

Visual Art, a Tool for Economic Empowerment and Technological Breakthrough in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria, so rich in artistic knowhow is still facing economic crisis as well as dancing in the wind of the global economic meltdown. It is this pathetic situation that this study on Visual Art, a Tool for Economic Empowerment and Technological Breakthrough in Nigeria is undertaken so as to review the relevance of arts, particularly visual art in the economic life of Nigeria. The study has revealed that every human being has the power to create things so that he/she can represent, express and communicate his/her ideas, thoughts, feelings, experiences and values. The power to create is developed and can be expressed in music, dance, drama, fine and applied art as products of our new technological and cultural creative development. It has further revealed that development can be regenerated through Fine and Applied Art. It could be used to enforce Nigeria's economic viability at this technological age. Based on the foregoing, it is concluded that in Nigeria, Visual Arts require to be given priority attention to solve the series of economic challenges facing the country as at now and in the future. Hence, government should invest in the art industry in order to motivate the local artists in various Nigerian communities to showcase their artistic dexterities and use them to beautify the society since art deals with aesthetic communication.

Keywords: Visual Art, empowerment, economy, technology, development

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria being the biggest and the richest African country in terms of cultural heritage, had her varied forms of arts and natural resources take its root as far back as pre-historic time when rock painting and engraving flourished. The movement of creative art education began to destabilize it self in the Southern and Northern Nigeria through the effort of K. C. Murray and Cadrew. Consequently, Nigeria contemporary artist has metamorphosed the melt down technological skills through representation of nature to the full growth and development of art of nationalist that are conscious of their cultural background in this technological age. The National Council on Education (NCE) has laid a concrete foundation for the development of visual literacy in our school children at primary school level. Creative Art and Craft is one of the subjects to measure the cognitive skills of the pupils in an aspect of drawing and painting to reflect and measure their psychomotor skills. One of the objectives of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Scheme of the Federal Government of Nigeria is to ensure the acquisition of the appropriate level of literacy, numeracy manipulative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civil values needed for laying the foundation for life

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long learning. The economic meltdown can therefore be improved through visual arts as a breakthrough potentiality for modification of the society in this era of modern technology. In view of this, people are therefore interested to know how it would be easy to use visual arts as the tools for technological breakthrough for the meltdown economy of the country as a whole. Visual Art can be categorised into Fine and Applied Arts in which Fine arts involves painting and sculpture and Applied Arts include Art Education, Art History, Graphics, Architecture, Ceramics, Textile and Drawing this can be either two dimensional and three dimensional Art based on the structure. Look at the local craftsmen who usually make use of any of the indigenous tools and raw materials in producing their works of art at this modern technological age. Although in some cases, these materials are supplemented by the imported ones, thus improving their methods and styles through outside influence. They provide a link between the old and new modern artist and craftsmen. By keeping up what might have been, otherwise, lost of our ancient crafts treasures thereby learning from the experience of our forefathers so as to improve, maintain and preserve our cultural heritage to meet the technological age. The fact that Art is meant for national development, connotes different meaning to different people. To some, it is an instrument for amusement and of intention. As instrument for amusement and recreation what comes to individual's mind is performing art like music, dance, drama and others, the later part of the definition has to do with visual art like sculpture painting, textile, graphics, ceramics and so on, these are otherwise known as Fine and Applied Arts.

Every human being has the power to create things so that he/she can represent, express and communicate his/her ideas thoughts, feelings, experience and values. The power to create is developed and can be expressed in music, dance, drama, fine and applied art as products of our new technological and cultural creative development. That is why music, dance, drama, Fine and Applied Arts collectively are referred to as cultural and creative Arts. Development is a multi-dimensional process involving the totality of man in his political, economic, legal, psychological, social relations among others. In a broad sense 'development' involves all the activities embarked on improving a person's or a nation's potentials, attitudes, material advancement, scientific and technological progress, thus one can refer to it as a positive change which involve material, physical, psychological, institutional and organizational innovation (Ajayi, 1992). In view of this, development can be regenerated through Fine and Applied Art. It could be used to enforce the economic viability of Nigeria at this technological age. This will consequently normalized the meltdown and bring about positive change to economic growth and development to the nation as a whole.

