELDWORK AUTHORIZATION LETTER 156

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. 1: Imve and Agbarala (booking rings). By Gerile, 2024 7
Figure 1. 2: Map of Lugbara Settlement Area 9
Figure 1. 3: Diagram for conceptual framework 14
Figure 1. 4: Location of Yumbe district on the West Nile sub region of Uganda. 19
Figure 2. 1: Zimbabwe Wedding Ritual and Community Gathering painted by (ClutterMeVintage, 2000) 38
Figure 2. 2: Representation of African Couple in Traditional Attire painted by Durus, (2022) 39
Figure 2. 3: Showing representation of African Marriage Partnership painted by (Walter, 2007) 40
Figure 2. 4: African Bride painted by (Jengo, 2018) 41
Figure 2. 5: Wedding procession in Kenya painted by (Thairu, 2000) 42
Figure 2. 6: The Kwanjula Ceremony: Baganda Marriage Introduction painted by (Kyeyune, 2015) 44
Figure 2. 7: Ugandan daily Life and Cultural Scene painted by (Kakaire, 2024) 45
Figure 4. 1: Kobi (winnowers). Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024 72
Figure 4. 2: Ilinga (knife). Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024 72
Figure 4. 3: Bowl used for putting in sauce. Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024 73
Figure 4. 4: Mito and Utoro from right to left (Baskets). Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024 74
Figure 4. 5: ’Ngalika (Bead). Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024 74
Figure 4. 6: Baby head cover. Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024 75
Figure 4. 7: Yelemvu (pot) used for storing water. Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024. 76
Figure 4. 8: Grinding stone. Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024. 76
Figure 4. 9: Goats and cows presented as bride wealth. Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024. 78
Figure 4. 10: Participants having a communal eating during a marriage ceremony. Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024 79

Figure 4. 11: Kpokponga (Stool) and Mat. Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024 81
Figure 4. 12: Sources of painting inspirations. By Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. 83
Figure 4. 13: Preparation for marriage by the Bridegroom. Preliminary Sketches on paper. A collection from studio experimentation. By Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. 84
Figure 4. 14: Preparation for marriage by the Bridegroom. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (29.7 x 42 cm). 85
Figure 4. 15: Preparing the girls for marriage. Preliminary Sketch, pen and acrylics on a paper. 87
Figure 4. 16: Preparing the girls for marriage. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (100 x 100 cm). 88
Figure 4. 17: Parent identifying a partner. Preliminary Sketches, Collections from the studio experimentations, Pastels on Manila paper, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. 89
Figure 4. 18: Parent identifying a partner for his son. Acrylic on plywood, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (240 x 120 cm). 90
Figure 4. 19: Transferring the Bride wealth. Preliminary Sketch, water colors on sugar paper, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. 91
Figure 4. 20: Transferring the Bride wealth to the Bride's family. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (100 x 100 cm). 92
Figure 4. 21: Booking a partner. Preliminary Sketches, Pastel on paper, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. 94
Figure 4. 22: Booking a partner. Acrylic on plywood, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (240 x 120 cm). 95
Figure 4. 23: Negotiation of Bride wealth. Preliminary Sketches, Media; pen and acrylics on paper, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. 97
Figure 4. 24: Negotiation of Bride wealth. Sketch Development of in water colors, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. 98
Figure 4. 25: Negotiation of Bride wealth. Acrylic on plywood, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (240 x 120 cm). 99
Figure 4. 26: Escorting the Bride to the Husbands home. Preliminary Sketches, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. 100
Figure 4. 27: Escorting the Bride to the Husbands place. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (150 x 95 cm). 101
Figure 4. 28: Designing the Bride. Preliminary Sketches. Collection from studio exploration, Poster colors on paper, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. 103
Figure 4. 29: Designing the Bride. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (100 x 95 cm). 104

Figure 4. 30: The Bride and the Parents. Preliminary Sketch from Studio exploration, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. 105
Figure 4. 31: The bride and her parents on Aje day. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (150 x 130 cm). 106
Figure 4. 32: The Aje day (Marriage celebration). Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (200 x 100 cm). 107
Figure 4. 33: The Bride wealth. Preliminary Sketch, colored pencils on paper, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. 109
Figure 4. 34: The Bride wealth. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (150 x 100 cm). 109
Figure 4. 35: Cooking Yamari on the Aje (marriage) day. Preliminary Sketches, Pen on paper, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. 111
Figure 4. 36: Cooking Yamari (meals) on the Aje day. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (150 x 100 cm). 112
Figure 4. 37: Eating Yamari (Traditional feasting). Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (150 x 100 cm). 113
Figure 4. 38: Traditional marriage dance. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (180 x 100 cm). 114
Figure 4. 39: Taking gifts to the bride. Preliminary Sketches. Collections of studio exploration, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. 115
Figure 4. 40: Taking gifts to the Bride. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (150 x 120 cm). 116

LIST OF ACRONYMS

Acronym	Full meaning
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGDM	Focus Group Discussion Male
FGDF	Focus Group Discussion Female
IME	Interview Male Elder
IFE	Interview Female Elder
UBOS	Uganda Bureau Of Statistics

INTERVIEW AND FGD PARTICIPANT CODES

Code	Participant category	Date
IME 01	Male elder	21st, 2024
IME 02	Male elder	21st, 2024
IME 03	Male elder	21st, 2024
IME 04	Male elder	21st, 2024
IME 05	Male elder	21st, 2024
IME 06	Male elder	21st, 2024
IFE 07	Female elder	21st, 2024
IFE 08	Female elder	21st, 2024
IFE 09	Female elder	21st, 2024
IFE 10	Female elder	21st, 2024
FGD 01	Male participant	22nd, 2024
FGD 02	Male participant	22nd, 2024
FGD 03	Male participant	22nd, 2024
FGD 04	Male participant	22nd, 2024
FGD 05	Male participant	22nd, 2024
FGD 06	Male participant	22nd, 2024
FGD 07	Male participant	22nd, 2024
FGD 11	Male participant	22nd, 2024
FGD 12	Male participant	22nd, 2024
FGD 13	Male participant	22nd, 2024
FGD 14	Male participant	22nd, 2024
FGD 15	Male participant	22nd, 2024
FGD 16	Male participant	22nd, 2024
FGDF 31	Female participant	23rd, 2024
FGDF 32	Female participant	23rd, 2024
FGDF 33	Female participant	23rd, 2024
FGDF 34	Female participant	23rd, 2024
FGDF 35	Female participant	23rd, 2024
FGDF 36	Female participant	23rd, 2024
FGDFY 41	Fmale Youth participant	23rd, 2024
FGDFY 42	Female Youth participant	23rd, 2024
FGDFY 43	Female Youth participant	23rd, 2024
FGDFY 44	Female Youth participant	23rd, 2024
FGDMY 45	Male Youth participant	23rd, 2024
FGDMY 46	Male Youth participant	23rd, 2024
FGDMY 47	Male Youth participant	23rd, 2024
FGDMY 48	Male Youth participant	23rd, 2024

ABSTRACT

This study examined Lugbara traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols among the Aringa subgroup in Yumbe district, northwestern Uganda, with particular emphasis on their cultural meanings and visual interpretation through painting. The study was motivated by the transformation and diminishing knowledge of selected traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols such as booking partners at young ages, payment of 100 arrows as part of bride wealth, family mediated traditional courtship, and transfer of ceremonial gifts. The study utilized a qualitative research approach incorporating ethnographic inquiry, visual artistic inquiry, and studio-based experimentation to investigate, interpret and visually represent the selected Aringa marriage traditions.

Data was collected through participant observation, semi structured interviews, focus group discussions and library review study. Purposive sampling technique was used to engage elders, clan leaders, knowledgeable community members and married adults and youths of the Aringa community. The data was analyzed thematically, while studio practice was used to interpret selected marriage ceremonies, associated symbols, and their cultural meanings into painterly forms. The study was guided by Emile Durkheim's Functionalist Theory, which provided a framework for understanding how marriage ceremonies and symbols contribute to social cohesion, cultural identity, and continuity.

The findings established that Aringa traditional marriage comprises interconnected ceremonies, including courtship, family introduction, bride wealth negotiations and bride wealth transfer, Aje (marriage celebration and), and transfer of gifts. The study identified several symbols including bride wealth, mats and stools, communal eating, songs and dance, and the role of elders, family and community. These objects and performative elements carry meanings related to family relationships, respect, responsibility, unity, and social recognition. The visual interpretation further demonstrated that painting can communicate these cultural meanings through contemporary painterly forms, thereby contributes to the documentation and preservation Aringa cultural heritage.

Keywords: Aringa, Lugbara, traditional marriage, ceremonies, symbols, visual interpretation, painting, cultural heritage.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of the study was to examine selected traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols among the Aringa of Lugbara, interpret their cultural meanings and visual represent them for documentation and preservation. Traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols play an important role in uniting individuals, families, and clans, preserving social identity and transmitting customs, norms, and cultural values from one generation to another. The Lugbara recognize several forms of marriage, including child marriage, levirate marriage, and customary marriage. Among these, customary marriage remains the most widely practiced and forms the primary focus of this study.

The Aringa traditional marriage constitutes a series of ceremonies and symbols that guide the formation, recognition and legitimization of marital relationships. Ceremonies such as courtship, family introduction, bride wealth negotiation, bride wealth transfer, transfer of gifts, marriage celebration (*Aje*) are associated with symbolic objects including mats and stools, animals, communal eating, songs and dances, involvement of elders, each carry culturally shared meanings. Understanding these cultural meanings provides a basis for interpreting the ceremonies and symbols visually, enabling the paintings to communicate their social and cultural significance.

However, these ceremonies, symbols and their associated meanings receive limited scholarly documentation, particularly through visual and artistic forms of representation. This gap informed the study's main research question: "How can the ceremonies and symbols of traditional marriage among the Aringa people be investigated and visually interpreted through contemporary painting to contribute to the preservation and appreciation of indigenous cultural heritage?"

The Aringa belong to a subgroup of the Lugbara people of Northwestern Uganda. (Shiroya, 1981), observes that, despite maintaining politically independence, the Lugbara groups largely share a common culture, particularly in language, political organization and social philosophies. This implies that Lugbara subgroups such as Aringa, Ayivu, Maracha, Terego, and Vura functioned as politically independent while remained culturally connected through their Lugbara language,

beliefs, customs and traditional institutions including marriage where they shared similar ceremonial stages and symbolic practices.

Consequently, this study situates the Aringa as an integral part of the broader Lugbara cultural tradition while maintaining distinctive cultural adaptations. Therefore, scholarly discussions and references to the Lugbara in this study are considered to encompass the Aringa community, except where a distinction is explicitly made to highlight the unique cultural features of Aringa.

1.1 Background of the study.

Traditional marriage is widely practiced across diverse cultures, although its forms, ceremonies, rules and meanings vary according to the cultural, social, religious and kinship systems of particular societies. It often extend beyond the union of two individuals to involve families, elders, and communities, with ceremonies and symbols expressing values, responsibilities, social relationships and cultural identity.

In Egypt, Northern Africa, traditional Marriage is understood as both an individual and family matter and involves several stages characterized by ceremonies and material exchanges (Rashad et al., 2005). These include *shabka*, involving the exchange of rings or gold dowry as part of the marriage arrangement, provision of housing and furnishings, and the bride's *gihaz* (trousseau). Traditionally, the groom and his family bear most of these financial responsibilities. However, the rising marriage expenses and increased female labour-force participation have led to greater financial contributions from brides and their families.

The Egyptian case illustrates that marriage extends beyond the union of the couple to encompass family participation, material exchange and economic obligations, while objects such as rings, gold and household items acquire symbolic meanings and cultural significance within the marriage process.

Similarly, customary marriage ceremonies among the Krobos of Somanya in Ghana's Eastern region involve diverse forms of visual and performing arts (Afful & Nantwi, 2018). The study found that music, drama and appellations were integral to the marriage rites, while beads played a significant role, with different colours carrying specific meanings within the marriage process.

These findings indicate that marriage ceremonies function as forms of artistic expression through which cultural values and meanings are communicated. The Krobo example is relevant to present study because it demonstrates how objects, colors, performances and other artistic elements can convey meanings within marriage ceremonies.

(Mulaudzi, 2013) observes that traditional marriage ceremonies among communities of South Africa take different forms, including approaches initiated by the prospective groom or his family towards the woman's family. Among the Nguni-speaking, one form involved taking a woman to the prospective groom's family against her wishes, a practice also reported among Tshivenda and Sotho-speaking communities. Another form involved an arrangement in which the woman was taken to the groom's family home pending negotiations between the two families. Both forms all involved customary obligations, including the payment of cattle by the groom's family. This demonstrates that marriage initiation was embedded in family negotiations, material exchanges and customary obligations rather than being solely an agreement between two individuals.

In East Africa, particularly Uganda, the traditional marriage practices are observed across various cultural communities, with their forms, ceremonies and meanings varying according to the customs and social structures of each community. Ruguma (2015), observes among the Bafumbira, traditional marriage involved different ceremonial stages including parental participation in partner selection, bride wealth negotiations, accompanied by customary practices such as presentation of *inzonga* (alcohol), marriage celebration, and traditional dancing. The groom's father would appoint a go-between to mediate between the two families. Bride wealth was regarded as a symbol of the marriage covenant, family recognition and legitimacy of children born within the union (Ruguma, 2015).

These practices demonstrate that Bafumbira marriage was a collective process in which family negotiations, material exchanges and ceremonial performance worked together to establish and publicly recognize the marital union.

Similarly, among the Lugbara of Northwestern Uganda, traditional marriages involve series of interconnected activities including courtship, family involvement, negotiations of bride wealth, marriage celebration and exchange of material gifts. Marriage is embedded in customary practices

that define relationships between individuals, marriage celebration, and exchange of material gifts (Middleton, 1965).

This indicates that marriage is not organized according to a universal pattern but is shaped by the specific social, cultural and kinship structures of each community. The literature reviewed above further demonstrates that marriage ceremonies involve interconnected elements, including family participation, material exchanges, performances, objects and symbolic practices.

However, limited attention has been given to the visual interpretation of marriage ceremonies and symbols, particularly among the Aringa subgroup of the Lugbara. The present study addresses this gap by examining selected Aringa marriage ceremonies and symbols and interpreting their cultural meanings through contemporary painting. Thus, the study moves beyond documenting marriage practices to visually communicating the meanings, relationships and symbolic elements embedded within them.

The researcher's motivation for this study stems from a personal interest in understanding and preserving the traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols of Aringa community. As a member of the Aringa community, the researcher has familiarity with the Aringa language, customs and social practices, such as greetings, communal eating and other forms of social interaction, through lived cultural experience.

This familiarity enabled the researcher to observe changes in traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols such as commercialization of bride wealth, decline of partner-booking traditions, and abandonment of the use of 100 arrows as part of bride wealth and family involvements, particularly among younger generations. These transformations raised concerns about the preservation of cultural practices and the meanings associated with them.

The researcher was also motivated by an interest in Fine art practice and the potential of painting to communicate, interpret and preserve cultural knowledge in visual form. Consequently, these observations motivated the researcher to document selected marriage ceremonies and symbols and interpret their cultural meanings through contemporary painting. This study therefore seeks not only to contribute to the documentation of Aringa cultural heritage but also to demonstrate how

contemporary painting can serve as a means of visually interpreting and preserving cultural knowledge.

1.1.1 Historical perspective

The historical development of the Lugbara people provides an important context for understanding Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols. (Middleton, 1954) classified the Lugbara as Sudanic-speaking people found in West Nile region of Uganda and parts of northwestern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The classification as Sudanic-speaking refers to their linguistic and historical origins rather than their contemporary national identity.

In other words, it indicates that the Lugbara belong to the Central Sudanic division of the Nilo-Saharan language family and share ancestral links with other Sudanic-speaking people. In agreement with this view, Shiroya (1981) traced the migration of the Lugbara to the founding ancestors believed to have originated from Moru area in the present-day South Sudan before settling in the West Nile region.

Traditional marriage has historically been one of the most important cultural institutions through which social relationships, family continuity, and identity have been maintained and expressed through ceremonies and symbols. For instance, the meaning of marriage can be traced through the use of symbols that conveys the impressions of love, commitment, companionship, respect, unity, fellowship (Erfiani et al., 2022). This perspective indicates that marriage symbols are not merely decorative elements but also carriers of cultural meanings and social values. In this study, the view provides a foundation for examining the ceremonies and symbols of Aringa sub group of Lugbara community and how they can be translated into painterly forms for cultural documentation and preservation.

The Lugbara recognize several types of marriage, each serving important social, cultural and economic functions within the community. Ayaka (1996) expressed that the Lugbara observe levirate marriage, a form of marriage in which upon the death of a married man, the widow may marry one of his brothers or another close male relative. The importance of this tradition was not simply to remarry the widow, but to ensure the continuity of the family, protect the widow and her children, preserve the deceased husband's family lineage and property within the clan.

However, this practice may violate the widow's autonomy and freedom of choice especially through the pressure from family or clan members. Above all, the levirate marriage served to maintain the alliance between the two families and clans created through the original marriage.

The Lugbara also recognise polygynous marriage, particularly among the Aringa community. This marriage involved a man marrying more than one wife which traditionally symbolized wealth, social status and ability to support family. Polygyny ensured continuity of the lineage especially if the first wife was barren to fulfill the procreation purpose of marriage. In this regard (Casale, 1982)noted that, childbearing and motherhood are the most important functions of women because they contribute to perpetuating their husband's lineage. However, despite its perceived social and cultural significance, polygyny was not without challenges. The tradition could generate jealousy, competition and rivalry among Co-wives, thereby affecting family harmony. Co-wives are thought to practice sorcery, and commonly make accusations against each other (Casale, 1982).

Furthermore, Eyaa (1986) emphasized that child marriage was maintained among the Lugbara. Such marriage was arranged by parents or guardians when children were still young, with the understanding that the union would be formalized once they reached marriageable age. This practice was intended to strengthen kinship ties, establish alliance between families. Although no specific age was prescribed for marriage, girls were expected to marry soon after puberty, while boys married when they were considered capable of supporting a family.

In contemporary times, however, child marriage has been associated with challenges such as limited education particularly for girls in contemporary times. As illustrated in figure 1.1 below, the partners were symbolically bound through the wearing of rings on their feet and arms, known as *Imve* and *Agbarala*, respectively.



Figure 1. 1: *Imve and Agbarala* used as booking rings. Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024

The most common form of marriage recognized by the Lugbara marriage was "the customary marriage" which involved systematic processes including, the identification of the suitable partner, family consultations, courtship, negotiation between the families, payment of bride wealth, blessings, communal celebration and recognition, and transfer of the bride to the groom's family (Middleton, 1965). This marriage established a legitimate union between the two families and their respective clans. More importantly, customary marriage served as the foundation of Lugbara social organization by reinforcing kinships, regulating marital obligations, ensuring lineage continuity and preserving cultural values.

However, over time, Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies have undergone significant changes due to historical and sociocultural factors including colonial influence, Christianity, Islam, formal education, urbanization, and interactions with refugee communities in the West Nile region and

South Sudan have also contributed to cultural transformations. These have contributed to the gradual erosion of some symbolic meanings associated with traditional marriage ceremonies, particularly among the young generation.

Although previous studies have examined aspects of Lugbara social organization and cultural practices, limited attention has been given to the visual interpretation and preservation of marriage ceremonies and symbols, particularly among the Aringa subgroup. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols and transform selected aspects of them into visual artworks through painting that contributes to the documentation and preservation of Lugbara cultural heritage for present and future generations.

The historical information is important to understanding the marriage ceremonies and symbols because it provides the cultural and social context within which these practices developed, acquired meaning, and changed over time. It helps establish the origins, continuity, adaptations, and transformations of marriage ceremonies and symbols among the Aringa subgroup of the Lugbara. The historical understanding also informs the visual interpretation by enabling the artist to represent marriage ceremonies and symbols in relation to their cultural context rather than as isolated visual forms. As a result, the paintings communicate the social function and cultural meanings within Aringa society.

Below is map showing the settlement of the Lugbara in West Nile region of northwestern Uganda

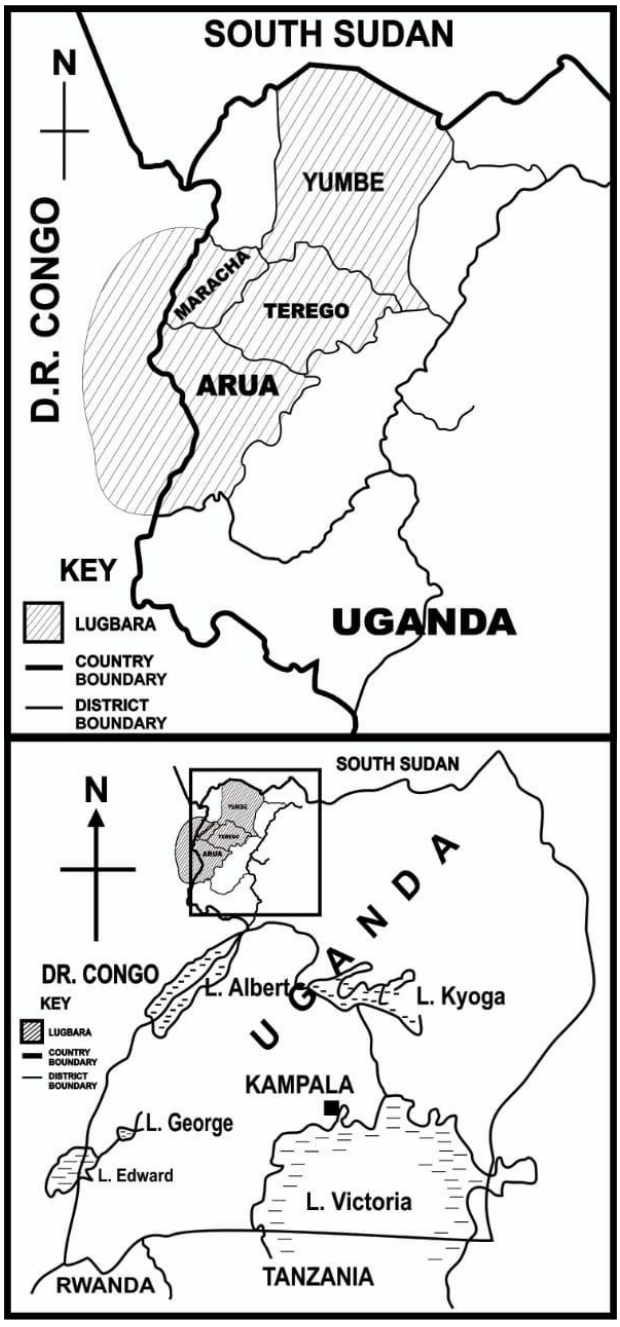


Figure 1. 2: Map of Lugbara Settlement Area. Reprinted from "*The Lugbara of Uganda and the Sudan: A brief account,"* by A. T. Dalfovo, 1982, *Anthropos*, *77*, copyright 1982 by Anthropos Institute. Reprinted with permission.

1.1.2 Theoretical Perspective

This study is grounded in Emile Durkheim's Functionalist Theory, which emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly through his works *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893) and *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) (Khairulyadi et al., 2022). Durkheim developed the theoretical perspective from the view that society is a complex system of interconnected parts, analogous to human body, in which each institution performs specific functions necessary for maintaining social order and continuity (Turner & Maryanski, 1979).

He argued that cultural practices are social facts because they exist beyond individuals and influence their behavior, thoughts, and relationships within society (Durkheim, 1982). According to Durkheim, social institutions such as the family, religion, and marriage perform functions that contribute to social solidarity and stability through shared values and collective consciousness among members of a community.

Durkheim's functionalist ideas were further expanded by scholars such as Bronislaw Malinowski (1922), A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1952), and Robert K. Merton (1968), who contributed to understanding culture as an interconnected system where practices have consequences for the survival and organization of society (Turner & Maryanski, 1979).

In relation to this study, Durkheim's Functionalist Theory provides a lens for understanding the social significance of traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols among the Aringa subgroup of the Lugbara contributing to social cohesion, stability and continuity. Ceremonies such as bride wealth negotiation, family involvement, and marriage celebrations, together with symbols like traditional songs, dances, and involving families and clans contribute to the preservation of cultural identity and continuity of social relationships among the Aringa society.

Furthermore, the theory informs the artistic component of the study by guiding the visual interpretation of marriage ceremonies and symbols beyond their physical appearance. Through painting, cultural elements of marriage such as traditional objects, gestures, attire, rituals, and communal interactions are represented according to the meanings and social functions they hold within Aringa society. Functionalist Theory therefore assists the researcher in selecting and

interpreting visual symbols that communicate themes of unity, identity, belonging, continuity, and cultural preservation which are expressed through painting.

However, Functionalist Theory has been criticized for its capacity to account for social change, gender inequalities, individual agency, and conflicts within society. For instance, (Anthony, 2014) argued that functionalism is inadequate in explaining the social conflict that has bedeviled the Nigerian contemporary society today. Similarly, (Smith, 2010) argued that functionalism is a perspective on society which is unable to cope with social change.

In the Aringa context, Functionalist Theory helps explain traditional marriage as a social institution that connects individuals, families, clans and the wider community. Ceremonies and their associated symbols communicate shared values and cultural identity. These traditions also facilitate the transmission of Aringa cultural knowledge across generations. Thus, the theory provides a useful basis for understanding how marriage contributes to social cohesion, cultural continuity and identity among the Aringa despite being criticized by some scholars.

1.1.3. Conceptual perspective

This study is conceptually informed by Aringa traditional marriage, ethnographic inquiry, visual interpretation, and studio experimentation. These concepts provide a foundation for understanding, interpreting, and visually representing selected aspects of Aringa traditional marriage. The framework conceptualizes the study as an interconnected and iterative process through which cultural knowledge is investigated, interpreted, and documented through painting. It also recognizes the production of paintings as a means of inquiry and knowledge production through sketching, and experimentation with color, form, composition and other painterly processes.

The Aringa cultural context provides the foundation for understanding traditional marriage within the community. Within this context, selected marriage ceremonies, including courtship, family introduction, bride wealth negotiation, transfer of gifts, bride wealth transfer, Aje (marriage celebration) provide the cultural traditions through which marriage is initiated, recognized and celebrated. (Middleton, 1965) conceptualizes Lugbara traditional marriage as a process involving a sequence of culturally prescribed ceremonies in which families, clans and the wider community

participate. This understanding provides a foundation for examining the selected Aringa marriage ceremonies and symbols as interconnected cultural traditions within organization of marriage.

The ceremonies incorporate various symbols whose meanings are embedded within customary practices. Several scholars conceptualize symbols from different but complementary perspectives. (Firth, 2013), views Symbols as instruments of expression, communication, knowledge and control. (Rowntree & Conkey, 1980), argued that symbols encompass a wide range of phenomena that includes speech, gestures, behavior, art, and architecture. From a semiotic view, Saussure explained a symbols consists of the relationship between the *signifier* (observable form) and the *signified* (the meaning it conveys), emphasizing that meaning arises from the association between the two (Culler, 1986).

Among the Aringa, symbolic items such as bride wealth, songs and dances, communal eating or feast, and roles of Elders that embody meanings related to respect, unity, fertility, kinship, responsibility and continuity of lineage. Their cultural meanings provide the basis for selecting significant Aringa marriage symbols and interpreting them into painterly forms that communicate their cultural and social significance.

Ethnographic investigation provides the means through which the researcher engaged with these cultural traditions and their associated meanings. Through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and library sources, the researcher investigated how community members understand and explain marriage ceremonies and symbols. The knowledge obtained through this process informed the interpretation of the cultural meanings and social significance of selected ceremonies and symbols, thereby informing their subsequent visual interpretation.

The information obtained from the field through ethnographic inquiry is interpreted in relation to the objectives of the study. The interpretation process involves identifying significant ceremonies, symbols, objects, social relationships, and understanding how cultural meanings are expressed and how selected aspects of the marriage tradition can be transformed into visual concepts. Therefore, the interpretation establishes connection between ethnographic knowledge and studio practice.

Through studio experimentation, the researcher critically selected, rearranged and transformed observed cultural elements into painterly compositions. Studio experimentation involved using preliminary sketches and exploration of composition, color, line, form, movement, space, emphasis, balance, gesture and other elements and principles of art. This process enabled the researcher to generate ideas from the fieldwork data through testing, modifying, combining and refining selected cultural elements, thereby facilitating the development of the final works.

The paintings emerged from an interaction between ethnographic knowledge, cultural interpretation, and artistic studio experimentation. The resulting works are understood as visual interpretations which enables the researcher to communicate and document aspects of Aringa marriage, thereby contributing to cultural preservation by providing records of Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies, symbols, and their cultural meanings.

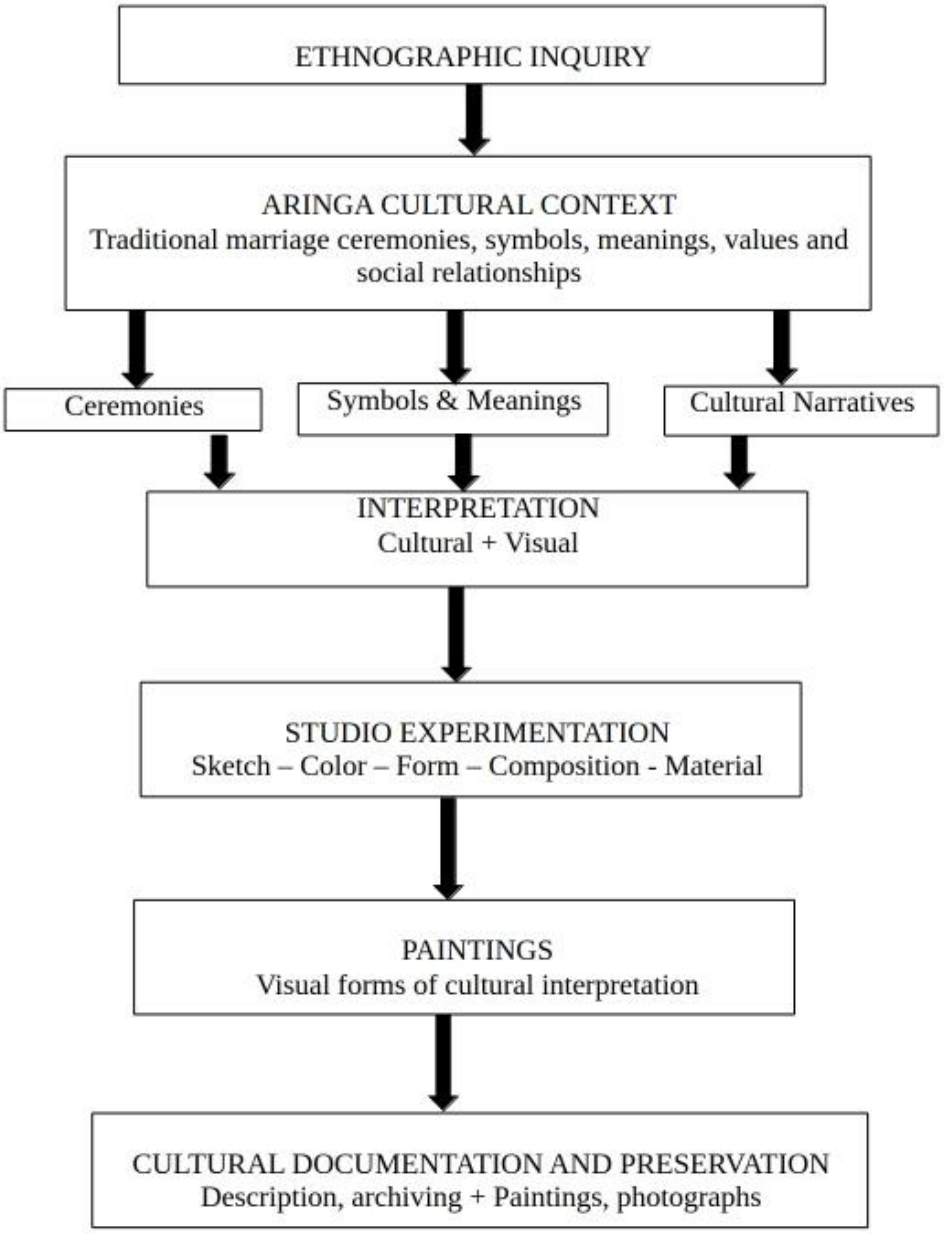


Figure 1. 3: ***Conceptual Framework*** showing the interconnected relationship between Aringa cultural context, ethnographic inquiry, interpretation, studio experimentation, painterly production and cultural documentation and preservation. Authors own construct (Gerile 2026).

1.1.4 Contextual perspective

This study is contextualized within the cultural traditions of the Lugbara people, particularly the Aringa subgroup found in Yumbe District in north-western Uganda. The Lugbara are a Sudanic-

speaking ethnic group whose cultural identity is expressed through language, kinship systems, rituals, social institutions such as marriage, religion. Among these practices, traditional marriage occupies a central position because it functions as a social institution that connects families, clans, and the wider community.

The study focuses specifically on the Aringa people because they have maintained their rich cultural expressions while also experiencing significant social transformations resulting from foreign religious influence, formal education, modernization, and interaction with neighboring communities especially through hosting a large refugee population. The resulting effects have contributed to modifications in some traditional marriage practices, creating concerns about the preservation and transmission of cultural knowledge among younger generations.

The study sought to address a regional gap in research, as previous studies have predominantly focused on other Lugbara subgroups, with limited scholarly attention given to the Aringa subgroup. Although Durkheim's theory emphasizes social unity, it does not require a researcher to study the entire ethnic group but instead it explains how social institutions such as marriage contribute to social unity within a society.

From a Fine Art perspective, the study is situated within contemporary African art practice, where artists use visual language to explore identity, memory, and cultural heritage. Painting provides a means of interpreting cultural experiences, ceremonies, and symbols into visual narratives that communicate meanings beyond written documentation. Through painterly interpretation, elements of Aringa marriage traditions are transformed into artistic expressions that preserve cultural knowledge and contribute to discussions on indigenous African identities.

Thus, the contextual perspective of this study lies at the intersection of Aringa cultural traditions and contemporary visual art practice. It examines how cultural meanings embedded in marriage ceremonies and symbols can be documented, interpreted, and represented through painting to contribute to the preservation and appreciation Aringa subgroup of Lugbara identity.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Lugbara, particularly the poses a rich traditional marriage heritage expressed through ceremonies, objects, gestures, colors and symbols that transmit cultural values, preserves the identity of the community and indigenous knowledge across generations. However, modernization, migrations, formal education, urbanization, religion, globalization, and interaction with other ethnic groups have increasingly transformed these practices (Ruguma, 2015).

Historically, the Lugbara, particularly the Aringa subgroup, experienced extensive contact with various other ethnic groups due to the Ugandan political wars of the 1970s and 1980s, which forced many into refugee camps (Vancluysen, 2022). In contemporary times, the West Nile region continues to host a large refugee population (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2024), leading to ongoing interaction and cultural exchange in shared service areas such as markets, hospitals, sports and recreational activities such as cultural festivals.

As a result, some practices have been simplified, modified and the meanings are gradually being lost. For example, the Aringa adopted Islamic religious practices and incorporated the *Kuta* into traditional marriage ceremonies through historical interactions with Nubian Muslim communities in South Sudan and the settlement of the British Nubian forces in the West Nile region. This demonstrates how intercultural contact has shaped the evolution of Aringa traditional marriage while preserving its cultural identity.

In addition, major aspects of Aringa traditional marriage such as traditional courtship that involved families have been reduced and replaced by more individual forms of partner selection, and increasingly, decisions in bride wealth negotiations are made by the couple reducing the authority of elders. This affects the transmission of indigenous knowledge from one generation to another (de Smedt, 2011), (Said, 2024).

Despite this growing cultural loss, there is limited scholarly attention given to how Lugbara marriage ceremonies and their symbolic meanings can be preserved and communicated through visual interpretation, particularly painting, making this underexplored area. This study therefore seeks to address this gap by investigating Aringa traditional marriage cermonies and symbols to

uncover their cultural meanings and translating these findings into a series of paintings that visually document and preserve Lugbara cultural heritage.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols, interpret their cultural meanings, and visually represent them through painting for cultural documentation and preservation.

1.3.1 Specific objectives of the study

The study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

i. To identify and examine the selected traditional marriage ceremonies among the Aringa subgroup of the Lugbara.
ii. To analyze the selected symbols associated with Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies and their cultural meanings.
iii. To visually interpret the selected Aringa marriage ceremonies and symbols through contemporary paintings for cultural documentation and preservation.

1.3.2 Research Questions

i. What are the traditional marriage ceremonies among the Aringa subgroup of Lugbara?
ii. What are the selected symbols associated with the Aringa traditional marriage and what are their cultural meanings?
iii. How can the selected ceremonies and symbols of the Aringa traditional marriage be visually interpreted into contemporary painterly forms?

1.4 Significance of the study

I. The study will help in Cultural documentation and Preservation of the Aringa subgroup of Lugbara marriage traditions especially that are increasingly threatened by modernization, globalization, religion and changing lifestyles.

II. The results can be used in Education as teaching and learning resources in schools, universities, museums, and cultural centers to make cultural meaning more accessible to learners who may not easily grasp them through text alone.

III. The study will serve as a source of inspiration, showing how traditional symbols and ceremonies can be translated into visual forms such as paintings, illustrations, photography, sculpture, while maintaining cultural authenticity.

IV. The findings can inform community leaders, educators, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in developing targeted programs and policies that support the intentional infusion and preservation of beneficial traditions and practices for the young Lugbara generation, ensuring cultural continuity while promoting social.

1.5 Justification of the study.

The Lugbara community is experiencing significant cultural shifts particularly in the traditional marriage ceremonies in the context of modernization, urbanization, education, religious influence, and hosting a large refugee population (approximately 149,479 individuals). The traditional marriage is one of the most important institutions through which the Aringa subgroup of Lugbara preserves their cultural identity, social values and kinship relationships.

Existing literature largely focuses on anthropological and sociological descriptions while limited attention has been given to the visual interpretation of the marriage ceremonies and symbols of the Aringa people. This study addresses this gap by using studio practice to visually document and interpret the cultural meanings contained in Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols.

The study specifically focused on the Aringa people because they experienced social and cultural change arising from historical displacement and contemporary interaction with neighboring communities coupled with broader societal factors such as modernization and globalization hence making their documentation and preservation necessary and timely.

1.6 Scope of the Study

1.6.1 Geographical Scope

This study was conducted exclusively in Yumbe District, Uganda. This location was strategically selected because it is the primary area of residence for the Aringa subgroup of the Lugbara community. Furthermore, Yumbe District hosts a significant refugee population approximately 78,375 refugees according to the 2024 national population census figures presented by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) providing a unique context for examining cultural interactions and potential shifts in traditional practices.

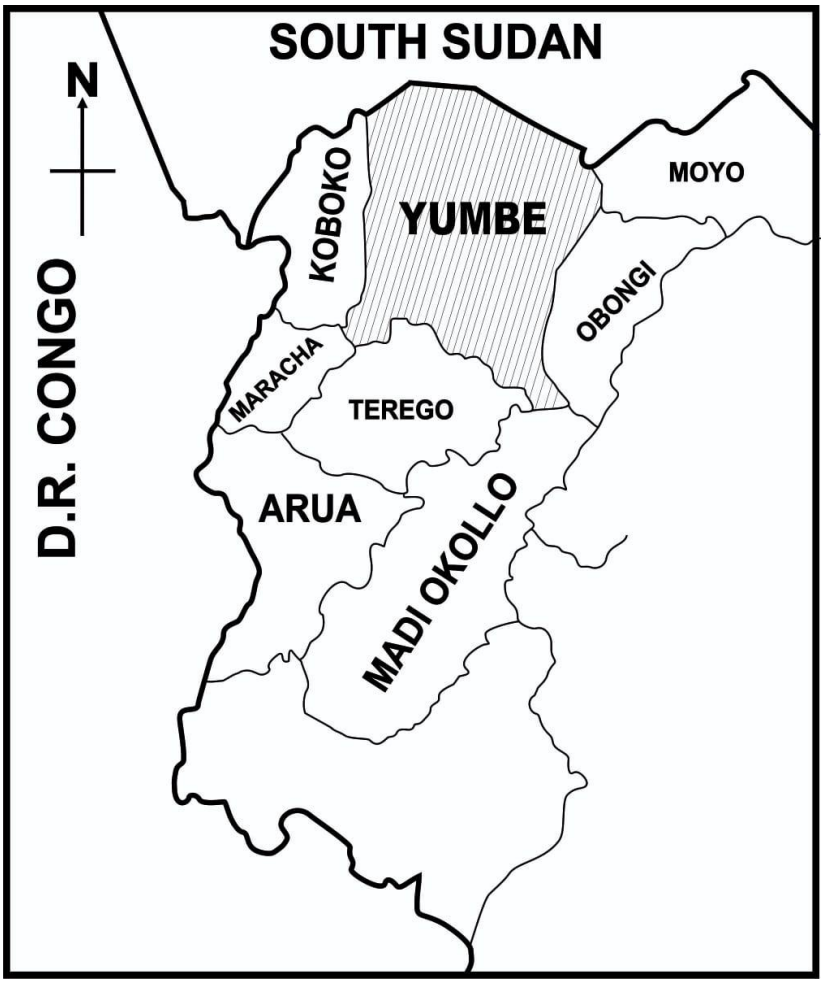


Figure 1. 4: Location of Yumbe district on the West Nile sub region of Uganda. Reprinted from "*The Lugbara of Uganda and the Sudan: A brief account,"* by A. T. Dalfovo, 1982, Anthropos, 77. Copyright 1982 by Anthropos Institute. Reprinted with permission.

The district's borders (South Sudan to the north, Moyo district to the northeast, Obongi district to the east, Terego district to the south, Madi-Okollo district to the southeast, Maracha district to the southwest, and Koboko district to the west) and its physical landscape (generally plain land with two northern plateaus) define the physical boundaries of the research environment.

1.6.2 Content Scope

The content scope of the study was based on the stated research objectives. The study focused on Aringa subgroup of the Lugbara traditional marriage ceremonies, the selected marriage symbols and their cultural meanings. It also focuses on how these symbols and their meanings can be represented through painting. Other aspects of Lugbara culture or Aringa subgroup of the Lugbara culture that are not directly related to traditional marriage are not included in the study.

1.6.3 Material Scope

The researcher purposely selected and used the following materials in this study, Namely Plywood, Canvas boards, Primer, Acrylics paints in painting medium. These materials were used because of the following;

1.6.3.1Acrylic paints

Acrylic paints were chosen because of their strong adhesion both on the canvas and plywood primed surfaces, allowing smooth application, vibrant colors and expressive brushwork. On plywood, acrylic bond strongly to the rigid surface supporting heavy textures without sagging. It also provides excellent stability and reduces warping when properly sealed which makes it suitable for large works.

1.6.3.1 Plywood

Plywood was selected because contrary to where canvas, it provides strong and suitable surface for large work contrary to where canvas material which may sag. It is also cheap, available in Uganda, and easily cut into desired sizes giving artists greater flexibility. The surface dries more quickly due to low absorption and provides a strong surface that resists warping making it reliable.

1.6.3.2 Canvas

Canvas boards were selected because they provide a light weight and portable surfaces for painting. When using acrylic on canvas, the adherence on the surface is strong, durability is long time, it is less heavy, does not crack when properly primed and easily transportable removing it from the frame making it suitable for both indoor and outdoor use

1.6.3.3 Primer.

Primer was selected to prepare the plywood and canvas surfaces before using acrylics for helping paints stick better and last longer. When using primer on plywood and canvas, it protects the surface excessive absorption of the paints, enhances color vibrancy, allowing paints to appear brighter and more accurate by preventing discoloration from the underlying material such as wood. Using primer ensures a stable, long-lasting, and visually consistent painting surface.

Overall, the selected materials complemented the study's studio based approach by providing suitable surfaces and painting media for the visual interpretation of Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols.

1.6.3.4 Time scope

The study examines Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols across three historical periods: the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods within the broader timeframe of 1900 to 2025. This historical scope is justified because examining the traditions across these periods enables the study to trace their origins, continuity, transformations, and contemporary forms. Historical accounts and elders' memories provide important sources for understanding how marriage ceremonies and symbols were practiced in the past, the meanings attached to them, and the changes they have undergone up to the contemporary period.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Lugbarati Lugbarati a language spoken by the Lugbara Community. 'Aringati' is the dialect of Lugbara language spoken by the Aringa people. Aringa are sub group of Lugbara speaking community who live in Yumbe district and parts of eastern Koboko district.

Aje Refers to the purchase of good. It this study, it refers to exchange of property or wealth such as cows, goats, sheep, with a girl for marriage. It also refers to the day of official marriage ceremony day.

Atazima This refers to part of the bride wealth given for exchange which is given inform of monetary value. The term refers to seeking of parents' permission. This is a practice asking wealth that has been included in the present day.

Bride wealth This is transfer of wealth or amount paid by a groom or his family to the family of the bride. Bride wealth includes money, property, animals and sometimes paid in terms of labour.

Ifendu Ifendu refers to a place where traditional gatherings took place. It translates as "under the tree". Most of the traditional gatherings in Lugbara culture such as marriages, clan meetings, occurred under the trees.

Marriage In Lugbara culture, Marriage refers to a spiritual and social institution that involves families, clans and tribes to unite two partners which is formalized through traditional customs, rituals, and payment of bride wealth. Marriage in Lugbara is not only relationship between individual couples but it also involves extended families, clans or tribes.

Opi This refers to a Chief of a sub-group of Lugbara. All the sub groups of Lugbara namely; Aringa, Maracha, Terego, Ayivu, and Vura had Chiefs. The Lugbara did

not have a single leader or central governing system but power was in the hands of Chiefs.

Ujogo It refers to a traditional sauce prepared for people during marriage ceremonies. It is made of black-eyed peas with sim sim paste.

Yamari Yamari refers to the traditional meal prepared for people on marriage day which is an activity that constitutes Lugbara traditional marriage. The food is prepared for the two clans of partners getting married, that is the clans of the bridegroom and the bride for asking blessing and well-wishing for the families getting married.

Kuta It is a decorated hand woven pyramid shaped basket made from palm leaves used for covering food to keep the meals warm and protect them from insects and dust

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the study of Lugbara traditional marriage among the Aringa people, with particular attention to marriage ceremonies, cultural symbols and their meanings and then visual interpretation through painting. The review draws on literature from international, African and Ugandan contexts to establish broader understandings of traditional marriage as a cultural institution and to examine how ceremonies and symbols communicate social, cultural and aesthetic meanings. It further considers literature on visual representation, African art and artistic interpretation to provide a conceptual basis for translating selected Aringa marriage ceremonies and symbols into painterly ideas. The chapter is organized according to the three study objectives, namely: traditional marriage ceremonies, marriage symbols and their cultural meanings, and the visual interpretation of selected ceremonies and symbols into painterly concepts and artworks.

2.1 Traditional Marriage Ceremonies among different societies

Traditional marriage is one of the most important social institutions through which African communities establish families, regulate kinship relations, transmit cultural values and maintain continuity between generations (Madondo & Dhobha, 2025). In many African societies, marriage has historically been understood as more than a private relationship between a man and a woman; rather, it constitutes a social relationship involving families, clans and wider communities (Mafela, 2014). Marriage ceremonies therefore provide important occasions through which cultural values, social expectations, responsibilities and identities are publicly expressed and reinforced.

(Heady & Yalçın-Heckmann, 2020), in their comparative examination of marriage transactions in Africa and Eurasia, demonstrates that marriage practices are closely connected to systems of kinship, inheritance, descent and the transfer of property. In other words, traditional marriage ceremonies should be understood within the broader social organization of particular communities rather than as isolated celebrations (Pallathadka et al., 2022).

Evans-Pritchard's (1948) study of the Nuer of the Upper Nile in South Sudan provides an influential anthropological example of marriage as a process involving a series of ceremonies rather than a single event. Among the Nuer, marriage was established through the combination of bride wealth payments and ceremonial rites. (Evans-Pritchard, 1948) observed that the transfer of cattle and the performance of ceremonies operated together, gradually strengthening the relationship between the families and kin groups involved. The ceremonies therefore represented stages through which a marriage became socially recognized and increasingly secure.

(Evans-Pritchard, 1948) further noted that the transfer of cattle alone was insufficient to complete a marriage, as ceremonial acts were also required to establish the union within the social and cultural framework of the community. Thus, the ceremonies provided a cultural framework through which economic exchange, kinships, social recognition and family obligations were brought together. This perspective is particularly relevant because it demonstrates how objects, gestures, people and spaces within a ceremony can carry meanings beyond their immediate practical functions.

The Nuer example also demonstrates the importance of material objects and social participation in marriage ceremonies, as Cattle were not simply economic commodities but were integrated into the ceremonial process where their transfer contributed to the establishment of relationships between the bride's and groom's kin. Thus, bride wealth functioned simultaneously as a material exchange and as a means of expressing kinship relationships, social obligations and recognition between families. This distinction between the economic and cultural functions of bride wealth is important for the present study in a way that marriage objects should not be interpreted solely according to their material or economic value. Their significance emerges from the social relationships, cultural beliefs and ceremonial practices within which they are used.

Traditional marriage ceremonies also vary considerably between African societies, among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria, for example, marriage is accorded considerable social and cultural importance and involves a distinctive sequence of marital rites (Adedibu & Oke, 2024). (Lawore, 2019) also noted that Yoruba marriage is regarded as a significant institution and that marital rites have been transmitted beyond the homeland, although their forms have changed in diaspora contexts. This demonstrates that the continuity of traditional marriage does not

necessarily require the preservation of its original form; rather, cultural practices can retain their core meanings while adapting to changing social environments. The Yoruba example therefore highlights the dynamic nature of marriage ceremonies and the importance of examining both continuity and transformation when interpreting traditional practices.

(Adebola, 2016) in a comparative study of Yoruba and Anlo-Ewe marriage ceremonies in Nigeria and Ghana respectively, found that both communities had experienced substantial changes in the ways traditional marriages were conducted. The study identified increasing interaction between traditional and religious forms of marriage and observed the emergence of hybrid forms of wedding celebration. However, certain elements, including gifts brought by the groom's family for the bride, continued to survive.