Visual Art and Craft in Nigeria

A modern economy needs people who are vocationally and technically trained, so as to meet the set out objective of the nation. To realize the goals of technological transformation or breakthrough economically, Nigeria should use Art Education as a strategy because advanced Nations like United States, Norway, Switzerland, Germany, China and others had earlier used the method to reach their present height in technology. Fine and Applied Arts generally spread its tentacle into all subject taught in the school curriculum. It is a way

out to improve, develop and eradicate social vices as well as normalized the effect of the present economic meltdown of the nation. Fine Art Education can facilitate technical skill for positive social change and growth in order to provide employment, increase productivity, eradication of disease and other functional social amenities that can affect the economy of the nation. Visual arts help to formulate principles for unity, cohesion and integration; experienced artists have solved various problems encountered in the field, a process which trains the mind for leadership qualities. As man is the owner of his environment and deals with the culture and his physical activities such as craft which is related to creativity which make him live convincingly in the society. According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, craft is an activity that involves making something in a skillful way by using your hands (www.merriam-webster.com/./craft). This implies that craft itself is work done by the use of hands. It is handiwork. It is work, job or activity that requires special skill.

Ivory Carving: This is an integral part of visual art which involves craft work. These are popular in Owo, Benin and some other parts of Nigeria. Some are using it as bangle, hear ring, for fashion *orufanran* clothing accessories e.g. house decorations as well as musical instruments. Adejemilua (2008) observes that the ivory carving was popular among the Yoruba, particularly from Ife and Owo. In this art, the Benin carvers have excelled. As early as the fifteenth century, the production of various items collectively termed “Afro-Portuguese Ivories” was one of the avenue through which Benin Arts was known outside the whole world. The Benin people received commission to produce ivory to reflect European themes. This has promoted the artists to engage in such carvings which serve as a means of income thereby reduce social vices in the society.

Pottery: Nigeria has attained a golden image in the field of pottery production to combat the economic empowerment due to this technological age. Nowadays, ceramic industries are commonly used by people of different social classes depending on their taste, choice and purpose. The formation of clay bodies is a science and colour, texture shrinkage and plasticity may be the main concern to the potter the coefficient of expansion and the ability to absorb thermal shock also have to be considered, potters arrived at a clay body formula by a general knowledge of the types of clay available and through experimentation.

In a nutshell, the ceramist put creativity at work to obtain desired goal on the product they produced. Since no household utensils are complete without the acquisition of ceramic products which range from earthen wares to glazed articles which are commonly found in homes of both the poor and bourgeoisie. Fatima (2002) observes that pottery has become a characteristic symbol almost of a settled life, adding that its appearance and development mark one of the important stages and development of evolution of man. Wurika (2004) and Tukurs (2005) agree that pottery products provide necessary learning and skills development of an individual, adding that the field of ceramic offers mainly independent careers including occupational opportunities, helps in the reduction of rural/urban migration, improvement in the standard of living through poverty reduction, creation of job opportunity better improvement and promotion of local resources in Nigeria society. The abundant deposit of clay found in most parts of Nigeria have encouraged the

development of pottery today. Such areas that are rich in these wealth are Ishiagwu, Afikpo, Okegwe, Borne area of south east Nigeria, Owo, Benin, Jos, Zaria, Abuja and Yola to mention a few which involve traditional firing but now mass production have been introduced with electric kilns to glazed form.

Bead Making: Beauty, according to the Yoruba tradition, must be defined in the context of morality and there is no room for beauty that does not appeal to the soul. Yoruba ethics, for its parts, stresses the essential goodness of our material existence, confirming that art is the very soul of life and God, the creator, the supreme artist. The governing principle of our moral philosophy is abundance; whatever enhances life is good, whatever deprives from life is evil. The guardians of morality, particularly the Ifa Oracle priests, aim at this vital balance by prescribing appropriate sacrifices to the forces of nature. Theirs is a moral quest which they artfully symbolize by wearing (red/yellow) glass beads together with 'tutu' cool (blue) (green/brown) glass beads.

The sacred paraphernalia belonging to the divinities, beads, costumes, metal emblems and others serve as models for their earthly representatives the divine King (Oba) and his various categories of chiefs. These beads can be used as crowns, bangles as well as weaved with thread and used as ceremonial cloth for cultural heritage. For example, it happens at Owo in Igogo festival, Benin to honour their king. That is the reason in most of their art works, the neck of the king is always heavily decorated with beads. Adejemilua (2008) stresses that Nigeria beads have remained an important medium of adornment and significant part of royal regalia among the various tribes, which the evident could be found in ancient sculptures such as Nok, Ife, Igbo, Ukwu and Benin Arts. The producer can earn their income while most of the high titled Obas and Chief display beads to show their riches during their culture.