This finding demonstrates that cultural continuity does not necessarily require traditional practices to remain unchanged. Instead, communities may retain culturally significant elements while modifying the form and context in which ceremonies are performed. This observation is relevant to the study of Aringa traditional marriage because it has similarly undergone changes resulting from external influences such as formal education, religion and interaction with refugees. Examining both continuity and transformation therefore provides a basis for understanding which Aringa ceremonies and symbols have been retained, modified over time and the cultural meanings attached to the changes.

Beyond continuity and transformation, the Anlo-Ewe and Yoruba cases also demonstrate that marriage ceremonies also function as forms of communication, performance and public interaction. (Nuworsu et al., 2019) in their study of inter-ethnic traditional marriage ceremonies in southern Ghana, used audio-visual recordings, observations and interviews to examine communication during marriage events. Their findings demonstrates that marriage ceremonies involve complex interactions among participants and that language itself forms part of the ceremonial performance. From a visual-art perspective, this is important because it suggests that a marriage ceremony can be understood as a multisensory cultural performance involving speech, movement, dress, objects, gestures and social interaction. These elements provide potential visual material for artistic interpretation.

A similar relationship between tradition and change is evident among the Krobo of Ghana. (Abbey & Nasidi, 2024) studied the dynamics of Krobo marriage rites, particularly the *la-pomi* and *fia* ceremonies. Their qualitative study found that marriage rites had changed from highly structured traditional ceremonies towards more adaptable forms that combine traditional elements with modern practices. The Krobo case is relevant because it demonstrates that the survival of traditional marriage does not necessarily mean the preservation of every original ceremonial detail. Rather, selected practices may be retained because they continue to express cultural identity, while other elements are modified or abandoned.

(Kuper, 2016) investigated on traditions of kinship, marriage and bride wealth in south Africa, and found out that marriage, family and the homestead were historically embedded within economic, political and religious institutions. He observes that bride wealth, particularly cattle, could connect the economic activities of men and women while marriage could also establish and restructure political and social relationships. This perspective expands the understanding of marriage ceremonies beyond the wedding event itself. The ceremony was viewed as part of a wider cultural system through which social relationships are established, negotiated and reproduced.

The visual and performative character of African ceremonies has also been documented by (Beckwith & Fisher, 1999) in their extensive photographic documentation of African ceremonial life. Their work includes cultural ceremonies and rites associated with communities such as the Maasai, Ndebele, Swazi, Berber, Rashaida, Swahili, Tuareg, Zulu and Himba. Among the documented subjects are marriage and wedding traditions, including Rashaida wedding, Swahili brides, Tuareg marriage, Ndebele nuptials, Zulu wedding and Himba marriage.

The work of (Beckwith & Fisher, 1999) is particularly relevant to a Fine Art study because it demonstrates the importance of visual representation in documenting and communicating cultural heritage. However, photography documentation and painterly interpretation involve different visual processes. While photography primarily records particular moments, people and events, painting allows the artist to select, emphasise and transform elements of a ceremony, such as gestures, forms, colors, objects emotions, and symbolic relationships. Therefore, the present study draws from the documentary value of visual representation while extending it through painterly interpretation, whereby selected Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols are

transformed into contemporary paintings that communicate their cultural meanings and significance.

In Uganda, traditional marriage ceremonies constitute important cultural institutions through which individuals, families and wider kinship groups establish socially recognized relationships (Isiko & Isabirye, 2023). Although the specific forms differ among ethnic communities, marriage commonly involves family participation, negotiations, exchange of gifts or bride wealth, ceremonial recognition and the establishment of relationships between families and clans (Akurugu et al., 2022), (Neswiswa & Jacobs, 2024).

These practices demonstrate that traditional marriage extends beyond the union of two individuals, as ceremonies provide a structured process through which social relationships, obligations and cultural values are formally recognized and reinforced. The involvement of families and kinshp groups also indicates that the objects exchanged and actions perfomed during marriage ceremonies may carry meanings associated with with respect, acceptance, alliance and continuity between families. This is relevant to the present study because Aringa traditional marriage similarly onvolves ceremonies, family participation, bride wealth and symbolic objects whose significance id embedded within wider kinship and community relationships.

(Kaduuli, 2006) observes that among the Baganda and Basoga, *Kwanjula* and *Kwandhula*, respectively, are elaborate introduction ceremonies through which the prospective husband is formally introduced to the bride's family. The Baganda and Basoga cases further demonstrate that neighbouring communities may have ceremonies that perform comparable social functions while maintaining distinctive cultural forms (Nelson et al., 2026). This variation indicates that traditional marriage should not be treated as a uniform cultural practice, rather, each community's ceremonies need to be understood according to its own history, values, kinship structures and cultural practices. This distinction is important because Aringa traditional marriage must be understood within its own cultural context rather than interpreted through practices form other Ugandan communities.

The ceremonies unite not only the prospective couple but also their families and clans, demonstrating that marriage is a broader social institution rather than merely a relationship

between two individuals (Pallathadka et al., 2022). Similarly, recent research on Uganda's wedding practices indicates that bride wealth ceremonies continue to have important ritual, social and legal significance, although their forms and costs have changed considerably over time (Chae et al., 2021). These observations demonstrate that traditional marriage ceremonies provide important contexts through which cultural values, family relationships and social identity are publicly expressed. From the perspective of the present study, the significance of these ceremonies lies not only in the actions performed but also in the relationships and cultural meanings communicated through them. This suggests that ceremonies should be examined as interconnected systems of people, objects, gestures and performances rather than as isolated events.

The diversity of Ugandan marriage traditions is further illustrated by the Banyankole, Banyoro, and Batoro communities. Among the Banyankole, *Okuhingira* constitutes an important traditional marriage ceremony involving a sequence of activities through which the bride is formally transferred to the groom's family. (Ohaja & Anyim, 2021) found that although contemporary *Okuhingira* varies according to location and influences from other cultures, important elements of the ceremony, including its movements, structures and symbolic performance tools, have remained significant. Similarly, the Banyoro and Batoro have historically organised marriage within wider systems of kinship, family and cultural authority, illustrating that marriage practices are embedded within the social organisation of individual communities (Madondo, 2025).

These examples indicate that marriage ceremonies should be understood not simply as sequences of events but as cultural performances through which meaning is communicated through language, movement, objects, space, gestures and participation. This view is important to the study of Aringa traditional marriage because its ceremonies also involves interconnected ceremonial actions, material objects, family participation and performative practices. The Banyankole, Nanyoro and Batoro examples therefore provide a comparative basis for understanding how marriage ceremonies function as forms of cultural expression while also highlighting the need to interpret Aringa traditions within their specific historical and cultural context.

(Middleton, 1965) in his book "*The Lugbara of Uganda"*, discusses marriage and exogamy within the broader organization of Lugbara family, clan and lineage systems, demonstrating the close relationship between marriage and social organization. More recent research by Tabi, (2025)

indicates that *oku jeza* and bride wealth remain important in contemporary Lugbara marriage, particularly in the Ma'di-West Nile region, where customary marriage requirements continue to influence access to church marriage.

The study demonstrate that Lugbara traditional marriage is not simply a historical practice but a cultural institution that has continued to adapt to Christianity and other contemporary influences. Nevertheless, much of the existing Lugbara scholarship has focused on kinship, bride wealth, religion, family organization and social relationships rather than on the visual and artistic dimensions of marriage ceremonies.

2.2 Symbols and their cultural meanings in traditional marriage

Marriage is not only a social institution through which two individuals establish a conjugal relationship, it is also a cultural process through which communities communicate values, identities, obligations and expectations (Mafela, 2010). Across societies, marriage ceremonies involve objects, animals, clothing, colours, food, gestures, songs, spaces and forms of exchange that communicate meanings beyond their immediate practical functions (Kartal, 2025). These elements may be regarded as marriage symbols because they represent ideas that are culturally understood by members of a particular society. (Janusz & Walkiewicz, 2018) conceptualized marriage as a rite of passage through which individuals move from one social status to another, involving processes of separation, transition and incorporation.

Similarly, (Cai, 2024) argued that culture is constituted through webs of meaning and that cultural practices should be interpreted in relation to the meanings people themselves attach to them. From this perspective, a marriage object cannot be interpreted adequately by observing its physical appearance alone; its significance must be understood within the cultural context in which it is used. (Deflem, 1991) provides an especially useful perspective for analyzing marriage symbols. In his study of Ndembu ritual, Deflem argues that ritual symbols can be multivocal**,** meaning that one symbol can communicate several meanings simultaneously.

The Yoruba of Nigeria provide one of the richest examples of marriage symbolism in Africa (Omobola, 2013). In Yoruba traditional marriage, objects presented during the marriage process are not simply gifts but are incorporated into prayers and wishes for the future of the couple. In

Yoruba marriage, items such as honey, salt, palm oil, kola nut and bitter kola have specific symbolic associations. Honey is associated with sweetness and is used to express the wish that married life should be happy and prosperous; salt is associated with preservation and longevity; palm oil is associated with reducing the harshness of difficult circumstances; while kola nut is associated with fertility and the hope for many healthy children (Omobola, 2013).

The significance of these objects lies in the transformation of their physical qualities into cultural meanings. Honey is physically sweet, but its sweetness becomes a metaphor for happiness in marriage. Salt preserves food, and this practical property becomes associated with preservation of life and longevity. Kola nut produces abundantly, and its reproductive capacity becomes associated with fertility

The importance of kola nut is not limited to the Yoruba. Among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria, particularly the Nike community, kola nut plays a significant role in traditional marriage. (Ugwu & Ugwu, 2023), examined the Ita Oji Nwanyi, or consumption of the bride's kola nut, as a central ritual within traditional marriage. Their study used observation and interviews conducted across twelve marriage ceremonies and employed a pragma-semiotic approach to analyze the linguistic and visual communication surrounding the ritual.

It demonstrates that the kola nut functions as a symbolic object within the marriage contract, rather than simply being food. Its presentation and consumption occur within a carefully structured social context. The kola nut alone does not constitute the entire meaning. Its cultural significance emerges from who presents it, who receives or consumes it, where the action occurs and what is said during the ritual. Kola nut used in Igbo marriage ceremonies is shown below.



Figure 2. 1: ***Oji Igbo (Kola Nut).*** **Reprinted from "Oji Igbo and its significance in Odinana Igbo Spirituality," by Ozi Ikoro, 2025,** ***Ozi Ikoro (https://ozikoro.com/oji-igbo-and-its-significance-in-odinana-igbo-spirituality/).*** **Copyright 2025 by Ozi Ikoro. (Accessed September 6, 2026)**

Beads constitute another important symbolic and artistic element in Yoruba culture. (Drewal & Mason, 1998) scholarship on Yoruba beadwork demonstrates that beads can communicate identity, status, power, protection, well-being, continuity and social relationships. Drewal's discussion of Yoruba beadwork shows that individual beads become more meaningful when they are assembled into necklaces, bracelets, crowns and other forms. The process of stringing beads itself creates ideas of connection and unity. Beads arranged together can therefore symbolize togetherness and solidarity, while their circular arrangement around parts of the body can suggest protection and enclosure (Drewal & Mason, 1998).

This has significant implications for visual interpretation. Beads provide the artist with formal elements such as color, repetition, rhythm, pattern and texture, while their cultural meanings provide conceptual content. A painter working with marriage imagery can therefore use beadwork not simply to make a figure visually attractive but to communicate identity, status, unity or continuity.

Evans-Pritchard's classic ethnographic studies show that Nuer marriage was established through both the payment of bride wealth and the performance of ceremonial rites (Evans-Pritchard, 1948). Cattle transferred from the bridegroom's family to the bride's family were central to the marriage process, but the cattle and the rituals were interconnected rather than separate activities (Heeren et al., 2011). The symbolic importance of cattle among the Nuer extends beyond their economic value, Evans-Pritchard's work demonstrates that cattle participate in kinship relationships and in the establishment of the marital union. (Hashimoto, 2026) further shows that the Nuer distinguish between cattle obtained through ordinary economic activity and cattle received as bridewealth, demonstrating that cattle are embedded within a broader cultural classification of wealth and social relationships.

The cattle received as bride wealth therefore carry a meaning that cannot simply be reduced to livestock ownership. They participate in the creation and maintenance of relationships between kin groups. The Nuer case illustrates that a single symbol may carry multiple meanings. Cattle can represent wealth, marriage, family cooperation, fertility, social status and continuity of lineage simultaneously. The animal is therefore not merely an object transferred during a ceremony; it becomes part of the cultural language through which marriage is constituted. Below is a Nuer homestead with their type of cattle exchanged for bride wealth.



Figure 2. 2: ***The Parameters of a Traditional Nuäär Marriage.*** From *the Parameters of a Traditional Nuaar Marriage*, by J.M. Gatkuoth, n.d., Africa World Books. **https://africaworldbooks.com/product/the-parameters-of-a-traditional-nuer-marriage-by-dr-james-mabor-gatkuoth/. (Accessed September 6, 2026).**

The Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania provide another important comparative example, particularly concerning cattle. Cattle have historically occupied a central position in Maasai social, economic and cultural life (Allegretti, 2017). (Quinlan et al., 2016) in their study of the symbolic value of Maasai livestock in Simanjiro, Tanzania, demonstrate that livestock possess values that extend beyond market price and household wealth. Their research specifically examined the symbolic value of livestock in relation to gender, marriage and household production. This distinction between economic value and symbolic value is crucial. A cow may have a monetary value in the livestock market, but its cultural value within marriage may relate to social status, family relationships, reproduction, identity and continuity (Ainslie, 2005).

The Maasai example demonstrates that the meaning of a marriage symbol is derived from the network of social relationships and cultural values within which it functions. Thus cattle are not

merely transferred as material wealth but can signify relationships between families, social obligations, continuity and belongings. This understanding is relevant to the present study because cattle and other forms of bride wealth among the Aringa similarly need to be interpreted according to their cultural and social functions rather than their economic value alone.

Among the Baganda and Basoga, the Kwanjula *and* Kwandhula ceremonies involve the presentation of gifts and the participation of family representatives, elders and other members of the community (Kaduuli, 2006). Ceremonies as important cultural institutions that unite not only individuals but also families and clans. The objects presented during such ceremonies can therefore be interpreted as material expressions of social relationships, respect and acceptance (Kaduuli, 2006). Similarly, evidence from Ugandan customary marriage indicates that among the Baganda, bride wealth may include items such as local brew, kanzu, gomesi, food and other household provisions, while among the Basoga it may include cattle, local beer and other gifts (Quinn, 2014). These differences demonstrate that objects used in marriage acquire meaning from the cultural setting in which they are exchanged. The same object may consequently have different symbolic significance across communities. This also indicates that marriage symbols should be understood in relation to the social practices, relationships and cultural values that give them meaning, rather than being interpreted solely according to their physical appearance.



Figure 2. 3: ***Ugandan Gomessi and Kanzu*****.** From "Uganda Traditional clothing contains a treasure of cultural splendor," by J.Jolie, 2026, *Uganda immigration.* **https://www.ugandaimmigration.org/news/ugandan-traditional-clothing-contains-a-treasure-of-cultural-splendor. (Accessed September 6, 2026).**

The Banyankole provide another useful example of the relationship between material objects, performance and cultural symbolism in marriage. The Okuhingira ceremony incorporates gift exchange, cattle, omugaba, family participation, blessings and the movement of the bride from her parental home towards the groom's family (Mbethki, 2014). Contemporary accounts of the ceremony emphasis the importance of cattle and other gifts, while research by (Ninsiima & Michael, 2025) specifically examined symbolism in Ankole marriage songs and found that these songs function as important avenues for communicating information and values to the young couple and their parents. The Banyankole case demonstrates that marriage symbolism is not confined to physical objects. Songs, gestures, movement, clothing, speech and ceremonial actions also operate as symbolic forms of communication (Mwiine & Atuheire, 2025).

This indicates that the meaning of meaning of marriage symbols is generated through their use within particular social and ceremonial contesxts rther than being inherent in the objects themselves. The Banyankole case therefore demonstrates that visual interpretation of marriage requires attention to bothh material symbols and the performances through which their meanings are communicated and reinforced.

2.3 Visual interpretation and representation of marriage ceremonies and symbols through contemporary painterly

Contemporary painting provides a significant means of interpreting and representing marriage ceremonies and symbols across Africa by transforming cultural practices, meanings and experiences into visual forms. Artists use elements such as composition, color, symbolism, gesture and painterly techniques to communicate the social and cultural significance of marriage beyond its literal representation. Existing contemporary artworks demonstrate how marriage ceremonies can be portrayed as expressions of cultural identity, memory, community and heritage. This section therefore reviews selected contemporary paintings that represent marriage ceremonies and symbols, with particular attention to how artists translate culturally significant practices into painterly forms.

The representation of marriage in African visual art demonstrates the capacity of painting to communicate social relationships, cultural values and ceremonial processes. For example,

ClutterMevintage's African Marriage painting: Zimbabwe Art, vibrant home Decor depicts a young couple undertaking a journey to obtain family approval for their marriage (ClutterMeVintage, 2000). The work presents marriage as a socially negotiated process involving family authority rather than merely a private relationship between two individuals. Its vibrant use of green, pink, and yellow together with a narrative composition and a handwritten account on the reverse, illustrates how painting can combine visual and textual storytelling to communicate cultural experiences (ClutterMeVintage, 2000).

Significantly, the work demonstrates the potential of a single painted composition to condense a sequence of marriage related activities into a visual narrative. This approach is relevant to the present study's use of painting to interpret selected Aringa marriage ceremonies and symbols. However, while the Zimbabwean work provides a visual interpretation of African marriage, the available description offers limited ethnographic information concerning the specific cultural practices and meanings represented.

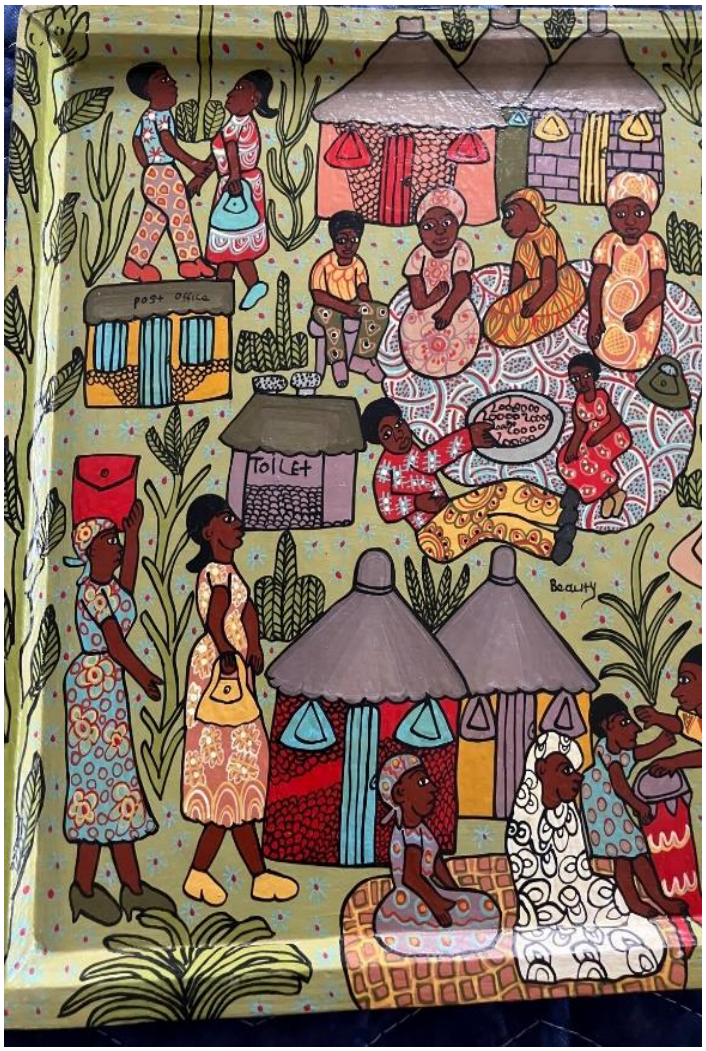


Figure 2. 4: ***African Marriage Painting: Zimbabwe Art, Vibrant Home Decor (20x13 5/8").*** **(n.d). clutterMeVintage. Etsy. https://www.etsy.com/listing/1853841950/african-marriage-painting-zimbabwe-art? (Accesessed August 10, 2026).**

Durus, (2022) provides another important example of approach by positioning traditional marriage, an acrylic on canvas work within contemporary African abstract art. The work utilizes abstraction as a means of moving beyond literal representation and emphasizing emotional, symbolic and narrative dimensions of marriage. The work also illustrates the intersection between cultural continuity and contemporary artistic expression. However, the available description does not identify a specific Nigerian ethnic group, ceremony or symbolic system represented in the

painting; therefore, the work is better understood as an individual artistic interpretation than as an ethnographic account of traditional marriage (Durus, 2022).



Figure 2. 5: The Darus. (2022). *Traditional Marriage* [Acrylic on canvas, 30 x 24 in.]. Artdey. https://artdey.com/products/traditional-marriage? (Accesessed August 10, 2026).

Furthermore, Cameroonian Angu Walters' *Couple* presents marriage through a visual representation of intimacy, affection, and celebration. The painting uses rich acrylic colors and textures to portray a newlywed couple, emphasizing the emotional and social significance of

marriage. This work is relevant to the present study because it demonstrates how painting can visually communicate marriage as a cultural and social experience (Walter, 2007). However, while Walters focuses on the relationship and emotional bond between the couple, the present study extends visual representation to include traditional marriage ceremonies



Figure 2. 6: Walters, A. (n.d). *Couple* [Acrylic painting, 40 x 80 cm]. Art Cameroon. https://www.artcameroon.com/couple-1-african-marriage-portrait/? (Accesessed August 10, 2026).

In East African contemporary art, Jengo, (2018) provides a significant example of how painting can visually interpret traditional marriage practices and their associated cultural meanings. Jengo, a Tanzanian painter and art educator, draws on the symbolism of the brides unveiling by her father, a practice associated with parental acceptance of the marriage. The painting is therefore significant not simply as a representation of a bride but as a visual interpretation of family approval, transition, and the social legitimization of marriage. The symbolic act of unveiling transforms a private relationship between the bride and the groom into a publicly acknowledged union, illustrating the important role of parents and family structures in traditional marriage (Jengo, 2018). Jengo's use of acrylics on canvas demonstrates how a specific ceremonial practice can be translated into contemporary painterly language while retaining its cultural significance.



Figure 2. 7: Jengo, E. (2018). *African bride* [Acrylic on canvas, 91.6 x 118.1 cm]. Art Auction East Africa. https://artauctioneastafrica.com/auctions/auction-2021/lot-36-2021/. (Accesessed August 10, 2026).

Thairu, (2000) *Wedding*, produced in Nairobi, Kenya, around 2000, demonstrates the representation of marriage as a subject within East African visual art. Executed in oil on canvas, the work positions the wedding as a significant social and cultural experience that can be translated into painterly form. Although limited information is available concerning the specific marriage practices and symbols represented, the work illustrates how painting can communicate cultural experiences through visual elements such as colour, form, texture, and composition.



Figure 2. 8: Thairu, G. (2000). *Wedding* (Oil on canvas, 29 ½ x 37 in.). Indigo arts. https://indigoarts.com/wedding. (Accesessed August 10, 2026).

In Uganda, Kyeyune, (2015) provides an important example of the visual interpretation of traditional marriage ceremonies through his paintings inspired by the Baganda *Kwanjula* ceremony. Kyeyune's work emerged from his personal experience of hosting the introduction ceremony of a young relative, where his position as a respected elder enabled him to observe the social expectations, roles, interactions, and responsibilities enacted by different members of the community.

His paintings consequently move beyond literal documentation to interpret marriage as a collective social and cultural experience. The rounded figures, affectionate gestures, embraces, gentle smiles, richly coloured surfaces and heavily textured oil application contribute to an atmosphere of warmth, celebration, solidarity, and communal belonging (Kyeyune, 2015). The recurring presence of bright red further intensifies the visual energy of the compositions and reinforces the celebratory character of the ceremony. Significantly, kyeyune's work also addresses the persistence of traditional practices within a rapidly globalizing and technologically connected society, presenting *kwanjula* as a living tradition negotiating continuity and change (Kyeyune, 2015).



Figure 2. 9: Kyeyune, G. (n.d). *Kwanjula ceremony* [Oil painting]. Image reproduced from Nangwa, M. (2015, Augussst 26), George Kyeyune: An artist in metamorphosis. Margret Nangwa. https://margaretnagawa.wordpress.com/2015/08/26/george-kyeyune-an-artist-in-metamorphosis/. (Accesessed August 10, 2026).

Kakaire, (2024) also demonstrated how painting can be used to represent and document local cultural experiences in his work. According to Kakaire, (2024) paintings combine the detailed technique and visual language of Russian icon painting with distinctly Ugandan subject matter. Rather than reproducing the religious themes of traditional icons, Kakaire adapts their stylistic qualities to communicate Ugandan cultural realities

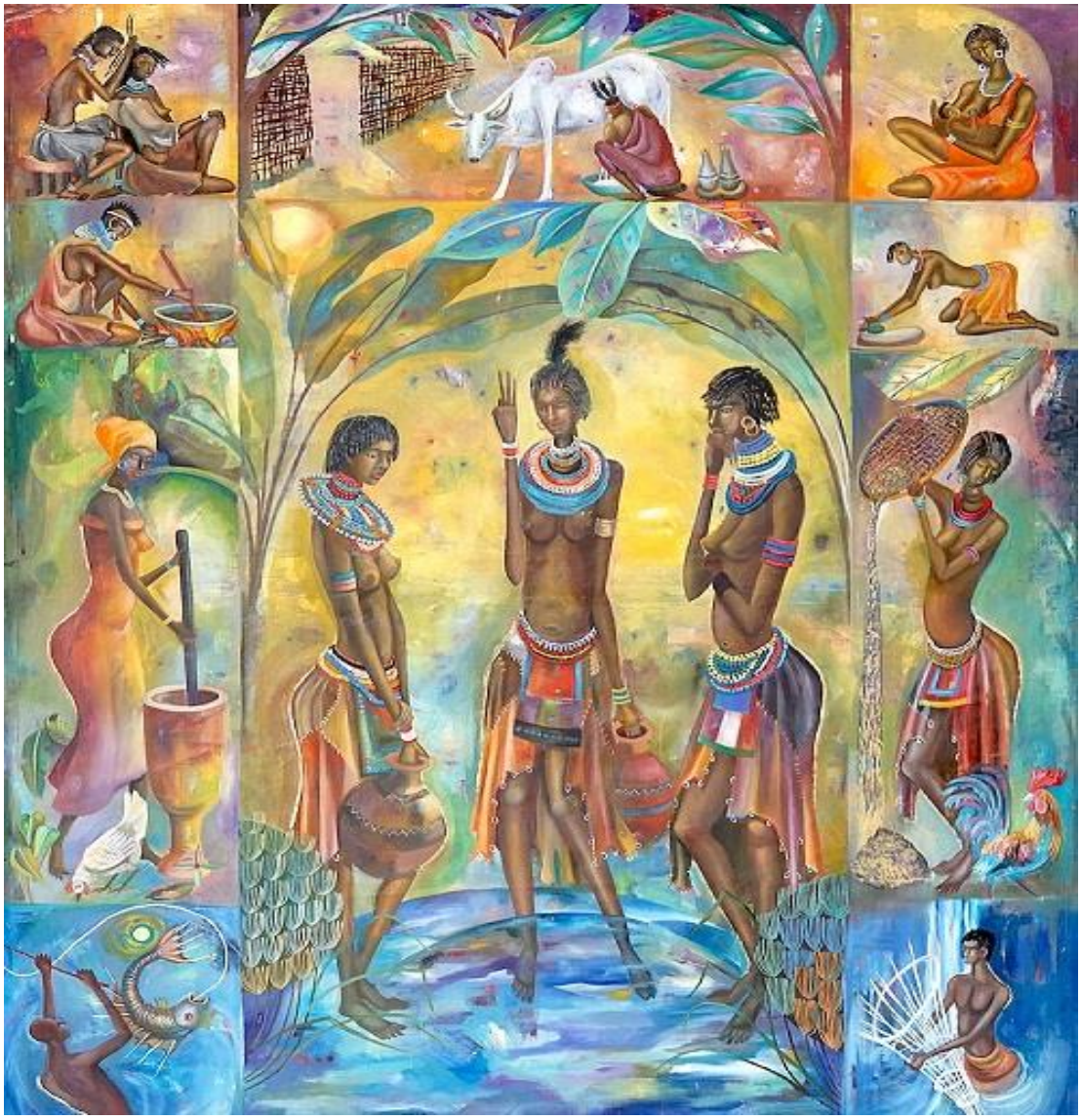


Figure 2. 10: Kakaire, S. (n.d). ***Ugandan daily life and cultural Scene*** **[Oil on canvas]. Image reproduced from** ***The Independent Uganda.*** **https://www.independent.co.ug/uganda-painter-featured-at-art-dubai-2024/. (Accesessed August 10, 2026).**

Kasule continues the Makerere University project of African modernism by using pattern to convey moral values, not just aesthetics. His work illustrates the use of elongated figure, simplified facial features, geometric forms, patterned clothing and a dominant warm color palette. Kasule transforms the human figures into expressive forms through exaggeration and abstraction rather than pursuing anatomical realism. The central composition establishes larger figure as the dominant visual element, while the smaller figure creates a relational interaction that contributes to the narrative character work. The repeated geometric patterns and contrasting colors unify the composition and evoke a sense of cultural identity without relying on literal representation. This approach demonstrates that cultural subjects can be communicated through selective visual transformation, in which recognizable figures and cultural references are reorganized into an expressive painterly language.

Beyond marriage, contemporary Ugandan artists also use painting to interpret diverse aspects of everyday social life. Through figurative and symbolic forms, color and composition, they transform lived experiences into visual narratives that communicate social, cultural and human realities. The work presented below demonstrate how painting functions as a medium for interpreting everyday life and communicating meanings within society.



Figure 2. 11: *The Inevitable,* Kizito Maria Kasule, 2011, Oil on canvas, 183 cm x 150 cm. Makerere University, Kampala. Photograph by Gerile 2026.

Kwesiga's (2012) acrylic-on-canvas painting demonstrates how contemporary African artists can transform cultural and social experiences into expressive visual narratives. The work combines figurative and abstraction forms, characterized by elongated human figures, exaggerated proportions, overlapping bodies, bold colors and simplified facial features. These elements move the representation beyond naturalistic depiction and emphasize symbolic and expressive communication. The use of multiple figures and interconnected forms creates a sense of social

interaction and collective experience, while the vivid color contrasts strengthen the visual rhythm and emotional intensity of the composition.



Figure 2. 12: *Support for Education,* Kwesiga Philip, 2012, Oil on canvas, 132 cm x 99 cm. Makerere University, Kampala. Photograph by Gerile 2026.

2.4 Literature gap

Although existing literature demonstrate that contemporary African artists have successfully used visual art to engage with cultural identity, history, tradition and symbolism, limited attention has been given to specifically address the visual interpretation of traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols of the Aringa subgroup of the Lugbara in northwestern Uganda. This creates a gap between contemporary African artistic practice and research documenting specific indigenous cultural practices. The present study addresses this gap by drawing cultural knowledge from Aringa community members and translating selected marriage ceremonies and symbols into painterly forms. By doing so, the study contributes to both cultural documentation and contemporary artistic practice by demonstrating how painting can be used to interpret, communicate and preserve culturally significant knowledge.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.0. Introduction

This research investigates the application of traditional Lugbara marriage customs as a foundation for artistic practice, specifically in the creation of a series of painterly images. The study is framed as an empirical inquiry, utilizing an exploration-based research design and studio-based experimentation to produce original artworks derived from selected ceremonies and symbolic elements of the Lugbara traditional culture.

The central objective of the study was to examine how painterly elements, including color, shape, and technique could be employed to visually interpret symbolic meanings embedded within these traditional Lugbara marriage ceremonies and symbols. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by translating an ethnographic understanding of cultural practices into a novel visual language, thereby highlighting the potential for traditional knowledge systems to inform contemporary fine art practice. It outlines the research background, methodology, and the analysis of the resultant artistic works, ultimately demonstrating how painterly interpretations offer new insights into the cultural significance of Lugbara marital traditions.

3.1 Research design

This study employed an ethnographic research design; a qualitative methodology used in the social and behavioral sciences. Ethnography requires the researcher's immersion in a specific cultural context or social group to observe and document the everyday behaviors, interactions, and perspectives of its members (Murchison, 2026). Similarly, Nixon & Odoyo (2020), describes ethnography as a qualitative research method that is used to study people and cultures in order to gain in-depth understanding of their social and cultural practices (Nixon & Odoyo, 2020).

The application of this method, specifically through participant observation, facilitated an in-depth, nuanced understanding of the Aringa culture, including its conventions and social dynamics. This approach granted direct, first-hand access to the group's practices and lived experiences, allowing for the observation of authentic, natural phenomena as they unfolded in their real-world setting. This was crucial for obtaining data grounded in the participants' reality

(an *emic* perspective), which may not have been accessible through methods reliant solely on self-reporting, such as interviews or surveys. The resultint rich, descriptive data enhances the depth and validity of the research findings.

3.2. Research Approach

The study employed a qualitative research approach to investigate and understand the cultural meanings, values and social significance attached to traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols among the Aringa subgroup of the Lugbara. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to examine cultural practices from the perspectives and experiences of community members rather than measuring the variables numerically. Tenny et al. (2017), describe qualitative research as an approach that explores participants' experiences, perceptions and behaviors by allowing them to explain the meaning, feelings and reasons underlying their (Tenny et al., 2017).

Similarly, black explain that qualitative research is suitable for exploring complex and less understood phenomena where variables are unclear, aiming to provide deeper understanding of experiences and processes rather than measuring outcomes quantitatively (Black, 1994).

The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to obtain detailed information about Aringa traditional marriage practices, including ceremonies, rituals, artefacts, oral expressions and symbols that communicate cultural values such as respect, unity, kinship and responsibility. Through interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation and documentary review, the approach allowed the researcher to capture indigenous knowledge and understand how these cultural elements are preserved, transmitted across generations.

Furthermore, the qualitative approach was suitable for the artistic component of the study because it provided a deeper understanding of the symbolic meanings embedded within marriage practices which formed the visual interpretation into paintings. Therefore, qualitative approach was appropriate because it provided in-depth exploration and supported the study's objective of preserving and visual interpretation of cultural heritage.

3.3. Study Population

The study population comprised members of the Lugbara ethnic group, with specific focus on the Aringa subgroup residing in Yumbe District in the West Nile sub-region of northwestern Uganda. The target population consisted of Aringa community members residing in the host communities of yumbe District who possessed knowledge, experience in traditional marriage ceremonies. The study excluded non-Aringa individuals settling in the district, including refugees and members of other ethnic groups, from the sampling frame to ensure the study focused specifically on Aringa community and its traditional marriage ceremonies.

The participants included clan leaders, clan elders, elderly women, married youth aged 18 years and above, and other key community informants who were considered knowledgeable about Aringa marriage ceremonies, symbols, and associated cultural meanings.

Clan elders were selected because they possess extensive knowledge of Aringa customary marriage and oral traditions. Their long-term experience enabled the researcher to obtain information on the procedures, historical development and culutural meanings of marriage ceremonies and symbols, including practices that are becoming less common in contemporary communities.

Clan leaders were selected because they play an impotant role in guiding and maintaining customary practices within their clans. They provided information on clan participation in marriage arrangements, bride wealth negotiations, customary obligations, and role of families and clans in sustaining traditional marriage ceremonies.

Elderly women were selected because they possess knowledge of women roles in Aringa marriage ceremonies and transmission of cultural practices. Their accounts provided information on womens participation in marriage prepartions and celebrations, including food, attire, adornment, songs, dances and other practices associated with marriage.

Ledi (traditional marriage intermediaries) were selected because they serve as intermediaries between families during marriage arrangements. Their involvement provided information on

communication, negotiations, and procedures connecting the families of the prospective bride and groom, particularly during the stages leading to the establishment of the marriage relationship.

Youth were selected because they represent the generation that is increasingly exposed to changing social, religious and economic influences. Their participation provided information on their knowledge, understanding and perceptions of Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols as well as they extend these traditions continue to be known, valued and practiced among younger members of the community.

Key informants were selected because they possessed specialized knowledge and direct experience of Aringa traditional marriage customs. Their selection enabled the researcher to obtain detailed information on the history, procedures, cultural meanings, and transformations of marriage ceremonies and symbols that might not be adequately captured through general participants. They therefore provide in-depth contextual information that supported the interpretation and validation of data obtained from other participant.

This delimitation ensured that the study findings reflected the experiences, cultural traditions, and characteristics of the Aringa host community. Data collection was carried out across population.

3.4 Study Area

The study was conducted in Yumbe district, located in the West Nile sub-region of northwestern Uganda. According to preliminary results from the 2024 Uganda National Population and Housing Census, Yumbe District has a total population of 972,351 individuals. The district was selected because it is predominantly inhabited by the Aringa subgroup of the Lugbara people, whose traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols form the focus of this study. Yumbe district is bordered by South Sudan on the north, Moyo district on the east, Obongi on south east, Madi-Okollo on the south, Terego on south west, Koboko on west and Maracha on south west.

The Aringa are among the major subgroups of the Lugbara people sharing a common cultural heritage while maintaining distinctive dialects and cultural adaptations from outsiders such as Islamic religion and some marriage symbols especially the use of *Kuta.*

The study area was also selected because traditional cultural practices in the region are undergoing transformations due to factors such as migrations, modernization, globalization, formal education, and interactions with refugee communities which affects transmission and practice of indigenous marriage traditions. Therefore, it provides an important context to document and visually interpret cultural ceremonies and symbols before some elements are lost.

3.5 Sample study

3.5.1 Sample Size

A total of 40 individuals were initially selected for field work study. The participants comprised seven (7) clan elders, eight (8) married youth, six (6) *ledi* (go-between), five (5) key informants, five (5) cultural leaders and six (6) eldery women. 27 participants participated in focus group discussions and ten (10) took part in individual interviews. Of the 40 individuals initially selected, 37 participants actively participated in the study, resulting in a response rate of approximately 93%. Three selected participants were unable to participate in the study; two were unavailable due to illness, while one was unable to participate because of an unforeseen journey.

Table 1: Participant categories and data collection mathods. The table below shows who participated in the study and how they were involved in data collection

Participant category	**Data collection method**	**Number of participants**
Clan elders	Focus group discussion	7
Youth	Focus group discuddion	8
Elderly Women	Focus group discussion	6
Ledi	Focus group discussion	6
Key informants	Semi structured interview	5
Clan leaders	Semi structured interview	5

Table 1 presents the categories of participants involved in the study and the data collection methods used. A total of 37 participants were involved, comprising clan leaders, youth, elderly women, *ledi*, key informants, and clan elders. Focus group discussions were conducted with clan elders, youth, elderly women, and *ledi*, while semi-structured interviews were conducted with key

informants and clan leaders. The different participant categories provided diverse perspectives on the ceremonies, symbols and cultural meanings associated with traditional marriage among the Aringa.

3.5.2 Sampling technique

The study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, to select participants who possessed relevant knowledge, experience, and cultural understanding of traditional marriage practices among the Aringa community. The sampling process was guided by the objectives of the study and focused on identifying information-rich participants who could provide detailed accounts of marriage ceremonies, symbols, and their cultural meanings.

Participants were purposively selected from relevant categories within the Aringa community, including clan elders, clan leaders, elderly women, youth, *ledi* (traditional marriage intermediaries), and key informants with specialized knowledge of Aringa traditional ceremonies. These categories were selected to provide diverse perspectives on the ceremonies, symbols and cultural meanings associated with traditional marriage.

3.5.3 Sample procedure

Participants were selected based on their familiarity with Aringa customary marriage ceremonies and their ability to provide detailed cultural and historical information. The researcher consulted clan and local leaders to assist in identifying participants who met the study’s inclusion criteria.

The sample composition was drawn from across all sub-counties within the Aringa County. The selection process prioritized participants' knowledge and experience to ensure the data collected aligned directly with the study's research questions. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, and ethical considerations regarding privacy and data confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process.

The sampling procedure was consistent with the qualitative and ethnographic nature of the study, where emphasis was placed on depth, contextual understanding, and cultural meaning rather than statistical generalization. The information obtained from the purposively selected participants

informed both the ethnographic interpretation of Aringa marriage practices and the subsequent studio-based visual interpretation of selected ceremonies and symbols.

3.5.4 Sample selection criteria

Identification of eligible participants was guided by predefined inclusion criteria, including Aringa identity, clan affiliation, place of origin, residence within the study area, knowledge of the Aringa language and cultural traditions, and experience or familiarity with traditional marriage ceremonies. Local leaders and clan leaders assisted in identifying community members who met these criteria.

Preference was given to participants whose roles and experiences were relevant to the study including clan elders, clan leaders, elderly women and newly married young men and women and key informants with specialized knowledge about marriage ceremonies, symbols and their meanings. Participants were excluded if they did not belong to the Aringa community or lacked sufficient knowledge relevant to the study.

3.6 Socio-demographic characteristics of participants.

Table 2: The table describing the background characteristics of the 37 participants.

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage %
Age	18-44	8	21.6
	45-59	7	18.9
	60+	22	59.5
Sex	Male	24	64.9
	Female	13	35.1
Marital status	Married	31	83.8
	Single	2	5.4
	Widowed	4	10.8
Education level	No formal education	20	54.1
	Primary	10	27.0
	Secondary	4	10.8
	Tertiary	3	8.1
Occupation	Farming	19	51.4
	Business	15	40.5
	Formal employment	3	8.1

	Other	0	0.0
Total		37	100

Table 2 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the 37 participants who took part in the study. The characteristics considered were age, sex, marital status, education level, and occupation. The findings show that the majority of the participants were aged 60 years and above, followed by those aged 18-44 years and aged 45-59 years. In terms of sex, males constituted the majority, with 64.9% of the participants, while females accounted for 35.1%. Regarding marital status, 83.8% participants were married, 10.8% were widowed, and 5.4% were single.

Concerning education level, 54.1% participants had no formal education, 27.0% had attained primary education, 10.8% had secondary education, and 8.1% had tertiary education. In terms of occupation, 51.4% participants were engaged in farming, 40.5% in business, and 8.1% in formal employment. These characteristics provide contextual information about the participants and their social backgrounds, which is relevant to understanding their knowledge and experiences of traditional marriage ceremonies among the Aringa.

3.7 Data Collection Methods and instruments

3.7.1 Participant observation

The researcher employed participant observation as the primary ethnographic method of data collection. The researcher immersed himself in the social and cultural setting of the Aringa community Yumbe district by participating in and observing traditional marriage related activities in their natural settings. The observation was conducted during marriage ceremonies, family visits, bride wealth negotiations, marriage celebrations, and other related communal activities during the field work period.

The researcher observed interactions among the bride, groom, their families, elders and other community members, with particular attention to the procedures followed during marriage negotiations, the transfer of bride wealth, the use of traditional objects and attire, preparation and sharing of food, songs and dances, gestures and the roles of elders and family members.

The researcher also observed the organization of marriage ceremonies and the use of traditional gathering spaces and artifacts associated with the marriage process. Participation in these activities enabled the researcher to gain first-hand understanding of how marriage ceremonies were performed and how symbols acquired meaning through social interaction. The researcher's shared linguistic and cultural background with the Aringa community facilitated communication and access to these settings. Ethical consent was obtained from participants involved in interviews and focus group discussions, while observations were conducted within publicly accessible and culturally appropriate settings without disrupting the activities being observed.

An observation checklist was used during participant observation to document relevant key feature of ceremonies, including key cultural performances, artefacts, attires, symbolic expressions and roles of the participants. This was used by following predetermined items on the checklist while observing marriage ceremonies and recording how each activity, symbol or role occurred in the field. Audio and visual recording tools such as smartphone and camera were also used to document observation, cultural activities, and artistic references. These materials assisted in preserving details of ceremonies, symbols and performances and supported the later process of visual interpretation into painterly forms.

3.7.2 Interviews

Qualitative data were gathered through interviews with key informants, specifically elders aged 60 years and above. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on recommendations from other community members who identified them as having specific in-depth knowledge of the local culture and artifacts. Interviews were used to elicit information pertaining to the first research objective: "to identify and examine the marriage ceremonies among the Aringa of Lugbara". Interviews were conducted in 'Lugbarati', the Aringa dialect, to ensure clear understanding and enable participants to express themselves naturally.

A total of ten (10) individuals with relevant cultural knowledge participated in the individual interviews. The interviews were conducted in *lugbarati*, the language spoken by the Lugbara, using the Aringa dialect, to facilitate clear communication and enable participants to express their knowledge and experiences naturally and accurately.

A semi-structured interview guide developed systematically by the researcher was used to collect information from cultural elders, clan leaders, traditional artisans and knowledgeable community members. This guide was used because it allowed obtaining consistency and flexibility to probe participants' experiences, knowledge and interpretations of Aringa marriage ceremonies and symbols. The guide contained open ended questions focusing on traditional marriage ceremonies, symbols and their meanings, and changes occurring within Aringa traditional marriage. Audio and visual recording tools such as smartphone and camera were also used to record interviews and artistic references because they supported the later process of visual interpretation into painterly forms

3.7.3 Library and documentary review.

Libraries are institutional entities that acquire, organize, and provide access to curated collections of information resources, which may include books, periodicals, manuscripts, and diverse multimedia formats, to meet the educational, research, and informational needs of a defined community. In this study, the researcher accessed information from Makerere University and Uganda Museum library collections to review of existing scholarly literature on Lugbara traditional marriage.

Makerere University was selected because it provided access to a substantial collection of dissertations, theses, books academic journals and other scholarly publications relevant to Fine Art, anthropology, sociology, history and African cultural studies. These resources enabled the researcher to examine previous studies and establish the theoretical and contextual foundations of the study.

Uganda Museum library was consulted for historical, ethnographic and cultural materials relating to the broader Lugbara group and Uganda's indigenous communities and traditional practices. The use of these library collections enabled the researcher to identify relevant scholarship, contextualize Aringa traditional marriage within broader Lugbara cultural practices, and establish gaps in existing literature that informed the present study. This research method facilitated the acquisition of valuable historical data concerning the Aringa and Lugbara people, providing a foundational context for the study's objectives.

3.7.4 Focus group discussion.

A focused approach using focus group discussion was employed to gather data. This method was selected to facilitate a detailed exploration of the research objectives: (I) To identify and examine the traditional marriage ceremonies among the Aringa subgroup of the Lugbara, (II) To analyze the selected marriage symbols and their cultural meanings among the Aringa subgroup of the Lugbara. Focus group discussion was used to facilitate discussions among selected elders, married men and women. The discussions investigated shared experiences and different perspectives regarding marriage ceremonies, symbols and contemporary changes affecting traditional marriage.

Twenty-seven respondents were recruited and provided with three days' advance notice to allow adequate preparation time for the discussions. To ensure candid and free participation, participants were segregated by gender and age set into four distinct focus groups:

i. **Group 1 (Women):** One group consisting of six (6) elderly female participants. Separating focus groups by gender minimizes social pressure, enhance the richness, credibility of the data and addressing culturally sensitive topics including bride preparation, marital counselling, food preparations, and gift exchange. The women's group provided extensive data on female roles, including pre-wedding bride preparation, the process of escorting the bride to her husband's home, associated gifts, and general activities such as cooking on the marriage day.

ii. **Groups 2 and 3 (Men):** Two focus group discussions comprising male elders were conducted, with a total of 13 participants drawn from different sub-counties within the Aringa community. The selection of participants from different sub-counties was intended to capture variations and commonalities in traditional marriage customs across the Aringa community. The first group comprised seven (7) clan elders drawn from two sub-counties, while the second group comprised six (6) *ledi* drawn from three sub-counties. The men's groups provided information on the history of the Aringa and Lugbara cultures, contributing to an understanding of the broader historical and cultural contexts relevant to the study objectives.

iii. **Group 4 (Married youth Men and Women):** This focus group comprised of eight (8) married youth aged 18 years and above, including four men and four women. The group

was included because the participants had recent experirnces of Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies and could therefore provide first-hand sccounts of how marriage ceremonies and symbols are currently practiced and understood. The inclusion of both men and women also enabled the study to capture gendered perspectives on contemporary Aringa marriage ceremonies.

A structured discussion guide of open-ended questions was developed in English and translated into 'Lugbarati' by the researcher who is fluent in both English and Lugbarati (Aringa dialect) before the commencement of data was used to prompt discussions and deeper insights to ensure all relevant topics are addressed. The focus group discussion guide was used to ensure that key research topics were consistently discussed across groups while allowing participants to freely, compare and expand their views on Aringa marriage ceremonies and symbols. Audio and visual recording tools such as smartphone was also used to record discussions from various groups which supported the later process of visual interpretation into painterly forms

3.7.5 Studio Exploration

The studio exploration was designed to address Objective (iii), which aimed to visually interpret selected ceremonies of the traditional Lugbara marriage through painterly ideas. The research methodology involved a qualitative approach, integrating both secondary and primary data collection. The following procedure was used during studio exploration.

i. **Data Collection:** Initial data were gathered through a comprehensive review of existing literature and library resources to identify and document the various activities comprising the traditional Lugbara marriage ceremonies. This was complemented by primary field research within the Aringa community, utilizing semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with local elders. This qualitative data collection method provided rich, contextual insights into the cultural practices, which were essential for generating authentic artistic ideas.

ii. **Creative Process and Materials:** The collected information was conceptually distilled and transformed into preliminary sketches using imaginative and interpretive skills. The final artworks were produced using paint as the primary medium, directly informed by these preparatory sketches.

iii. **Technique and Style:** The paintings were executed in an abstract art style to visually convey the essence and emotion of the ceremonies rather than a strict representational form. A Monoscenic narrative art painting technique was employed, where a single scene depicts the sequence of ongoing activities involved in organizing the traditional marriages, thus capturing the progression of the events within a unified visual framework.

This studio-based visual art methodological approach ensured that the studio practice was grounded in rigorous cultural research, allowing for a systematic yet creative translation of traditional ceremonies into a scholarly artistic output.

3.8 Pilot study of Research Instruments

A pilot study was conducted among Makerere University students in Kampala, Uganda, prior to the main fieldwork to assess the suitability, clarity, relevance, and consistency of the research instruments. The pilot involved nine students, who were selected to provide feedback on the semi-structured interview guide and focus group discussion guide. Of the nine students, three participated in the pilot semi-structured interviews, while the remaining six participated in the pilot focus group discussion.