Photography: This is derived from the Greek words, *Phos-Graphus*, which directly means light and writing. The photograph's capacity to receive or produce itself exactly and infinitely through the negative to positive process was one side of radical character. At this modern time, photography has become a lucrative work that assist the youth in the society to earn their income. Herschel (1839) stresses that photography is the art of writing with light. Photography helps in self reliance. Aladenika (2003) stresses the acquisition of knowledge skill, desirable work attitudes and competencies applicable to efficient use of tools and equipment in the production and service, thus one could realized that skill labour lead to high productivity. It helps educational and national development. The economic reforms of former President Olusegun Obasanjo has given room for economic hardships, making white collar job difficult to get. This has given way to different forms of vocational education such as photography to be sale in service. Photograph is easy to learn as an apprentice for two to three years thereby graduated to be professional photographer in the society in which most of them would work for their customers at various ceremonies such as naming ceremony, marriage ceremony, burial ceremony and others. Hardly does a person organise an event without demanding the services of the photographer. Kehinde (2003) observes that it is important for Nigeria and Africa as a whole to brainstorm on

how to move and meet up with the rest of the world. He stresses further that about 33.5 billion rolls of photographic films are sold annually worldwide and over 20 billion photo market is about 85 billion including photo processing, and on the average, people across the globe shoot more than 2,500 pictures every second. So, photography helps to reduce social vices in the country as a whole, that is the reason Onaneme (1995) stresses that photographers who engage in this art work have an opportunity to servicing their religion and culture thereby developing their society.

Cloth Weaving/Textile Ware: This is an integral part of visual art and it is a craft for social development of fashion in the society. Cloth weaving has been in existence over so many decades ago. These have given room for physical development of the skilled labour and manipulation of yarn with the use of hand with necessary equipment required to produce a better wear for people living in the society. Akinwumi (1993) writes about Obamadesera's artistic works which was perfectly carried out with striking examples of Yoruba creativity that many contemporary weavers regard as unattainable particularly on the narrow and vertical looms. It was stressed that there is scarcely a single woman in the whole country (Owo) and district who does not weave and in which some of the female in their compound work at their rooms far into the night as soon as the market day approaches.

As far as Nigeria is concern, people love to put on beautiful and suitable clothes which have given rise to the production of a rich assortment of textile design which involves various technique and harmonious colours by Nigeria craftsmen and women. Some areas that involve in this type of weaving and textile wares include Ibadan, Abeokuta, Okenne, Oshogbo, Oyo, Ado-Ekiti, Ishan, Iseyin, Kano, Bida, Junkun, Akwete and Owo in Ondo State. The innovation of traditional fashion encourages social development in the society. Okeke (1990) stresses that fashion is a term commonly used to describe a style of clothing worn by most people such as chiefs and kings of nations and kingdoms in a country. He further says that a product or activity is fashionable during the time that a large segment of society accepts it.

Leather Work: This is predominant in the area where there is availability of livestock. Leather is used for handmade leather goods, leather cushions, briefcases, bags, toys, money purses, shoes, cosmetic containers, leather book cases, etc. The livestock used for these work of arts include camel, horses, sheep, goats, snake, lizard and crocodiles. These animals are skinned, coloured, polished and decorated in an appealing manner.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Nigeria, Visual Arts require to be given priority attention to solve the series of economic challenges facing the country as at now and in the future. Since Art touches every area of life and should not be neglected. As a result, it should be made compulsory as a subject of study in all schools while course related to creative, imaginative, constructive thinking and perception should be develop in the students. Based on the findings of this review, the following recommendations are made:

- i Government should give scholarship to students of Fine and Applied Arts in school in order to develop and encourage them.
- ii Seminars and workshops should be organized by the government for vocational teachers to develop more skills and potentials for effective performance in the field of arts.
- iii The career study should be organized by the principal of the schools to allow students to understand the importance of choice of subject and courses to offer.
- iv Artists should show more interest in pursuing political positions as a way of helping the society develop, not by their art works alone but by their natural leadership dexterity given to them from creation.
- v Government should invest in the art industry in order to motivate the local artists in various Nigerian communities to showcase their artistic dexterities and use them to beautify the society since art deals with aesthetic communication.

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