The instruments were assessed for the clarity and comprehensibility of questions, appropriateness of wording, sequence and logical flow of questions, relevance to the study objectives, potential repetition, and the time required to administer them. The pilot also enabled the researcher to assess whether the questions could elicit detailed information relevant to Lugbara traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols.

Based on the feedback and observations made during the pilot, unclear and repetitive questions were revised, ambiguous wording was clarified, and the sequence of some questions was adjusted to improve logical flow and facilitate more focused discussions and interviews. The researcher also refined the procedures for introducing questions, probing participants, and recording responses. These modifications enhanced the clarity and suitability of the instruments before their use in the main study. Participants who took part in the pilot study were excluded from the main study to avoid duplication of responses and to minimize the possibility that prior exposure to the research questions could influence their responses during the main fielwork.

3.9 Data analysis

The data collected through interviews, Focus Group Discussions, participant observation, were analyzed using Reflexive thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (Clarke & Braun, 2017). This approach was selected because it is appropriate for identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. The analysis focused on understanding participants' experiences and interpretations of the ceremonies and symbols of traditional marriage among the Aringa subgroup of the Lugbara.

The analysis began after fieldwork through transcription and translation of interviews and Focus Group Discussion recordings from Lugbarati into English, followed by verification against audio recordings and integration of field and observation notes into the dataset.

Following familiarization, the researcher manually coded the data by assigning labels to relevant words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs related to the research objectives. Similar responses were grouped under common codes to identify recurring concepts, while new ideas emerged. The codes were continuously reviewed, revised, merged, to enhance deeper understanding of the data.

After coding, related codes were grouped into broader categories based on their conceptual similarities. These categories were then examined to identify overarching themes that represented important patterns across the dataset. For example, codes relating to bride wealth, negotiation rituals, and clan involvement were grouped under themes explaining traditional marriage ceremonies, while codes relating to beads, arrows, traditional attire, and other cultural objects were organized into themes explaining marriage symbols and their cultural significance.

The preliminary themes were reviewed against the coded data to ensure they accurately reflected participants' views and addressed the research questions, with overlapping themes merged and weak themes revised or discarded to enhance the credibility and coherence of the findings.

The final themes were defined and named based on their meanings, interpreted in relation to the study objectives and existing literature, and supported with verbatim participant quotations to guide the presentation and discussion of the findings in Chapters Four and Five.

The trustworthiness of the analysis was enhanced through data triangulation across interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, together with maintaining an audit trail of coding and theme development to ensure the credibility, dependency, and transparency of the findings.

3.10 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are fundamental criteria for evaluating research quality, demonstrating the overall rigor of the research processes and the trustworthiness of the findings. Reliability refers to the consistency and reproducibility of a measure, while validity concerns the extent to which the study accurately measures what it intends to measure.

To enhance the robustness of the study and ensure the credibility of the data, the researcher employed specific methodological strategies, primarily triangulation. Methodological triangulation, a widely recognized technique, involves the application and combination of several research methods to investigate the same phenomenon (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021).

In this study, methodological triangulation was used to collect data from multiple sources to cross-verify findings and mitigate the biases inherent in a single-method approach. The researcher integrated data from interviews, observations, focus group discussions, and archive/library sources to corroborate evidence, thereby strengthening the validity of the conclusions and ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This multi-method approach allowed for a balanced exploration of complex issues and increased confidence in the overall research findings.

3.11 Ethical considerations

The research proposal and all associated study protocols were submitted to and approved by the Directorate of Research and Graduate Training (DRGT). The study adhered to the ethical guidelines and principles of good research practice, including respect for participants' rights and dignity, beneficence, and justice.

Prior to data collection, all respondents were provided with a comprehensive explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. This information was presented in a clear and comprehensible manner to ensure participants could make an informed decision regarding their involvement. Written informed consent was obtained from all individuals; participants were

explicitly informed that their participation was voluntary and that they retained the right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or negative consequences.

To ensure the integrity and quality of the data, a reasonable incentive in the form of a monetary appreciation was provided to participants as compensation for their time and the inconvenience incurred by their involvement. This compensation was designed to avoid undue influence or coercion while acknowledging their contribution to the research.

Confidentiality and data privacy were strictly maintained throughout the study. All responses were treated with the highest standards of security, and personally identifiable information was removed from the final report to ensure the anonymity of participants. Data gathered from interviews and discussions were securely stored and used exclusively for the stated research purposes, with a commitment to protect the identities and interests of the people within the Yumbe District and avoid any potential harm or misuse of the information.

3.12 Limitations of the study

This study faced several limitations which primarily related to data collection and participant access, and the scope of the results.

I. The study was limited by existing scholarly literature specifically addressing Lugbara traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols of Aringa subgroup. Most existing studies discuss Lugbara people as general or focused on other subgroups.
II. The study focused only on the Aringa subgroup of the Lugbara in Yumbe district. Consequently, the findings may not fully represent the marriage ceremonies and symbolic practices of other Lugbara subgroups or other ethnic groups in Uganda.
III. The study relied heavily on oral narratives and stories from cultural elders and knowledgeable members of the community. These oral narratives are affected by modernization, formal education, religious influence and changing lifestyles.
IV. Logistical difficulties were encountered in coordinating and assembling clan elders from Aringa in various sub counties within Yumbe district. This was primarily due the elders' geographical dispersion and old age which hindered participations in group discussions.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses, and interprets the findings of the study on Lugbara Traditional Marriage focusing on the visual interpretation of Ceremonies and Symbols of traditional marriage among the Aringa. The findings were gathered through semi structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. The data was analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, meanings, and practices relating to traditional marriage among the Aringa subgroup of the Lugbara.

The presentation of findings is organized according to the study objectives. The first objective sought to identify and examine selected traditional marriage ceremonies among the Aringa of the Lugbara. The second objective focused on analyzing selected marriage symbols and their cultural meanings. The third objective examined how the selected ceremonies and symbols could be visually interpreted into painterly forms.

4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

4.1.1 Traditional Marriage Ceremonies among the Aringa Subgroup of the Lugbara

The analysis revealed that traditional marriage among the Aringa is not understand as a single event but as a process involving several interconnected activities. These activities bring together the prospective couple, their families, elders, relatives, and the wider community. The ceremonies provide opportunities for families to establish relationships, negotiate marriage arrangements, transfer bride wealth, celebrate the union, and integrate the couple into their respective social networks.

Participants emphasized that marriage traditionally involved the participation of the wider family and community rather than being regarded merely as a private relationship between two individuals. The findings therefore suggest that Aringa traditional marriage functions as a social institution through which kinship relations, responsibilities, values and cultural continuity are maintained.

4.1.1.1 Courtship and expression of interest.

The findings indicate that courtship was an important initial stage of Aringa traditional marriage. At this moment, the groom and his family expressed interest in the prospective bride and initiated contact with her family. This process gave an opportunity for the two families to become acquainted and to establish whether the proposed relationship was socially accepted. In discussion groups, participants emphasized that there was a consensus that a girl's father jointly assessed a suitor's character and industriousness. For instance, one elder participant explained as follows.

> "…*the prospective groom was being invited to the bride's family home to perform arduous physical labor, such as digging fields, constructing a granary, or renovating a hut. The suitor would typically stay for one or more nights, often sharing living space, or even a sleeping mat, with the prospective bride. Successful completion of the assigned tasks demonstrated the man's respect and capacity to provide for a family, thus confirming his hard work*" (FGD 02, male participant, 22nd, 2024).

Simultaneously, the shared lodging arrangement served as a crucial character test. A man who abstained from sexual intimacy with the girl during this period was deemed a person of integrity and granted permission to marry her. Conversely, engaging in sexual intercourse was considered an act of disrespect and poor manners, disqualifying him as a potential husband. (FGD 04, male participant, 22nd, 2024), add the following account:

> "…*a boy who engaged in illicit sexual intercourse while sharing living space with the girl might be subjected to severe physical punishment and disqualified from pursuing the prospective bride"* (FGD 04, male participant, 22nd, 2024).

Courtship can therefore be interpreted as a ceremonial process of establishing social relationships and family acceptance. The involvement of the groom's family demonstrates that marriage among the Aringa is traditionally understood as a relationship between families rather than representing personal interests of the prospective couple.

4.1.1.2 Introduction and Marriage Arrangements

The findings indicate that the process of traditional marriage could begin with the identification of a prospective partner and subsequent communication between the families concerned. Courtship and marriage arrangements were traditionally influenced by considerations such as family background, clan relationships, character and social compatibility.

The participation of family was important because marriage was regarded as creating a relationship between families rather than simply between a man and a woman. Elders played a key role in advising the young people and establishing whether the proposed marriage was socially acceptable. The findings further indicated that traditional marriage was guided by customary rules concerning acceptable relationships between clans and families.

The vital consideration was exogamy, whereby individuals were not allowed to marry within the kinship relationships. An elder described the importance of identifying partners by relative as below.

> "…*father would visit a friend from another clan with the son to identify a potential wife for his son in order to prevent incest. Alternatively, the father's sister, who had married into another clan would identify a girl as a potential partner for her nephew*…" (IME 03, interview, 21st, 2024).

Elders and family members therefore played a significant role in determining whether the proposed union was appropriate. The engagement of elders also provided an avenue through which cultural knowledge was transmitted from one generation to another. Through discussions concerning marriage, young people were introduced to expectations relating to respect, family responsibility, sexual conduct, and obligations towards relatives.

The findings demonstrate that the introductory stage of Aringa marriage was not simply a preliminary arrangement but an important mechanism for maintaining social relationships and cultural values. Marriage arrangements provided a structured way of connecting families and transmitting customary knowledge to younger generations.

4.1.1.3 Bride wealth Negotiation

The findings indicate that Bride wealth terms were negotiated directly between the fathers of the prospective bride and groom. The bride wealth was transferred from the family of the groom to the bride's family. An elder narrated the following significance of the wealth being transferred.

> "*…once the bride wealth is received, it is divided among the patrilineage, known as the anabudra", a term translated by pariticipants as 'we eat and share things together'*" (FGD 11, male participant, 22nd, 2024).

A mediator known as the *"ledi"* played an important role in facilitating communication between the families. The mediator helped to establish communication and guide the negotiation process between the two sides. This demonstrates that marriage negotiations were conducted through recognized social structures rather than through informal individual arrangements.

The primary form of bride wealth identified comprised animals, specifically cows, goats and sheep. A maximum payment of five animals and one hundred arrows were presented by the groom's family, designated exclusively for use in community defense or offensive military action against enemies, and subsequently distributed among the bride's brothers. In cases where the groom's family lacked material wealth, a form of bride service was accepted. The groom was required to perform labor for the bride's father, such as cultivating land or constructing a hut.

The importance attached to negotiation suggests that marriage among the Aringa was regarded as a collective social responsibility. The participation of elders and the *ledi* demonstrates the role of customary authority in regulating marriage relationship and maintaining harmony between families.

4.1.1.4 Bride wealth Transfer

Bride wealth transfer emerged as one of the significant practices associated with Aringa traditional marriage. The findings indicated that bride wealth historically consisted mainly of livestock, particularly goats, sheep and cattle, although the form and composition of bride wealth have been modified over time. Participants indicated that contemporary bride wealth include money.

Participants in focus group discussion noted the significance of bride wealth transfer at night and was often handled by young male relatives. The practice was associated with cultural beliefs concerning protection from misfortune, witchcraft, and the evil eye. For instance, (FGD 13, male participant, 22nd, 2024), explained as follows,

> "…*the back of the animals was not to be seen during their transfer. Publicly transferring bride wealth during the day was believed to expose the marriage or the family's livestock to potential harm such as loss of the animals, barrenness of the wife*". (FGD 13, male participant, 22nd, 2024)

The practice therefore involved more than an economic transaction. The objects transferred during bride wealth represented relationships and obligations between the two families. Livestock, in particular, carried social and symbolic significance because they demonstrate the seriousness of the marriage arrangement and connected the union with family wealth and continuity.

The transformation of bride wealth from livestock to money and other material goods indicates that the practice has adapted to changing economic and social circumstances. However, the underlying expectation that bride wealth represents an important component of the marriage relationship continues to be recognized. Bride wealth can therefore be understood as both a material and symbolic component of Aringa marriage. Its transfer establishes relationships and obligations between families, while the beliefs surrounding its presentation demonstrated the influence of cultural knowledge and spiritual understandings on marriage practices.

4.1.1.5 Marriage celebration (Aje)

The marriage celebration emerged as an important communal stage in which the union was publicly recognized and celebrated. The findings indicate that relatives, elders, friends and members of the wider community participated in the marriage celebration. One notable practice identified during the study was the organization of participants into eating groups. Eating together created social interaction and reinforced relationships among members of the two families and the wider community. The celebration therefore involved more than entertainment.

Through field research, the researcher observed that elders gather under trees during marriage celebrations to recount clan histories and other forms of cultural knowledge. These gatherings provided an important setting for oral transmission of history, customs, and family relationships.

Songs, dances, traditional clothing, and other forms of participation also contributed to the celebratory character of the marriage ceremony. These practices created a collective environment through which cultural knowledge and identity were publicly expressed.

The marriage celebration illustrates the communal character of Aringa traditional marriage. The practice of eating together and sharing cultural narratives reinforces social solidarity and provides a mechanism through which younger generations encounter and learn cultural traditions.

4.1.1.6 Transferring gifts.

The transfer of Marriage gifts was an important activity practiced during Aringa traditional marriages. The purpose of this journey extends beyond the material exchange; it represents a formal occasion for the elder women to offer final words of advice and blessings to the bride. The guidance is essential for the bride's successful integration into her marital family, reflecting the community's emphasis on maintaining harmony and avoiding behaviors that lead to divorce, which is generally discouraged in Lugbara culture. This practice serves as a mechanism of social control and support, ensuring that bride is well-prepared for her spousal duties and reinforcing community values. (FGD 32, female participant, 23rd, 2024), identified and explained the transfer of the following objects.

> "…*items given as gifts including Kobi (winnowers), Ilinga (knife), Bowl, Mito and Utoro (woven baskets, 'Ngalika (Bead), Baby head cover, Yelemvu (pots) and Grinding stone are transferred to the bride after the official marriage celebrations in her new home by her female kin*". (FGD 32, female participant, 23rd, 2024).

The findings demonstrate that Aringa traditional marriage comprises a process of interconnected ceremonies and activities which includes courtship, negotiations, bride wealth transfer, gift transfer and communal celebration. The Items of gift include the following.



Figure 4. 1: *Kobi* (winnowers). Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024



Figure 4. 2: *Ilinga* (knife). Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024



Figure 4. 3: ***Bowl*** **used for putting in sauce. Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024**



Figure 4. 4: ***Mito and Utoro*** **from right to left (Baskets). Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024**



Figure 4. 5: ***'Ngalika*** **(Bead). Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024**



Figure 4. 6: Baby head cover. Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024



Figure 4. 7: *Yelemvu* (pot) used for storing water. Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024.



Figure 4. 8: *Grinding stone*. Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024.

4.1.2 Marriage Symbols and their Cultural meanings among the Aringa Subgroup of the Lugbara

The second theme emerged from participants' regarding the objects, activities, social roles and performances associated with traditional marriage among the Aringa subgroup of the Lugbara. The findings indicate that marriage symbols are not merely decorative elements but carry meanings that communicate social relationships, cultural values, obligations, identity, and continuity. The analysis identified the following subthemes.

4.1.2.1 Bride wealth and its Symbolism.

Bride wealth emerged as one of the most significant symbols associated with Aringa traditional marriage. Participants explained that bride wealth traditionally consisted of five (5) livestock and other culturally valued items such as arrows. The primary form of bride wealth identified comprised animals, specifically goats and sheep. (FGD 03, male participant, 22nd, 2024), narrated the following significance of bride wealth.

"…*a maximum payment of five animals, and one hundred arrows were presented by the groom's family, designated exclusively for use in community defense or offensive military action against enemies, and subsequently distributed among the bride's brothers*" (FGD 03, male participant, 22nd, 2024).

Contemporary practice, however, reflects significant modification in the composition of bride wealth. The earlier use of arrows has largely been replaced by monetary payment while livestock remain important component of payment. This transformation is illustrated by a young married participant who stated the following. "…*in my marriage, my family negotiated 17 goats, five cows and 488,800 Ugandan shillings as arrows*" (FGDMY 45, Male Youth participant, 23rd, 2024).

This indicates that while the material composition of bride wealth has changed, aspects of its cultural meaning and terminology continue to be retained within contemporary Aringa marriage ceremonies.

The findings indicate that livestock traditionally used as bride wealth possessed meanings beyond economic value. Their transfer presents the ability of the groom's family to fulfil customary obligations and participate in establishing a socially recognized marriage. The transfer therefore functioned as a symbol of responsibility, family cooperation and social recognition. Bride wealth can therefore be interpreted as a material symbol through which social relationships and responsibilities are established between families.



Figure 4. 9: *Goats and cows* presented as bride wealth. Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024.

4.1.2.2 Communal eating.

The practice of eating food emerged as important symbol within Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies, expressing unity and social belonging. An elder emphasized the importance of communal eating during marriage ceremonies as this, "… *food was communally eaten and distributed based on family lineages. Eating together from a common container shows the idea of belonging together as 'one blood'*" (FGD 05, male participant, 22nd, 2024). This transformed eating from a basic necessity into a symbol of unity, social integration, and kinship.

Communal eating also created opportunities for interaction between the two families, clans and the wider community. Community members established and reinforced social relationships through communal eating created by marriage.

Communal eating therefore functioned as a symbol of unity, belonging and social integration. Communal eating demonstrates how material objects and everyday activities can acquire deeper cultural meanings within ceremonial contexts.



Figure 4. 10: *Participants having a communal eating* during a marriage ceremony. Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024

4.1.2.3 Songs and dances.

The findings indicate that songs and dances are important symbols within Aringa traditional marriage. Participants described these activities important components of marriage celebrations and a means through which cultural knowledge and values are communicated. Songs and dances provide a means of expressing happiness, welcoming participants, celebrating the couple and

strengthening social relationships. They also create opportunities for older members of the community to transmit cultural knowledge to the younger generations.

Therefore, songs and dances can be understood as cultural symbols because they communicate emotions, values, history and identity while simultaneously creating social cohesion among participants. The character if which they are performed also makes them important resources for visual artistic interpretation.

4.1.2.4 Mats or Stools

Mats and stools emerged as important ceremonial objects used in Aringa traditional marriage. Their use during marriage ceremonies symbolized respect, acceptance, hospitality and family unity. For example, an Elder explained how, during courtship, the prospective groom was welcomed by the bride during his visit to her home and offered a stool on which to sit as below.

> "*When the prospective groom visited the bride's family, he geeted them by saying the word orukumbia, to which the girl responded, oree, and offered him a stool known as kpokponga on which to sit. He then said kolo, and she responded, mgbili, indicating that he had been accepted*" (IME 04, interview, 21st, 2024).

Participants also explained that mats were mostly presented to the female guests to provide them with a designated place to sit and eat during marriage ceremonies. The presentation and use of the mats formed part of the hospitality extended to guests and reflected the organized participation of women in the gathering.

The practice of presenting a mat or stool for guests and family members reflects recognition and respect for their presence and participation in the marriage process. The use of mats and stools presented to guests also creates a sense of belonging and togetherness among the members of the two families. Thus, mats and serve beyond their practical purpose by representing the values of social acceptance, mutual respect and unity.



Figure 4. 11: ***Kpokponga (Stool) and Mat.*** **Photographed during fieldwork in (Yumbe District), Uganda. Photograph by Gerile, 2024**

4.1.2.5 Roles of Elders, family members and the community.

The finding indicate that people themselves performed symbolic roles within marriage ceremonies. Elders were particularly important because they represented cultural authority, knowledge, and experience. The elders contributed to bride wealth negotiations, provide advice, and communicated cultural knowledge and the collective responsibility of the community in marriage matters. The participation of family members from both sides played important symbolic roles.

Their participation indicates that marriage was not only a private arrangement between the bride and the groom but it symbolized the formation of a wider social relationship between families. The wider community similarly played a significant role through participation in celebrations, eating, singing, dancing and other activities. The community participation demonstrated that marriage was traditionally understood as a collective social event.

The symbolic role of elders, families and the community demonstrates the collective nature of Aringa traditional marriage. Their participation communicates values of respect, responsibility, kinship, solidarity and cultural continuity. The findings illustrate that symbols within Aringa traditional marriage occur in both material and non-material forms. Material symbols include bride

wealth, mats or stools while non-material symbols include songs, dances, social roles and communal participation.

The symbolic meanings of Aringa traditional marriage therefore provide a significant basis for the visual and conceptual components of this study. As a result, the findings from this theme provides foundation for the third objective of the study, which focuses on the visual interpretation of selected marriage ceremonies and symbols into painterly forms.

4.2 Data interpretation

4.2.1 Visual interpretation of ceremonies into painterly forms

The process of transforming the research data into visual forms began with collecting sources of painting inspiration. These sources played an important role in interpreting selected Lugbara traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols among the Aringa. Visual references, including traditional dress, women's adornment, dance, communal activities, historical illustrations and facial expressions, guided the selection and development of visual elements for the paintings. These sources informed decisions concerning figure arrangement, body movement, posture, clothing, facial expressions and composition.

However, they were not copied directly; rather, selected visual elements were transformed and reinterpreted in relation to the cultural meanings established through the field findings. The sources therefore helped to bridge the gap between cultural knowledge and studio practice, enabling the researcher to transform documented ceremonies and symbols into contemporary painterly representations. The figure below shows sources of painting inspiration arranged on mood a board to provide visual direction and ideas for the artworks.

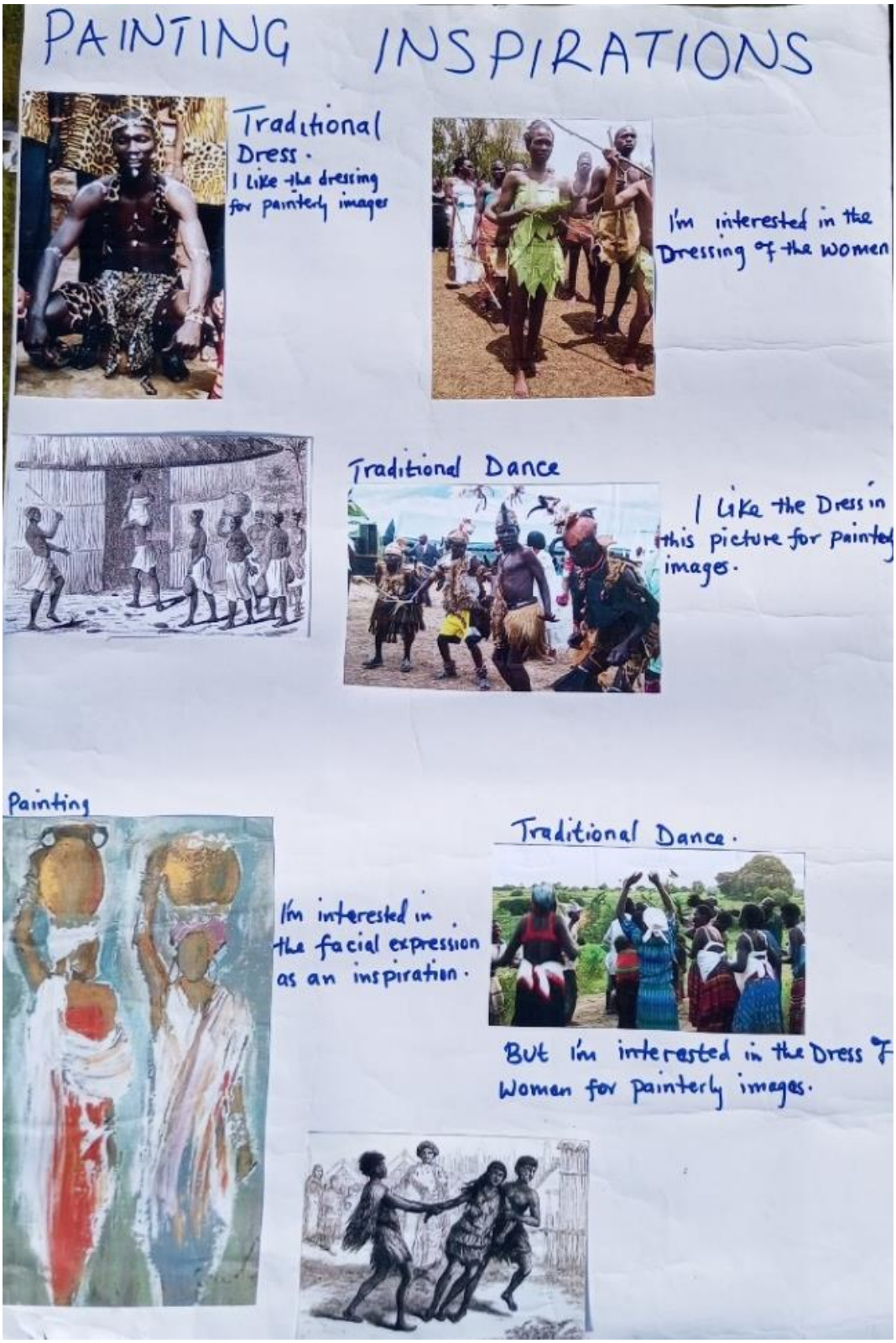


Figure 4. 12: ***Sources of painting inspirations*****. By Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.**

The following visual transformations below depict preparation of male partner for marriage during the courtship process, illustrating the progression from initial sketches to developed painterly representations. The process enabled the researcher to transform the cultural information obtained from the field into a visual form.



Figure 4. 13: *Preparation for marriage by the Bridegroom*. Preliminary Sketches on paper. A collection from studio experimentation. By Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

The sketch was transformed onto an A3 canvas board using acrylics paints, with color, texture and brushwork applied to develop the initial drawing into a finished painterly representation as shown below.

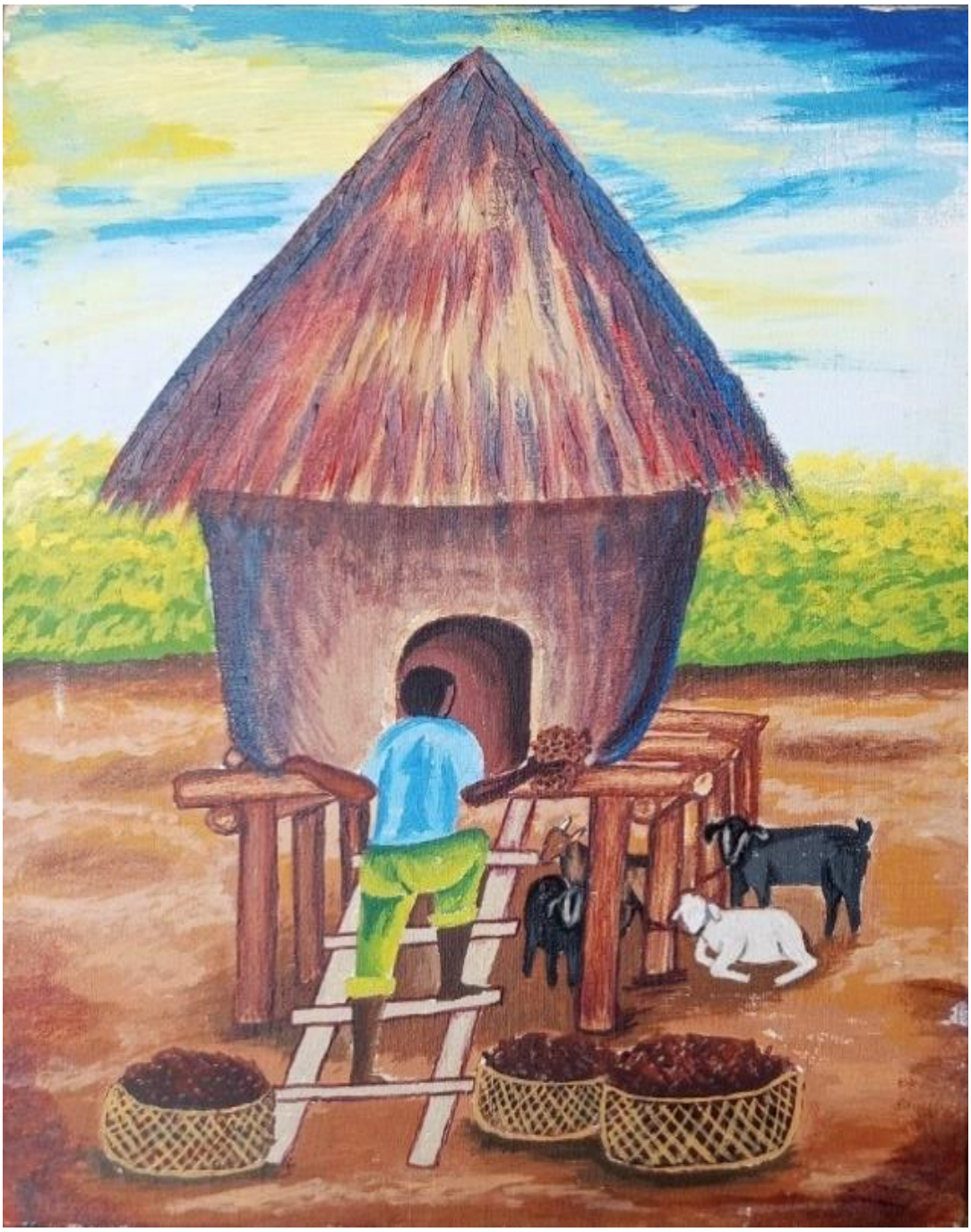


Figure 4. 14: ***Preparation for marriage by the Bridegroom*****. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (29.7 x 42 cm).**

In traditional African societies, marriage is often a complex, multi-stage rite of passage that solidifies alliances between families and lineages, not merely individuals. The prospective groom's

preparations serve both practical and symbolic functions, demonstrating his capacity to provide for his future household.

During courtship, a pivotal element in this process is the construction and provisioning of his own granary (food store), which signifies his readiness for the responsibilities of marriage and family headship. This structure, typically built at the groom's residence, is characterized by its traditional architecture: a grass-thatched roof, walls woven from sticks, and a finish of cow dung cement. Its elevated design, necessitating the use of a ladder, ensures the safekeeping of stored items from pests and ground moisture.

Preparations extend beyond construction to the accumulation of resources. The groom acquires specific items of value, such as goats and arrows, from his maternal uncles. These items represent a portion of the bride-wealth, a crucial exchange given to the bride's father on the day of the official marriage ceremony, known as the 'aje'. Concurrently, upon the announcement of the impending marriage, the groom's aunts contribute foodstuffs, such as millet and groundnuts, carried in baskets. These collected provisions, including the grain, are stored within the granary to provide sustenance for the newly formed family for several months post-'aje'. The livestock (goats) are kept securely tethered beneath the raised granary structure.

An accompanying artistic depiction (the painting) visually captures this stage of preparation, showing the groom storing baskets of food in the granary and the goats secured beneath it, illustrating the tangible preparations required for establishing a new, self-sufficient family unit within the community.

During courtship and expression of interest, the girls were also prepared for marriage by their grandmothers and aunties, who guided them in domestic duties and other responsibilities associated with married life. The artwork's creation began with the development of line sketches on paper using a pen, which was then transformed color onto hard sugar paper using acrylic paints as shown below.



Figure 4. 15: ***Preparing the girls for marriage*****. Preliminary Sketch, pen and acrylics on a paper.**

The final artwork below employs key element and principle of art to communicate the preparation of girls for marriage. Blue color is the dominant element used to suggest the night and darkness, while yellow and orange represent the fire, creating a strong contrast between the dark environment and the and the illuminated foreground. Line is expressed through visible brush strokes and curved contours that define the figures, clothing fire and the surrounding forms. Shapes are evident in the simplified human figures, cattle, and fire, with figures rendered in solid forms to establish their presence within the composition.



Figure 4. 16: ***Preparing the girls for marriage.*** **Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (100 x 100 cm).**

The painting's central theme depicts a domestic scene at night, where a grandmother educates young girls about family matters. A fire provides the primary source of light, a detail that alludes to the traditional practice of imparting knowledge and sharing ideas within a family setting. The painting also explores the cultural significance of a girl's upbringing. The animals positioned in the background on the left symbolize the belief that a well-raised daughter would bring a

substantial bride wealth to her family. The artwork further highlights a cultural value system where a girl's character and good conduct were historically prized above her physical appearance.

The images below depict the family heads discussing the possibility of a marriage union between their children and initiating the process of identifying a suitable partner. The visual interpretation of family introduction began with preliminary sketches using pastels to explore the composition, arrangement of figures, and key elements of the marriage process. The sketches use line, shape, form and tone to establish the figure and their relationships. The figures are positioned closely together to emphasize family interaction and consultation.



Figure 4. 17: Parent identifying a partner. Preliminary Sketches, Collections from the studio experimentations, Pastels on Manila paper, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

The sketching stage enabled the researcher to transform the information obtained from the initial field into a visual composition of painting as shown below in figure 1.18.The researcher employs the elements and principles of art to visually communicate collective family involvements in marriage process. Colors is dominant, with warm yellow, orange and red tones creating emphasis and contrast with cool blue and green tones. Shapes are represented through simplified figures, while texture is created through visible acrylic brushwork. The researcher achieved the principle of balance through the distribution of figures and objects across the picture plane, while emphasis is created by the centrally positioned figures and contrasting colors.



Figure 4. 18: ***Parent identifying a partner for his son.*** **Acrylic on plywood, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (240 x 120 cm).**

The artwork depicts two sets of parents seated, sharing a communal moment over food and beer, a practice integral to building inter-family relationships. The narrative presented in the painting describes a customary process where, upon a son reaching maturity, his father initiates the search for a suitable partner from the daughters within his network of friends. This practice highlights the communal nature of marriage in traditional societies, where the union is not merely between two individuals but two extended families or clans, serving to uphold social values and ensure communal well-being.

The specific interaction captured shows the parent on the right formally requesting the hand of the friend's daughter, seated next to her parent on the left. The background symbolism represents the expected qualities considered desirable for the prospective bride and groom by the parents, with a strong emphasis placed on identifying partners who are hardworking. This focus on character and social contribution underscores the pragmatic values inherent in traditional arranged marriages, which prioritized the stability and prosperity of the community and lineage over individual romantic preference.

The preliminary sketch *Transferring the bride wealth* below explores the transfer of bride wealth through the representation of two male figures accompanied by cows. The brown and grey cows serve as visual symbols of the material items presented during the marriage process, while the male figures represent the participants involved in the transfer. The use of blue and dark-purple tones establishes a night setting, reinforced by the white circular form representing the moon. Warm brown and orange tones in the animals and ground contras with the cool background, creating emphasis on the bride wealth items. The arrangement of the figures and animals creates balance and unity, while the central positioning of the animals establishes the main focal point. Overall, the sketch transforms the cultural tradition of brie wealth transfer into visual form.

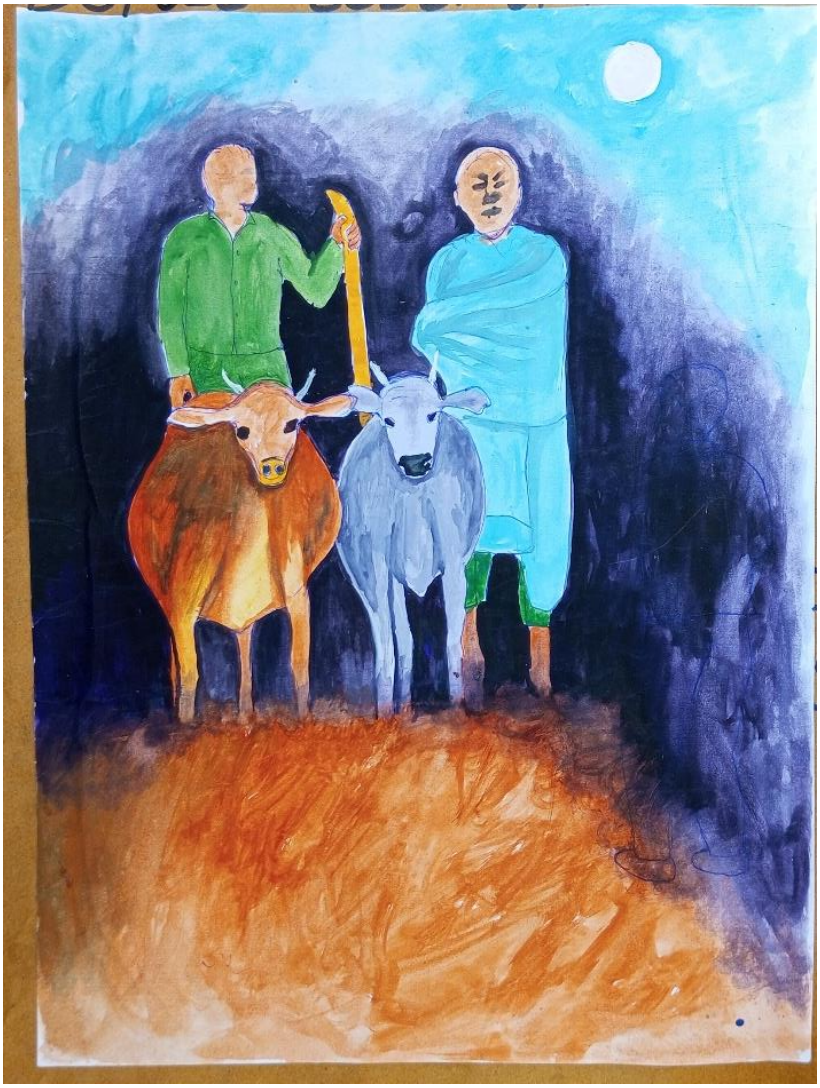


Figure 4. 19: *Transferring the Bride wealth*. Preliminary Sketch, water colors on sugar paper, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

The final painting *Transferring the bride wealth* below, developed from preliminary sketch by retaining the central element of the bride wealth transfer; men cattle and the nighttime setting while expanding them into a more expressive composition. The number of cattle was increased and figures were repositioned to strengthen the relationship between the people and the livestock being transferred. Blue and dark tone were deliberately used to establish the nighttime atmosphere and create a cool unified background, while white and yellow accents represented points of light, including the stars. Brown, reddish, and earthy tones were applied to the cattle and ground to warm cool color contrast, making the bride wealth animals more visually prominent against the cool background. Through elements and art principles, the painting transforms the initial sketch into a more expressive visual interpretation of the Aringa bride wealth transfer ceremony.



Figure 4. 20: *Transferring the Bride wealth to the Bride's family*. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (100 x 100 cm).

The painting depicts a customary Aringa marriage scene, focusing on the symbolic exchange of wealth and the cultural emphasis on reproduction and lineage continuity.

The artwork portrays a traditional marriage ritual, specifically the transfer of bride wealth. On the left of the composition, two male figures are depicted herding cattle under the cover of night. The nocturnal timing, according to an elder's testimony, is a protective measure against potential witchcraft or the "evil eye" directed at the valuable livestock. The movement of the cattle at night, observed as being managed by young men and received with food preparation the same evening, highlights a specific, discreet procedural element of the transaction.

Contrasting the left panel, the right side features a standing woman who is visibly pregnant and holding an infant. These figures are not merely descriptive but serve as potent visual symbols of **f**ecundity and the primary cultural purpose of the matrimonial union: reproduction and the subsequent multiplication of the family and clan lineage.

The core theme of the painting lies in the reciprocity and alliance building between the two kin groups. The exchange of reproductive assets the woman, who is expected to bear children to expand the husband's lineage, and the animals, which are expected to multiply and increase the wealth of the bride's family is central to the marital contract. The failure of either the human or animal component to reproduce is presented as a significant cultural concern, raising questions within the community and underscoring the societal value placed on progeny and continuity. This dynamic illustrates how the institution of marriage, facilitated by bride wealth, embeds individuals within a broader social and economic structure focused on generational survival and expansion.

The preliminary sketches for *Booking a partner* below explore different visual possibilities for representing the process of selecting and establishing a marriage relationship among the Aringa. The researcher used colored pencils and pastels to explore preliminary sketches on paper. These media enabled experimentation with color, line, tone, texture, form and composition while developing approaches to representing the selected marriage symbol.



Figure 4. 21: Booking a partner. Preliminary Sketches, Pastel on paper, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

The final painting below developed from the preliminary sketches by consolidating selected symbols associated with Aringa courtship and marriage. The composition combines enlarged feet and leg booking rings with human figures, cattle and a homestead to represent the relationship between courtship, family, adornment and marriage. The enlarged feet dominate the foreground and create emphasis, while the smaller figures, cattle, house provide contextual meaning. The repetition of colors and forms create rhythm, while the arrangement of large and small forms establishes balance and depth.



Figure 4. 22: *Booking a partner.* Acrylic on plywood, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (240 x 120 cm).

In certain traditional Lugbara cultural such as the Aringa, a system of betrothal was practiced involving symbolic markers and exchanges. Parents would pre-arrange marriages, sometimes from the future spouses' childhood or teenage years.

Key elements of this practice, as potentially depicted in the referenced painting, include:

i. **Symbolic Adornments:** The future bride wore rings (or similar metal adornments) on her legs and/or arms as a visible sign of her pending marital status. According to one account, these markers served as a clear signal within the community, ensuring that other individuals would not express romantic or physical interest in the betrothed person.

ii. **Bride wealth Component:** A cow was presented to the girl's family. This act was not a purchase of the bride but a practical and symbolic gesture to ensure the girl was well-nourished and grew healthily, a form of early contribution to her well-being. In Lugbara tradition, cattle are often a token of appreciation for the children born into the marriage, with an initial single cow presented at the start of arrangements.

iii. **Union and Homestead:** The couple's union was formalized when they reached maturity and were deemed ready to establish their own home. This transition to married life and the establishment of a new household is symbolically represented by the presence of a hut in the background of the painting.

These practices reflect complex social structures and a visual communication system, where attire, specific objects, and even the family home's decoration conveyed significant information about an individual's status and community values.

The researcher explored alternative visual approaches to representing the bride wealth negotiation ceremony between two clans through studio experimentation using pen and pastels on paper. The process focused on interpreting the interactions, gestures and symbolic objects associated with the negotiation. The use of pen and pastel allows the researcher to explore line, form, proportion, space, and movement before developing the idea into a final painting. The preliminary studies provided a basis for selecting and refining the most effective visual composition for subsequent development into the final painting.



Figure 4. 23: Negotiation of Bride wealth. Preliminary Sketches, Media; pen and acrylics on paper, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

The researcher selected the most effective sketch from the several preliminary sketches that effectively conveyed the essential elements of the ceremony for further development into watercolor painting. This process enabled the researcher to refine the initial ideas and determine the most appropriate visual elements for the final artwork. The refined composition was subsequently transformed into a large scale final painting using acrylic paint on wood, allowing the researcher to develop richer color, texture, form, and brushwork while maintaining the key elements identified during the sketching process as show below.

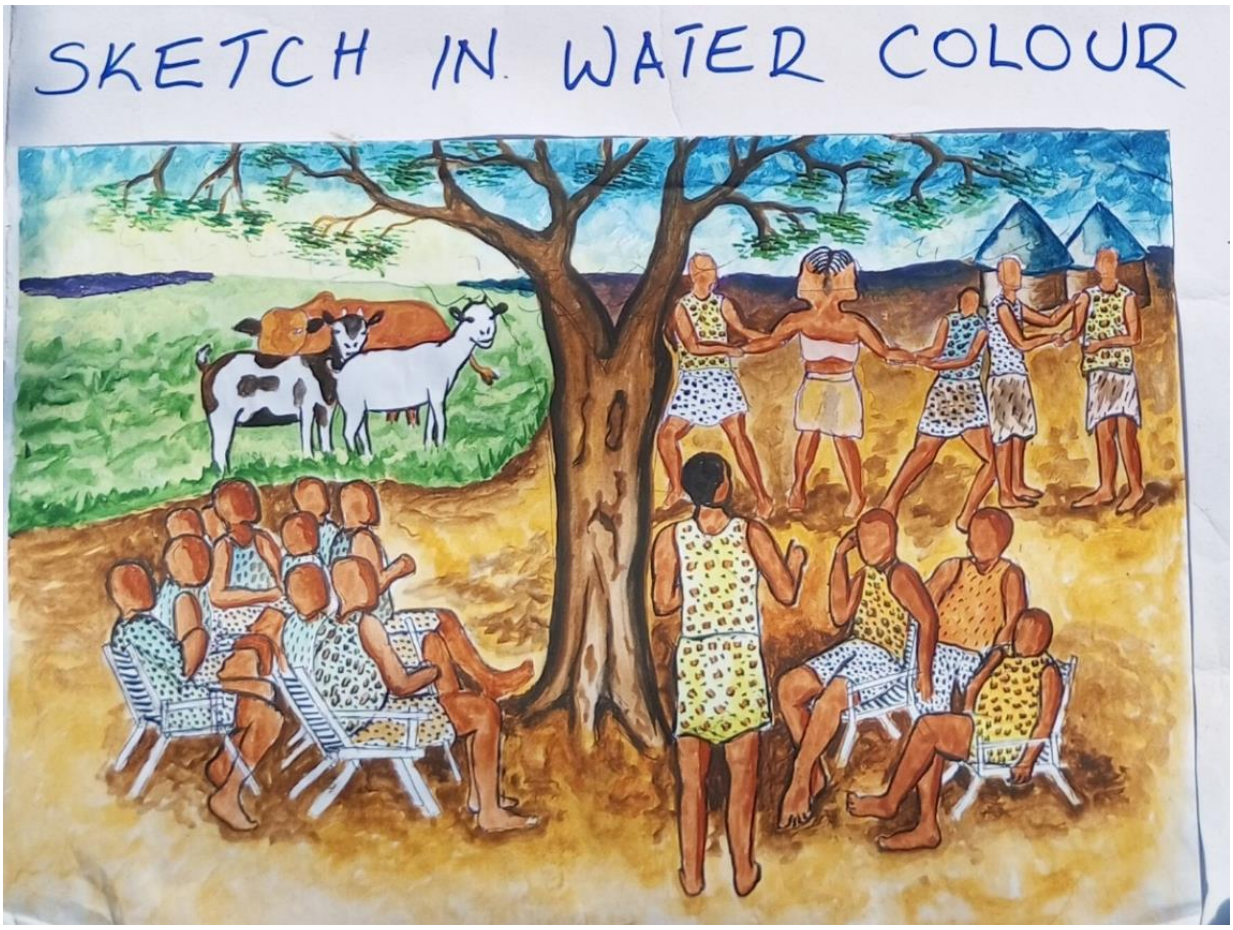


Figure 4. 24: ***Negotiation of Bride wealth*****. Sketch Development of in water colors, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.**



Figure 4. 25: *Negotiation of Bride wealth*. Acrylic on plywood, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (240 x 120 cm).

The painting depicts a traditional bride wealth negotiation taking place between two clans under a tree. A neutral mediator, connected by kinship to both families, is positioned between the groups to facilitate the discussion and manage potential disputes. The negotiation centers on the transfer of livestock, specifically cows and goats, which are visible in the left background as the proposed bride wealth. The power dynamics of the negotiation are symbolized on the right side of the painting, where two men are shown physically pulling a young woman, illustrating how the outcome of the bargaining determines where the bride will ultimately reside.

A respondent noted that these negotiations were typically conducted by the fathers of the prospective bride and groom. Despite the potential for spirited arguments, the process is ultimately a peaceful one, as emphasized by the men in the foreground shown shaking hands, signifying an amicable resolution.

The preliminary sketches below explore the ceremony of *Escorting the bride to the husband's home* after official public recognition. Through studio experimentation, the researcher investigated the movement, postures, and spatial relationships of the participants as the bride is formally accompanied to her husband's home. The sketches explore the procession as both a physical movement and a culturally significant transition, emphasizing the accompanying relatives, and other members of the community. Various elements and principles of art including line, color, form, composition and balance were used to capture the ceremonial atmosphere of the bride's transition into her husband's family.



Figure 4. 26: *Escorting the Bride to the Husbands home*. Preliminary Sketches, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

The researcher used the preliminary sketches as appoint of departure for exploring a more symbolic and expressive visual language. Rather directly reproducing the human figures observed during the ceremony, the researcher transformed selected human forms into animal forms to introduce symbolism and abstraction into the composition. This transformation enabled the researcher to move beyond literal representation and emphasize the cultural relationships, exchange, movement, and significance associated with bride wealth transfer.



Figure 4. 27: ***Escorting the Bride to the Husbands place*****. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (150 x 95 cm).**

In the depicted painting, an Aringa bride is depicted in a traditional marriage procession, carrying a basket known as a '*kuta*' on her head and accompanied by livestock. In Aringa culture, the bride

traditionally travels to her husband's home escorted by two to three young girls and one aunt. The duration of their stay typically ranges from one to three weeks. This entourage plays a specific role: the accompanying girls, known as '*otaa*', assist with the bride's domestic responsibilities, thereby allowing her to focus on her marital duties with her husband, primarily for procreation, which is a major purpose of the marriage.

The aunt's role is to provide instruction and guidance to the bride on her new responsibilities as a wife, encompassing both domestic skills and service to her husband. The goats and cows in the painting, holding arrows, symbolize the transfer of bride wealth from the groom's family to the bride's family. This exchange is a fundamental aspect of Aringa customary marriage, as it formally legitimizes the union and grants the husband the right to engage in sexual intercourse with his wife. The kuta basket, a gift from the bride's relatives on the official marriage day, is used to cover food prepared for the husband, a gesture signifying respect within the marital home.

The preliminary sketches titled *Designing the bride* below were developed as part of the researchers studio exploration into the preparation and adornment of the bride during the traditional marriage process. Using poster colors on paper, the researcher explored different compositions, body postures, gestures, clothing and decorative elements associated with the bride's preparation. The sketches provide opportunity to experiment color, line, and form while identifying the most effective visual representation.

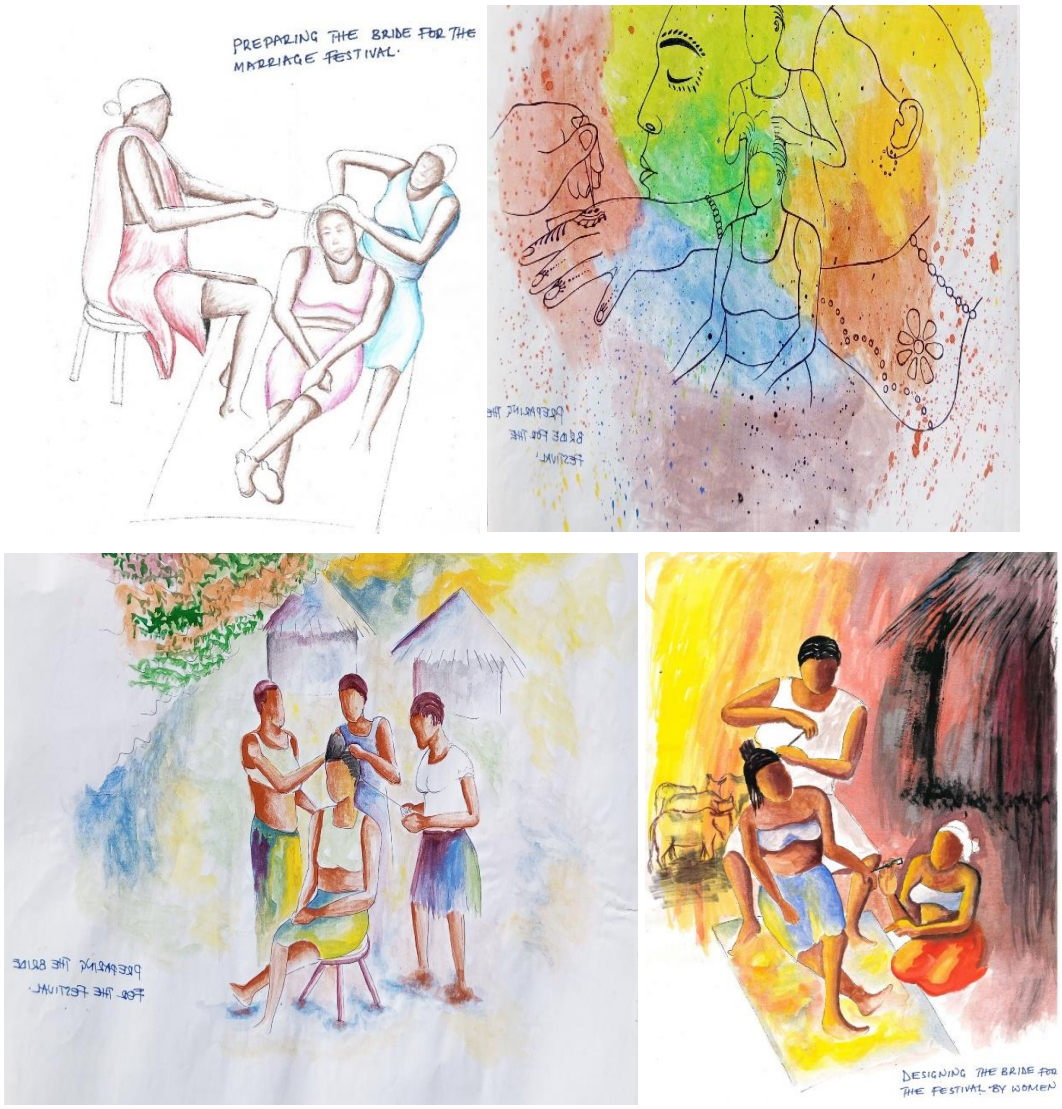


Figure 4. 28: *Designing the Bride. Preliminary Sketches*. Collection from studio exploration, Poster colors on paper, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

The preliminary sketch was transformed into a final acrylic painting on canvas. The researcher used bright colours, expressive forms, and decorative elements to emphasize happiness, the bride's beauty, femininity and cultural significance within the marriage ceremony.



Figure 4. 29: *Designing the Bride*. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (100 x 95 cm).

In Aringa culture, the elaborate preparation of a bride commences following the successful negotiation of the bride wealth. The provided painting depicts this initial preparation phase: a bride, seated on a mat before a traditional hut, is attended by two women. One attendant meticulously plaits the bride's hair, while the other applies intricate henna designs to her body. The application of henna in Aringa culture is a practice with deep historical roots, a tradition passed

down through generations. On her wedding day, the bride and her sisters have their bodies adorned with detailed, flower-patterned henna art.

These designs hold profound symbolic significance, representing blessings and well wishes for the bride's future, particularly concerning fertility and good fortune. This beautification process is a joyous occasion, serving as a celebratory communal event for the women and girls involved in the wedding festivities. Beyond its aesthetic and symbolic value, the ornate designing of the bride serves a practical cultural purpose. It is intended to enhance her beauty for the groom and his family, facilitating a seamless transfer of the agreed-upon bride wealth and ensuring the union is established under positive auspices and without reservation.

The bride and the parents in Figure 4. 30 is a preliminary sketch develop through studio exploration. The sketch explores the relationship between the bride and her parents within the traditional marriage process. Through line, form and spatial arrangement, the researcher experimented with ways of visually communicating the emotional and social significance of the relationship before developing the idea into a final painting below.



Figure 4. 30: ***The Bride and the Parents.*** **Preliminary Sketch from Studio exploration, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.**



Figure 4. 31: *The bride and her parents on Aje day*. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (150 x 130 cm).

In Lugbara culture, patriarchal authority over children was established through the payment of bride-wealth by the father. This transaction granted the man full dominion over his daughters, a power that included the right to refuse potential suitors for any reason. Consequently, the presence of the bride's father was essential during the marriage proceedings. This paternal control extended even to the financial aspects of marriage, with the father solely determining the amount of bride-wealth to be negotiated. John Middleton's observations on the matrimonial customs further describe a ritual where the bride's mother received consolatory gifts, such as beer, upon her daughter's departure, acknowledging the loss of her assistance with domestic chores.

Furthermore, another respondent highlighted the crucial role of the bride's father in providing vital genealogical and medical information about his daughter, including any historical health issues. This practice underscored the significance of the father's knowledge and authority, a principle encapsulated by the Aringa proverb: ***"avu le dipi"*** which translates as "The bad things you do in

your lifetime which you don't admit shall affect your children" or, in a broader sense, a missed target lands on innocent individuals. The proverb emphasizes that a father's actions and disclosures, or lack thereof, have lasting consequences for his offspring.

The painting *Aje Day (Marriage celebration)* below uses a vibrant, multi-figure composition to interpret traditional marriage celebration among the Aringa. The central tree provides structural balance, while the seated figures, food preparation, and dancing groups create rhythm and movement across the composition. Bright blue, yellow, orange, pink, and green colors establish a celebratory atmosphere, while variations in figure size and overlapping forms create depth.



Figure 4. 32: *The Aje day* (Marriage celebration). Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (200 x 100 cm).

This painting depicts the activities of a traditional Lugbara *Aje* day ceremony among the Aringa, a marriage ritual that involves multiple symbolic and communal acts. The central act of the ceremony is the public declaration of the marriage by the bride's father, who formally presents his daughter to the community by raising her hand. A notable custom of the ritual involves the bride applying ash to her face and body. This act is intended to symbolically deter other men and protect her from unwanted sexual advances, underscoring her new status as a married woman.

The painting illustrates the division of labor during the celebration, with women on the right side engaged in dancing and performing wedding songs, while those on the left are shown preparing meals for the attendees. In the background, animals are visible, representing the bride wealth, or *Ayira or Ewasi*, which is to be transferred to the bride's family, a common practice in many Lugbara marriage traditions. The exchange of bride wealth, often in the form of livestock, is a crucial component of the marriage process in Lugbara culture, signifying the union of the two families.

4.2.2 Visual interpretation of symbols into painterly forms

This section presents the visual interpretation of selected traditional marriage symbols into painterly forms. The researcher captures the objects, cultural meanings and symbolic significance identified from the field data into visual elements through composition, color, form, lines, and gesture. The paintings therefore serve as visual interpretations of Aringa marriage symbols, connecting their cultural meanings with artistic expression.

The following painting *The Bride wealth,* executed in acrylic on canvas, was developed from preliminary sketch that explored symbolic objects associated with traditional marriage among the Aringa. The initial sketch guided the development of the final painting, enabling the researcher to capture visual elements of bride wealth into painterly composition.



Figure 4. 33: *The Bride wealth*. Preliminary Sketch, colored pencils on paper, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.



Figure 4. 34: *The Bride wealth*. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (150 x 100 cm).

The painting depicts the objects traditionally exchanged as bride wealth within the Lugbara culture. Among the Aringa Lugbara people, these items typically included cows and arrows, which are prominently featured in the artwork. The presentation of bride wealth served as the formal recognition of the marriage union between the respective clans of the bride and groom. This exchange was a prerequisite for the husband's conjugal rights; any sexual relations prior to the completion of the bride wealth agreement were considered illicit and subject to severe penalties.

Historically, individuals engaging in premarital intercourse faced punishments such as physical chastisement or even death, administered by the bride's clan brothers. In some instances, such transgressions could be expiated through the payment of a compensatory fine, typically a cow, from the groom's family to the bride's family.

The sketches below, executed in pen and colored pencils, explore traditional cooking during marriage ceremonies known as *Yamari.* The compositions emphasizes the participation of women and other community members in preparing the meal, highlighting cooperation, communal labour and social interaction. The final painting is drawn from the most effective sketch based on its ability to convey essential elements and cultural significance of *Yamari* and was subsequently developed into the final painting.



Figure 4. 35: *Cooking Yamari on the Aje (marriage) day*. Preliminary Sketches, Pen on paper, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

The foreground of the final painting below is dominated by a woman stirring a large cooking pot over an open fire, while other women engage in food preparation and related domestic activities. The arrangement of figures, cooking vessels, firewood, and traditional homesteads creates a sense of an active communal setting. Warm hues of red, orange, yellow and brown dominate the

composition, suggesting the heat of the fire while creating a vibrant and festive atmosphere. The contrasting blue and green tones in the women's clothing provide visual emphasis and balance.



Figure 4. 36: *Cooking Yamari* (meals) on the Aje day. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (150 x 100 cm).

In traditional marriage ceremonies, following the successful negotiation of bride wealth, the wealth was officially transferred to the bride's family on the day of the marriage. The bride's father would then organize a meal, often referred to as 'yamari,' for members of his clan. This ritual meal served as a prayer for divine blessings and protection for the bride, with a specific request for her to conceive a child. The inability to bear children was considered grounds for divorce, as mentioned by some respondents. The absence of this 'yamari' meal could displease certain elders, which was believed to bring misfortune to the bride. A traditional food known as 'ojogo,' a solid paste made from black-eyed peas, was also prepared for the community to share. More recently, some elders noted that a bull was slaughtered for the clan people to feast on, a practice that served as a public and official recognition of the marriage.

The painting *Eating Yamari (Traditional Feasting)* in **Figure 4. 37**, visually interprets the communal consumption of food during the Aringa traditional marriage ceremony.



Figure 4. 37: ***Eating Yamari*** **(Traditional feasting). Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (150 x 100 cm).**

In the traditional Lugbara marriage ceremony, the ***aje*** day marks a critical final stage where social organization during the concluding feast reinforces community identity and structure. This event, attended by both the bride's and bridegroom's clans, involves specific protocols for communal eating that underscore kinship ties and social hierarchies. During the feasting, attendees organize themselves into small, cohesive groups of four to five individuals to share a single dish. According to local elders, this practice symbolizes the fundamental Lugbara concept of shared lineage and unity, emphasizing that all members are of "one blood."

However, this expression of unity is simultaneously structured by strict social stratification. Groupings are determined by age sets and sex, maintaining distinct separation between male and female participants during the meal. This highly structured communal activity formally concludes

the marriage rites. The successful completion of the feast immediately precedes the physical transfer of the bride to her husband, solidifying the new marital and extended family bonds.

The painting in **Figure 4. 38**, employs a horizontal composition dominated by three female dancers in the foreground arranged to create rhythm movement, anchored by seated female drummer on the lower left. Depth is suggested through overlapping and scale reduction, with thatched huts and onlooker figures in the background establishing the village context. Forms are semi abstracted with elongated limbs and simplified facial features to emphasize gesture and motion.



Figure 4. 38: *Traditional marriage dance*. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (180 x 100 cm).

This painting depicts the celebration of traditional marriage by women and girls. Women especially from the bride's family and clan express happiness through high pitched celebratory cries, clapping and singing. This signal acceptance of the marriage and joy that the bride is entering a new stage of life. Meanwhile the brides female relatives (mother, aunts, and sisters) may show sadness or controlled weeping, reflecting the pain of losing a daughter to another family. The family at the same time also show pride and satisfaction, especially if the bride wealth is considered honorable and the grooms family shows respect.

As rituals conclude successfully, women participate in traditional dances, hand movements and rhythmic steps, celebrating unity between families. The painting illustrates divided parties of

women, a party of them excited and dancing in front of huts with kuta (woven colorful conical shaped lid designed to fit over a woven tray) and the other party watches women dancing in sadness. Once the bride formally handed over, women show ritual acceptance, blessing her and acknowledging her transition into womanhood and wifehood.

The painting of the ceremony *Taking gifts to the Bride* comprises a collection of preliminary sketches developed through studio exploration using pen and pastels on paper. The sketches investigate different possibilities for visually representing the customary practice of presenting gifts to the bride after the marriage process among the Aringa. The individual preliminary sketches were selectively combined and reorganized to form a unified painting composition, which subsequently informed the development of the final painting.

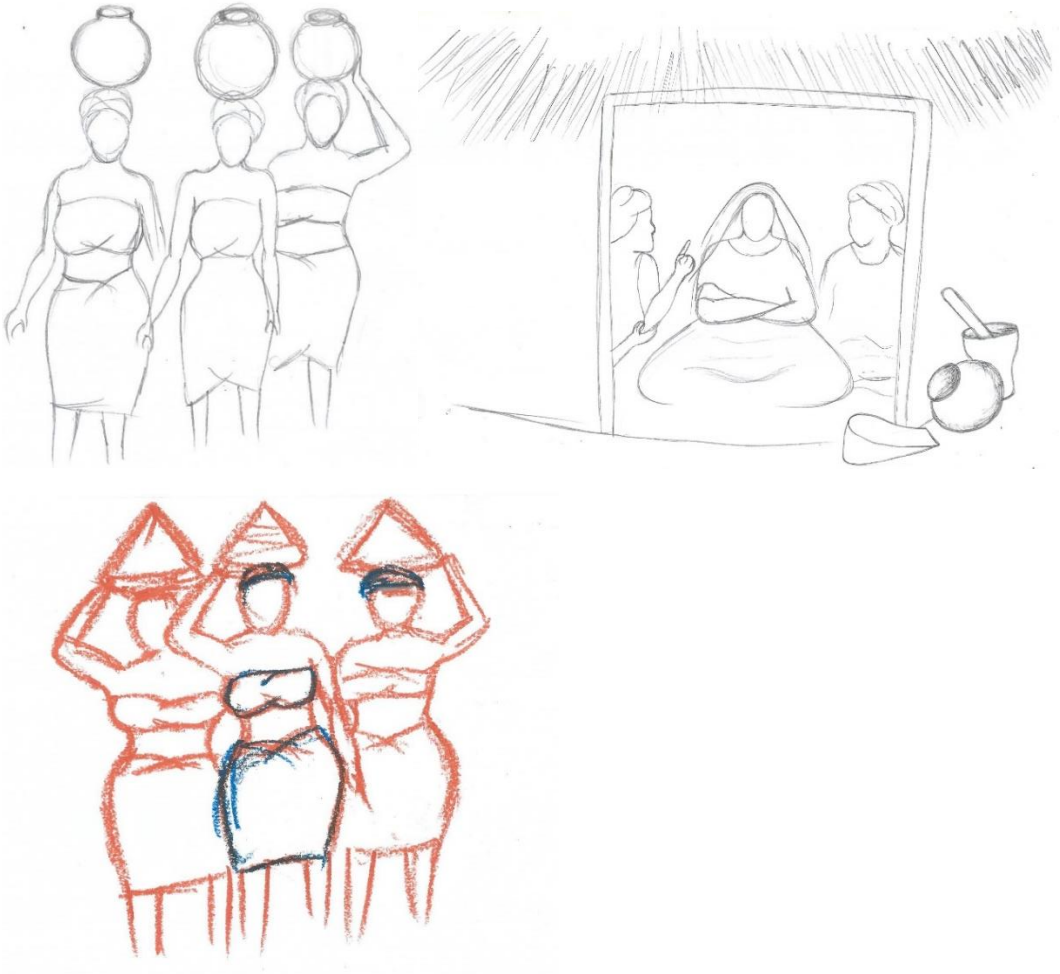


Figure 4. 39: *Taking gifts to the bride.* Preliminary Sketches. Collections of studio exploration, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

The painting foreground, framed by a thick arched doorway, a bride seated centrally in a white veil and blue wrapper with crossed arms forms the focal point, flanked by two sitting women attendants engaged in instruction. The space on the right depicts three women carrying gifts on their heads. The forms are semi-abstracted with simplified facial features and expressive brushwork while the arched doorway creates framing and depth.

The researcher employs a symbolic and expressive use of color to distinguish interior and exterior space while reinforcing meaning. The overall palette is dominated by warm earth tones, burnt orange, ochre, brick red and yellow. The red and orange on the in the interior space suggests vitality and counsel. The blue-green around the doorway acts as a framing device, separating the interior from the exterior. The yellow wash on the right side where gifts are placed signifies abundance, celebration, and light from the researcher's perspective.



Figure 4. 40: *Taking gifts to the Bride*. Acrylic on canvas, by Gerile, 2025. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. (150 x 120 cm).

In Lugbara traditional marriage, particularly within the Aringa sub-group, women have defined roles centered on preparing the bride for her new life and ensuring marital stability. A specific practice involves a delegation of women from the bride's paternal clan, typically married aunts possessing extensive experience in home affairs, escorting the bride to her husband's home with various gifts.

This activity is depicted in the mentioned painting. Upon arrival, the women present essential household items organized by the bride's clan, such as pots, sitting mats, winnowing trays, and grinding stones. A crucial element of this ritual involves an exchange and a shared meal: the bride's entourage brings a goat, which is exchanged for a goat from the husband's clan, and both are slaughtered to prepare food for the families. This exchange symbolizes the merging of the two families and the transfer of the woman's social and financial responsibility to her husband's patrilineal clan.

The primary purpose of this journey extends beyond the material exchange; it represents a formal occasion for the elder women to offer final words of advice and blessings to the bride. This guidance is essential for the bride's successful integration into her marital family, reflecting the community's emphasis on maintaining harmony and avoiding behaviors that could lead to divorce, which is generally discouraged in Lugbara culture. This practice serves as a mechanism of social control and support, ensuring the bride is well-prepared for her spousal duties and reinforcing community values.

5.0 CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study entitled Lugbara Traditional Marriage: A Visual Interpretation of Ceremonies and Symbols among the Aringa. The discussion is organized according to the three specific objectives of the study.

5.2 Traditional Marriage Ceremonies among the Aringa Subgroup of the Lugbara

The findings demonstrate that Aringa traditional marriage is a process rather than a single ceremony**.** It involves several interconnected stages, including courtship and expression of interest, family introduction and marriage arrangements, bride wealth negotiation, bride wealth transfer, the Aje marriage celebration, escorting the bride to her husband's home and the subsequent transfer of gifts by female relatives. These activities involve the prospective couple, parents, elders, relatives and the wider community. This finding suggests that marriage among the Aringa historically functioned as a social institution through which families established relationships, transferred responsibilities and maintained cultural continuity.

This finding is in broadly consistent with Baganda and Basoga marriage ceremonies *Kwanjula* which is described as an elaborate introduction ceremony involving the prospective husband, the bride's family and wider kinship networks. Kaduuli, (2004), shows that the ceremony functions not merely as an introduction of two individuals but as an occasion for establishing relationships between families and clans. Similarly, the Basoga Kwandhula involves family participation and establishes relationships extending beyond the prospective couple (Isiko, 2023).

However, the Aringa findings also extend this literature by identifying a distinctive sequence of practices and terminology, including the ledi mediator, anabudra sharing arrangement, *Aje*, specific bride wealth practices and the role of female relatives in taking gifts to the bride. This supports the argument that traditional marriage in Uganda should not be treated as a uniform institution. (Atekyereza, 2001), for example, demonstrates that although bride wealth occurs across Ugandan communities, its meaning and practice differ according to ethnicity and changing social conditions. The present study similarly demonstrates that Aringa marriage possesses its own cultural logic.

Courtship and Expression of Interest

The study found that courtship among the Aringa historically involved more than emotional attraction between a young man and woman. The prospective groom was assessed for character, industriousness and capacity to provide for a household. He could be required to dig fields, construct a granary or renovate a hut, while his conduct during periods of interaction with the prospective bride was also observed. Successful completion of these tasks demonstrated his hard work and suitability for marriage.

This finding suggests that courtship functioned as a social assessment mechanism. Marriageability was associated with practical capability and moral conduct rather than solely with personal affection. The emphasis on hard work is particularly significant because it reflects a conception of marriage in which the prospective husband was expected to demonstrate his ability to establish and maintain a household.

The finding was consistent with the broader literature which presents African marriage as an institution embedded within social responsibilities and family expectations. For instance Atekyereza, (2001), argues that traditional marriage and bridewealth practices in Uganda were influenced by economic, social, cultural and gender considerations. The Aringa findings therefore reinforce the view that marriage historically served broader social and economic purposes.

Introduction, Family Involvement and Exogamy

The findings further demonstrate that Aringa marriage arrangements involved the participation of parents, elders and other family members. Elders assessed family background, clan relationships, character and social compatibility. Exogamy was an important consideration, with elders determining whether the proposed union was socially permissible. This finding strongly agrees with the literature on the Baganda, Banyoro, Banyankole and other Ugandan communities, where marriage has historically been connected to clan organisation and kinship. The literature on Baganda Kwanjula, Basoga Kwandhula and Banyankole Okuhingira all involve participation beyond the individual couple (Kaduuli, 2004; Ninsiima & Michael, 2025).

The Aringa finding is also consistent with Tabi, (2025) recent study of oku jeza among Lugbara Christians identifies bride wealth as a core part of the customary marriage process and notes the importance of permission from the bride's family. The significance of the Aringa findings, however, lies in the way elders function as cultural custodians. Their role was not limited to approving a marriage. They also transmitted knowledge concerning respect, sexual conduct, family responsibility and obligations to relatives. Thus, marriage ceremonies served as informal institutions for cultural education.

Bridewealth Negotiation, Transfer and Cultural Change

Bride wealth negotiation emerged as one of the most significant stages of Aringa traditional marriage. The findings indicate that negotiations were traditionally conducted between the fathers of the prospective bride and groom, with a ledi acting as mediator. Livestock, particularly cattle, goats and sheep, formed the major components of bride wealth, while arrows were also presented to the bride's brothers. Where a groom's family lacked sufficient material resources, bride service involving cultivation or construction could be accepted.

This finding is consistent with Atekyereza, (2001) who found that bride wealth was historically important among the Baganda, Bakiga and Langi, although its meanings differed across the groups. The practice was generally understood as a sign of respect and appreciation towards the bride and her family and as part of establishing marital relationships.

Nevertheless, the Aringa findings provide distinctive details not adequately captured by the general literature. The role of the *ledi* as mediator, the division of bridewealth through the *anabudra*, the presentation of arrows and the possibility of bride service reveal a complex system of social negotiation. The term *anabudra*, explained by participants as “we eat and share things together,” particularly emphasizes the collective rather than individual nature of bridewealth.

The findings indicate that bridewealth historically consisted primarily of livestock but has increasingly been transformed to include money and other material goods. Participants also reported that livestock were traditionally transferred at night, with the practice associated with protection from misfortune, witchcraft and the evil eye. The transition from livestock to money agrees with (Moore & Schneidermann, 2025) who noted that bridewealth in Uganda has undergone

changes and may involve livestock, property and money, while the decline of some marriage ceremonies reflects broader socioeconomic transformations. Similarly, recent research on Uganda demonstrates that contemporary bride wealth may increasingly be expressed through money and expensive material goods rather than actual cattle.

Aje: Marriage Celebration and Public Recognition

The study found that *Aje* constituted an important communal stage during which the marriage was publicly recognised and celebrated. Relatives, elders, friends and members of the wider community participated through eating, singing, dancing and sharing cultural narratives. Elders could gather under trees to recount clan histories and cultural knowledge. This finding agrees with other African societies like Banyankole where marriage ceremonies "Okuhingira*"* is seen as a public mechanism for recognising and incorporating the couple into wider social networks (Ninsiima & Michael, 2025). It is also consistent with the Banyankole literature on Okuhingira, which treats marriage as a cultural performance involving movement, language, ceremonial structures and symbolic performances (Monaci, 2020).

Transfer of Gifts and Escorting the Bride

The study found that after the marriage celebration, female relatives transferred household gifts to the bride. These included *Kobi* (winnowers), knives, bowls, baskets, beads, pots, baby head covers and grinding stones. The journey also provided an opportunity for elder women to give advice and blessings to the bride and the results are inline with Banyankole culture where brides are also given omugamba, milk pots (ebyanzi), calabashes and gourds (ehweera and enkyeka), traditional cosmetic containers, brooms, ropes, mats, bedding, household utensils, goats, and cows, as part of the gifts presented during Okuhingira to support the bride in establishing her new home (Ninsiima & Michael, 2025).

5.3 Marriage symbols and their cultural meanings among the Aringa

The second objective established that Aringa marriage symbols included bride wealth, communal food, songs and dances, mats and stools, elders, family members and the wider community. The findings therefore demonstrate that Aringa symbolism is both material and non-material. The

bridewealth as a symbol of responsibility, family cooperation and social recognition agrees with Kuper,(2017) argued that cattle bridewealth historically connected economic and social systems and established alliances between families. Hashimoto, (2026) similarly demonstrated among the Nuer that cattle payments and marriage ceremonies operated together in establishing the union.

The use of mats and stools as symbols of hospitality and acceptance provides another distinctive finding. Participants explained that a prospective groom could be offered the *kpokponga* stool when visiting the bride's family, while mats could be provided to female guests for sitting and eating. The objects therefore performed practical functions while simultaneously communicating respect, acceptance and belonging. This finding were consistent with the semiotic perspective of (Ogunkunle, 2013), who demonstrates that objects in African marriage ceremonies often communicate meanings beyond their physical functions.

The Role of Elders and Women in Marriage Symbolism

The study findings demonstrated that cultural transmission in Aringa marriage was achieved not only through objects rather through people who embodied cultural knowledge. Elders acted as cultural custodians, while older women guided the bride through the transition into marital life. The findings are consistent with (Mahmud, 2021) interpretation of Yoruba marriage as a rite of passage involving symbolic communication that helps move the bride from one social status to another. The Aringa findings similarly demonstrate a transition from unmarried girl to wife, accompanied by instruction, adornment, movement between households and public recognition.

Nevertheless, the Aringa findings add a distinct dimension through the importance attached to female kin accompanying the bride and taking household objects to her new home. The objects included pots, baskets, winnowing trays, grinding stones and other domestic implements. These objects can therefore be interpreted as symbols of the bride's preparation for domestic life and her incorporation into the husband's household and this concur with (Fog Olwig, 2002).

5.4 Visual Interpretation of Aringa Marriage

The third objective sought to translate selected marriage ceremonies and symbols into painterly ideas. The findings demonstrate that the researcher did not simply reproduce ceremonies

photographically but transformed cultural knowledge into visual narratives through sketches, experimentation and final paintings. The studio process included pencil sketches, pastel and watercolour experiments, poster-colour development and acrylic paintings on canvas, plywood and other surfaces.

This approach is strongly supported by (Afful & Nantwi, 2018) study of the Krobo, which specifically examined the role of art in customary marriage ceremonies and recommended the documentation and preservation of marriage-related artistic forms. The present study extends this approach by moving beyond documenting existing cultural art forms to creating original contemporary paintings based on ethnographic research.

The painting Preparation for Marriage by the Bridegroom, for example, translates the cultural idea of male preparation into a visual narrative involving the granary, food stores, livestock and the prospective groom's preparations. The granary therefore becomes more than architectural background. It represents preparedness, household establishment, food security and responsibility. Then Preparing the Girls for Marriage transforms women's intergenerational transmission of knowledge into a nocturnal domestic scene. The grandmother educating young girls, the firelight and the presence of animals create a visual narrative about cultural education, womanhood and future marriage.

The use of firelight in this painting is particularly significant artistically. Rather than treating the fire simply as a source of illumination, it can be interpreted as a visual metaphor for the transmission of knowledge from older to younger generations. This demonstrates how the painter can transform ethnographic information into a visual metaphor.

Marriage, Gender and Visual Representation

The paintings also reveal that Aringa marriage was strongly structured by gender roles. The works depicting bride preparation, escorting the bride, gift transfer, cooking and marriage dances foreground women's participation, while the paintings of bridewealth negotiation and male preparation emphasize male responsibilities. The painting Designing the Bride, for example, depicts the bride being prepared by women through hair plaiting and henna decoration.

This agrees with the broader literature demonstrating that bodily adornment can function as a form of cultural communication. Ogunkunle, (2013) argues that objects and visual elements in Yoruba traditional marriage operate as signs carrying cultural meanings. Likewise, Mahmud, (2022) demonstrates that marriage rites employ symbolic verbal and non-verbal resources to facilitate the transition of the bride between social statuses.

6.0 CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introducton

This chapter presents the conclusions, contribution and recommendations arising from the study on Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols. It summarizes the main findings in relation to the study objectives, highlights the study's contributions to knowledge cultural heritage preservation and Fine Art practice, and provides recommendations for the preservation and further study of Aringa of Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies and their cultural meanings.

6.2 Conclusions

The study concludes that Lugbara traditional marriage among the Aringa subgroup is a culturally embedded social institution through which relationships between individuals, families, clans and the wider community are established, for example the process of bride wealth negotiation and transfer brings the two families together, while the involvement of clan elders and family heads formalizes the relationship between the families and their respective clans. The marriage process goes beyond personal arrangements between the bride and the groom for the reasons it involves ceremonies through which families express interest, negotiate for obligations, establish relationships and publicly recognize unions.

The study further concludes that the ceremonies associated with Aringa traditional marriage carry significant social and cultural meanings. Courtship, introduction, bride wealth negotiations and their transfer, transfer of gifts and related activities constitute interconnected stages by which marriage is fixed. For instance, during courtship, the prospective bride and groom establish a relationship which lead to groom's family to formally introduce themselves to the bride's family. The introduction leads the families to negotiation of the bride wealth, which is subsequently transferred on agreed terms and the transfer is accompanied by gifts that signify. These activities provide a foundation for governing relationships and defining the responsibilities of the families involved.

The study also concludes that the Aringa traditional marriage symbols carry both material and symbolic importance. Objects especially stools, mats, food, and livestock communicate values that

cannot be understood solely from their physical functions but are derived from the cultural context in which they are used. They therefore function as material expressions of respect, responsibility, acceptance, family cooperation, and social recognition.

The study concludes that Aringa traditional marriage is evolving rather than static, for example, the study found that some aspects of bride wealth have changed over time, with items such as arrows that were traditionally used in bride wealth being increasingly replaced by money. However, contemporary social, religious, economic, and educational influences have change aspects of traditional marriage practices but the underlying cultural values associated with respect, kinship, social responsibilities, and family involvement continue to influence marriage relationships, indicating that cultural change does not completely erase traditional meanings but rather produce cultural transformation.

Overall, the study concludes that visual interpretation through painting provides a suitable means of interpreting and communicating cultural practices that may otherwise remain mostly in oral traditions and lived experiences. The studio based interpretation illustrates that ceremonies and symbols can be translated into visual art that contributes to the documentation, preservation and transformation of indigenous cultural knowledge. For example, the ceremony of *Transferring the bride wealth*, which involves negotiations, the transfer of agreed items, and the participation of family members was explored through preliminary sketches and subsequently interpreted into a final painting.

6.3 Contributions

The study contributes to knowledge by documenting and analyzing selected traditional marriage ceremonies and symbols among the Aringa of the Lugbara. It provides detailed accounts of ceremonies, material objects, performances and social traditions such as communal eating, associated with marriage and examines the cultural meanings attached to them. The study therefore adds to the existing limited literature on Aringa traditional marriage and provides basis for understanding marriage as a cultural process involving individuals, families, clans and the community.

The study contributes to the preservation of Aringa cultural heritage by documenting selected marriage ceremonies, symbols and their associated meanings at a time when some traditions are declining. For example, it documents marriage symbols such as the *Imve* and *Agbarala* rings which are associated with booking partners and carry cultural meanings within the marriage process. The documentation provides a record of cultural knowledge that support its transmission to younger generations and future researchers.

The study demonstrate how contemporary painting can be used to interpret cultural ceremonies and symbols. Rather than merely reproducing the physical appearance of marriage ceremonies, the paintings interpret selected cultural meanings, relationships, gestures, objects and activities into painterly forms. To illustrate, the painting *Transferring the Bride wealth* interprets the social interactions, negotiations, exchange of bride wealth and participation of family members involved in the ceremony. The study therefore expands the role of Fine Art from aesthetic expression to cultural interpretation and documentation.

The study provides a foundation for further research on Aringa cultural heritage, particularly in areas that remain insufficiently documented. Future researchers may build on this study by examining other Aringa cultural practices, comparing marriage traditions across different Lugbara subgroups, or investigating how younger generations understand and engage with traditional cultural practices.

The study contributes to broader African cultural studies. While much of the scholarly work has focused on African cultures' oral traditions and texts, this study's visual approach to interpreting Aringa marriage ceremonies and symbols offers a fresh perspective. This study contribute to addressing a gap in African cultural studies that tends to overlook the power of visual symbols in shaping and communicating cultural knowledge.

6.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

Documentation of traditional marriage practices: Cultural institutions, community leaders and researchers should document Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies, symbols, oral histories, and

associated meanings to safeguard cultural knowledge that may be affected by social and cultural change.

Intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge: Elders with knowledge should be actively involved in transmitting knowledge about traditional marriage practices to younger generations through community dialogues, storytelling, cultural gatherings, and other appropriate forms of cultural education.

Integrating indigenous knowledge into education: relevant aspects of Aringa cultural heritage should be incorporated into appropriate educational and cultural programs based on regions to enable younger generations to understand the value and meanings associated with traditional marriage.

Promotion of visual art as cultural documentation: artist and cultural institutions should be encouraged to use painting and other visual art forms to document and interpret indigenous ceremonies, symbols and social practices. Such works can provide alternative forms of cultural representation alongside written and oral documentation.

Establishment of cultural exhibitions: universities, museums, galleries, and cultural organizations should create opportunities for exhibitions of artworks representing indigenous cultural practices. Such exhibitions can promote public awareness of Aringa cultural heritage and provide spaces for dialogue between artists, researchers, elders and younger generations.

Responsible adaptation of cultural practices: since traditional marriage practices continue to change, community members should be encouraged to distinguish between the core cultural values of marriage and practices that may appropriately adapt to contemporary social conditions. This can support cultural continuity without necessarily preventing social transformation.

However, the study recommends further research in the following areas. Comparative studies among Lugbara subgroups: Further research could compare marriage ceremonies and symbols among the Aringa, Maracha, Terego, Ayivu, and Vurra subgroups to establish similarities, differences and patterns of cultural change.

Changing meanings of bride wealth: a study could examine how the meaning, composition and social significance of bride wealth have changed in contemporary Aringa society and how these changes influence relationships between families.

Religion and traditional marriage: Further research could examine how Christianity, Islam and indigenous beliefs interact within contemporary Aringa marriage practices and how religious influences have transformed traditional ceremonies and symbols.

Visual art and indigenous cultural preservation: Further studies could explore the role of painting, sculpture, photography, installation, digital art, other contemporary art forms in documenting and communicating indigenous cultural knowledge.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I. OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Study Title: *Lugbara Traditional Marriage: A Visual Interpretation of Ceremonies and Symbols among the Aringa*

Objective 1: To identify and examine traditional marriage ceremonies among the Aringa subgroup of Lugbara.

Objective 2: To analyze selected marriage symbols and their cultural meanings among the Aringa subgroup of Lugbara.

Objective 3: To visually interpret selected marriage ceremonies and symbols into contemporary painterly forms.

No.	Observation area	What to observe	Observation notes
1	Marriage ceremony	Type and stage of the marriage ceremony being conducted	
2	Courtship and arrangements	Interaction between the prospective couple, families and elders	
3	Marriage negotiations	Family discussions, roles of elders, language and procedures followed	
4	Bride wealth	Items presented, quantity, manner of presentation and participants involved	
5	Family participation	Roles of parents, elders, relatives,	

	youth and other community members
6 Ceremonial space	Location, arrangement of people, seating, objects and Activities
7 Communal eating	Types of food, preparation, serving, sharing and groups involved
8 Songs and dances	Types of songs, dances, performers, movements and occasions of performance
9 Marriage symbols	Objects, materials, clothing, adornments, gestures and activities with symbolic significance
10 Bridewealth symbols	Cultural meanings associated with cattle, money, arrows or other forms of bridewealth
11 Attire and adornments	Clothing, beads, rings and other forms of bodily adornment and their meanings
12 Ceremonial objects	Stools, mats, utensils and other objects used during the ceremony
13 Gestures and actions	Greetings, sitting arrangements, exchanges, movements and other meaningful actions
14 Social relationships	Expressions of respect, acceptance, unity, kinship and cooperation

	between families
15 Changes in practice	Evidence of modified, abandoned or newly introduced marriage practices
16 Generational differences	Participation and knowledge of elders, adults and younger generations
17 Visual elements	Significant colours, forms, patterns, objects, gestures, spaces and human interactions
18 Potential for artistic interpretation	Ceremonial scenes, symbols and cultural meanings suitable for translation into painting
19 Emotions and atmosphere	Expressions of joy, celebration, respect, anticipation and other emotions
20 Researcher's reflections	Significant observations, cultural meanings and ideas arising from the observation

Checklist format

Date: _____

Location: _____

Type of ceremony: _____

Duration of observation: _____

Participants observed: _____

Observation:

……
……

Cultural meaning/significance:

……
……

Visual elements for painting:

……

Researcher's field notes/reflections:

……
……

APPENDIX II.:FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Study Title: Lugbara Traditional Marriage: A Visual Interpretation of Ceremonies and Symbols among the Aringa

Purpose of the Discussion:

The discussion seeks to obtain participants' views and experiences regarding Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies, symbols, their cultural meanings, and changes in marriage practices over time. The information will contribute to the visual interpretation of selected ceremonies and symbols through contemporary painting.

Section A: General Information

1. Date of discussion: _____

2. Location: _____

3. Group number: _____

4. Number of participants: _____

5. Composition of the group: _____

6. Duration of discussion: _____

Section B: Traditional Marriage Ceremonies

Objective 1: To identify and examine traditional marriage ceremonies among the Aringa subgroup of Lugbara.

1. What is traditional marriage among the Aringa?

2. What are the main stages or ceremonies involved in Aringa traditional marriage?

3. How did traditional marriage ceremonies traditionally begin, from partner selection to marriage?

4. How were the partners traditionally selected or introduced to their families?

5. What happened during marriage negotiations between the two families?

6. How was bridewealth negotiated and presented?

7. What roles did parents, elders, relatives and other community members play in the marriage process?

8. What activities took place during the marriage celebration?

9. What roles did songs, dances, food and communal activities play during marriage ceremonies?

10. What ceremonies or practices that were traditionally performed are no longer commonly practised? Why?

Section C: Marriage Symbols and Cultural Meanings

Objective 2: To analyse selected marriage symbols and their cultural meanings among the Aringa subgroup of Lugbara.

11. What objects or practices are considered important symbols in Aringa traditional marriage?

12. What is the cultural meaning of bridewealth among the Aringa?

13. What was the significance of the traditional 100 arrows as bridewealth?

14. What meanings are attached to ceremonial objects such as stools and mats?

15. What is the significance of traditional marriage attire and adornments?

16. What meanings are associated with rings, beads and other forms of adornment?

17. What is the cultural significance of communal eating during marriage ceremonies?

18. What meanings are communicated through marriage songs and dances?

19. What do greetings, gestures and other actions during marriage ceremonies communicate?

20. How do these objects, practices and performances express relationships between the two families?

21. Are there symbols or objects that were important traditionally but are no longer commonly used? What did they mean?

Section D: Changes in Traditional Marriage Practices

22. What changes have occurred in Aringa traditional marriage ceremonies over time?

23. How has the payment and form of bridewealth changed?

24. What has happened to the traditional 100 arrows as part of bridewealth?

25. How have partner-booking traditions changed?

26. How has the participation of families and elders in marriage changed?

27. What factors have contributed to these changes?

28. How have younger generations influenced or responded to these changes?

29. Which traditional marriage practices do you think should be preserved? Why?

Section E: Visual Interpretation and Fine Art

Objective 3: To visually interpret selected marriage ceremonies and symbols into contemporary painterly forms.

30. Which Aringa marriage ceremonies would be most appropriate for representation in painting? Why?

31. Which marriage symbols would be most important to represent visually?

32. What colours, forms, objects, gestures or activities would best communicate the meanings of these ceremonies and symbols?

33. Which moments or scenes from the marriage ceremonies are culturally significant and visually important?

34. How could painting communicate the cultural meanings of marriage ceremonies beyond simply showing their physical appearance?

35. Are there particular arrangements of people, objects or activities that should be included in a painting to communicate family unity, respect or acceptance?

36. What advice would you give an artist who wants to represent Aringa traditional marriage respectfully and accurately?

Section F: Closing Questions

37. Is there any important Aringa marriage ceremony or symbol that has not been discussed?

38. Is there any traditional marriage practice that you believe should be documented for future generations?

39. Is there anything else you would like to add about Aringa traditional marriage, its symbols and their meanings?

Thank you for participating in this discussion.

APPENDIX III.:TRANSLATION OF THE FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE INTO ARINGA LUGBARA TI LANGUAGE.

Study Title: **Uku 'dun'nga Lugbara Aringa ru riki isele aga ri**

Ini 'disi ai 'ba piri igatanga i'dini la fejo ijo 'di driga ra. Ijo mu isu tratanga di gari ki la mu adru unitanga sukulu ni la ru adru ni si 'ba ijo umve le pi riki indu ndrujo ku. 'Ba mupi ijo di ti udha pi la ci azila 'ba ijo joleri ki ta mba piri la ijo piri ta mba ci.

Purpose of the Discussion:

Tratanga 'di si unitanga isujo uku du'nga Aringa Lugbara ru 'di ki esele gari ki driga. Tratanga 'di va si drejola awi Aringa azila Lugbara dri afuki ingoni ya ri isujo, ako i'baa'be osuta'nga ru suru ani 'diki nijo azila ijo ngale uku 'dun'nga 'diki.

Section A: General Information

1. Imba o'du: _____

2. Angu ngo ii: _____

3. amuti ngoki : _____

4. 'baa ki si: _____

5. 'baa ingooni 'diki: _____

6. sawa sii: _____

Section B: Traditional Marriage Ceremonies

Objective 1: To identify and examine traditional marriage ceremonies among the Aringa subgroup of Lugbara.

1. Uvi ru igbanga Aringa ki aga ri idi adu?

2. Ijo ngale igbanga diki aga riki adu?

3. Igbanga diki andraa ido ingoni angajo amurugo isunga aga?

4. Ala amurugo lereri oya ingoni?

5. Ako ru idelepi mali jonga gariki adu licho iri ki selega?

6. Ala andraa Mali ki ajejo azila fe ingoni?

7. Azi atepi, baa iyo, kaka azila ongulumu ki ngaleri ki adu?

8. Ngatanga run gale pi aje ga riki adu?

9. Muke ungo ngonga, ungo tunga, inya azila ngatanga ongulumu ni aje ga riki adu?

10. Ngatanga igbanga Aringa Aringa si do sadisi aviipi bo riki adu? Adusi?

Section C: Marriage Symbols and Cultural Meanings

Objective 2: To analyse selected marriage symbols and their cultural meanings among the Aringa subgroup of Lugbara.

11. Ako kaniku ngatnaga lale ifiletu muke igbanga Aringa dri ki agari adu?

12. Mali fenga ifila iche ingoni Aringa ga?

13. Eee fele turu alu mali aga da iche ingoni?

14. Ijo ru akpapi brisi azila kpokponga ki agari ki adu?

15. Sutunga arusi dri ga riba muke laki adu?

16. Imvee azila agbarala ki ifi iche ingo ni?

17. Yamari nyanga angu aluga di iche ingoni?

18. Uduko ru fepii ungu ngonga azila tunga ga riki adu?

19. zitanga azila gatanga igbanga gari ki uduko ingo fee?

20. Ako fele azila ngale diki licho iri ki kaka ida ingoni?

21. ako andraa fele azitu leki sadisi avipi rariki adu? Iche andraa ingoni?

Section D: Changes in Traditional Marriage Practices

22. Ujantanga ru ujapi igbanga Aringa ki isekelega riki adu?

23. Mali ufenga uvi ujakiru ingoni?

24. Adu ideru ee fele turu alu mali uku aberi tuni?

25. Uvi Amurugo ki dri atringa igbanga gari ujaru ingoni?

26. Fitanga igbanga ga kaka bani azila ba ouwara bani ri ujaru ingoni?

27. Ako ujatanga diki feepiri ki adu?

28. Anji unde ki ruki ru ujatanga diki abe ingoni?

29. Ngatanga igbanga le umba tala kici ri ki adu? Adusi?

Section E: Visual Interpretation and Fine Art

Objective 3: To visually interpret selected marriage ceremonies and symbols into contemporary painterly forms.

30. Ngatanga ichopi ru gbapi idaru rangisi muke riki adu? Adusi?

31. Which marriage symbols would be most important to represent visually?

32. Gbeti ichopi adrupi muke si ida gbanga diki gbajo ri la adru adu?

33. Ijo ru ngapi igbanga ga muke awi ga azila indrenga ga ki adu?

34. Ida gbanga rangi si ri ico uduko ifitu abi ni fele indrenga ida ruri sira?

35. Ututanga baa bani, ngatanga abe ico bale idaru si uduko injitanga ni, adrjo alu ri ki chi?

36. Uduko mini eco fee baa ida gbapi ri ni si Aringa igbanga ba jo idaru rangi si muke ri ingoni?

Section F: Closing Questions

37. Ngatanga azi muke Aringa ki ba igbanga ga ijo jojo drila ga kula ci?

38. Ngatanga azi imini iga le usi ijo ida be dri laga anji ude drilega ri bani ra la ci?

39. Ijo azi imi ni le obale Aringa ki ba igbanga dri ga la ci?

Awadifo ini amujo ijo alejo risi

APPENDIX IV:SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Study Title: *Lugbara Traditional Marriage: A Visual Interpretation of Ceremonies and Symbols among the Aringa*

Researcher: Gerile Ismail

Institution: Makerere University

Date:…….

Interview location:……..

Participant code:…….

Participant category……

Duration:……

Introduction

My name is Gerile Ismail, a Master of Arts in Fine Art researcher at Makerere University. I am conducting a study on Aringa traditional marriage, focusing on selected marriage ceremonies, symbols, their cultural meanings and their visual interpretation through contemporary painting.

Your participation is voluntary. The information you provide will be treated confidentially and used for academic purposes only. With you permission, the interview will be recorded to ensure accurate documentation of your responses.

Section A: Background information

1. What is your age and occupation?

2. What is your relationship to or role within the Aringa community?
3. How did you acquire your knowledge of Aringa traditional marriage?
4. How long have you had experience Aringa traditional marriage?

Section B: Traditional Marriage Ceremonies

1. What is traditional marriage among the Aringa?

2. What are the main stages or ceremonies involved in Aringa traditional marriage?

3. How did traditional marriage ceremonies traditionally begin, from partner selection to marriage?

4. How were the partners traditionally selected or introduced to their families?

5. What happened during marriage negotiations between the two families?

6. How was bridewealth negotiated and presented?

7. What roles did parents, elders, relatives and other community members play in the marriage process?

8. What activities took place during the marriage celebration?

9. What roles did songs, dances, food and communal activities play during marriage ceremonies?

10. What ceremonies or practices that were traditionally performed are no longer commonly practised? Why?

Section C: Marriage Symbols and Cultural Meanings

11. What objects or practices are considered important symbols in Aringa traditional marriage?

12. What is the cultural meaning of bridewealth among the Aringa?

13. What was the significance of the traditional 100 arrows as bridewealth?

14. What meanings are attached to ceremonial objects such as stools and mats?

15. What is the significance of traditional marriage attire and adornments?

16. What meanings are associated with rings, beads and other forms of adornment?

17. What is the cultural significance of communal eating during marriage ceremonies?

18. What meanings are communicated through marriage songs and dances?

19. What do greetings, gestures and other actions during marriage ceremonies communicate?

20. How do these objects, practices and performances express relationships between the two families?

21. Are there symbols or objects that were important traditionally but are no longer commonly used? What did they mean?

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Section F: Closing Questions

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39. Is there anything else you would like to add about Aringa traditional marriage, its symbols and their meanings?

Thank you for participating

APPENDIX V:FIELDWORK AUTHORIZATION LETTER

MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

P.O.Box 7062, Kampala - Uganda
Website:http://www.ccdat.mak.ac.ug

Tel:256414 531423
Email:deanfineart@ccdat.muk.ac.ug

COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING, DESIGN, ART AND TECHNOLOGY (CEDAT)
THE MARGARET TROWELI SCHOOL OF INDUSTRIAL AND FINE ART
OFFICE OF THE DEAN

30th September, 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: RECOMMENDATION FOR MR. ISMAIL GERILE REGARDING FIELD RESEARCH.

This is to introduce Ms. Ismail Gerile, **Student. No. 2300726552** a student of Master of Arts and Fine Art (MAFA) at Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art, College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology, Makerere University.

Ms. Ismail Gerile is a dedicated, motivated, and dependable student, possessing a strong passion for his field of study. I have had the pleasure of witnessing his enthusiasm firsthand, and I can confidently affirm his commitment to Academic excellence.

The purpose of this communication therefore is to request your cooperation in allowing Ms. Ismail Gerile to conduct Design Communication Project Research within your organization. The focus of his research project is centered on **"Lugbara Traditional Marriage. A Visual Interpretation of Selected Ceremonies and Symbols Among Aringa".** Any assistance rendered to him will be highly appreciated.

Thank you for your cooperation.

MAKERERE UNIVERSITY
MTSIFA DEAN'S OFFICE
30 SEP 2024
P.O. BOX 7062, KAMPALA
College Of Engineering
Design Art And Technology

Yours sincerely,

.....

Assoc. Prof. Amanda Tumusiime (PhD)
Dean, Margaret Trowell School of Industrial & Fine Arts
Makerere University