
Innovation in Teaching and Practice of Art in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper reveals how art education began with Onobolu laying a foundation for the innovation in teaching and practice of Art in Nigeria which before this time was indigenous Art. The paper also examines the role of government in the teaching and practice of Art in Nigeria with the aid of National Policy on Education (NPE) highlighting the views of Europeans on Nigerian Art. It therefore draws attention to the role played by studio Artist and Art Educators in the growth of Art and in our present contemporary society. This paper also recommended some innovative actions that will help in enhancing modern Art in Nigeria.

Introduction

Innovation in the practice of Art in Nigeria is a conscious effort aimed at fine-tuning the various operational strategies put in place in the practice of Art in Nigeria. The success of teaching of all stages of Art in Nigeria depends to a very large extent on their effective teaching. The more innovation and imaginative, the better it is for the practice, of Art in Nigeria and responds to the complexities of modern society. In essence, any trained Artist that doesn't practice lacks the quality control that is desired in all areas of Creative Art.

In broad outline, a trained and day to day practicing Artist helps to reveal the set targets and actual operation in each area of Art. It also helps to reveal the behavioural style patterns of the operator/educator or Artist in the society. Therefore, the practice of Art should be seen as a measure of creativeness and imaginativeness from established guidelines and rules of Art in general. The Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English defines "Innovation" as a new idea, method or invention to make change. Therefore, an innovation entails improvement on imaginative, creative imagination and more than the norm. It is therefore necessary that innovation strategies/plans in teaching and practice of Art in Nigeria be adopted to give the desired credibility to the nation.

To this effect, it is evident that the National Policy on Education (NPE 2004) stresses the aims and objectives of the teaching Art in the primary through tertiary institutions in Nigeria. For instance in junior Secondary Schools (JSS) level, Art is

grouped under group 'B' i.e pre-vocational electives and in Senior Secondary (SS) level it is grouped under group 'B' as vocational electives.

To this end, Government's intention was that the provisions set out should transform all aspects of the nation's life. However, to consolidate the effort of the Government towards the inclusion of art as a subject in the NPE, it is pertinent to know about how long Art has been with us, and even then it was Onabolu who initiated the idea of including Art in the school curriculum, which emanated from Education ordinance of 1887. Today, art rearing shoulder upon which human crumb to reach the scientific attachment.

Indigenous Nigerian Arts

The earliest known works of ancient Art in Nigeria is the Nok terracotta sculpture which is in accordance to Emu, 2007 are from the old Zaria province. He went further to state that the works are sculptures back to between 500 BC and 300 BC. Again, in 1958, some executed bronze works were found in the small village of Igbo-Ukwu. There are a lot of works of Nigerian indigenous Arts like the Benin Court Art, the Ife naturalistic Art, Esie Stone etc. Nigeria has produced and contributed great varieties to indigenous art in her diverse areas of human endeavour. Before the coming of the Europeans, pottery works was practiced in almost all the parts of the Country e.g. Gwari in the North and some part of Western states of Nigeria. (Ernest 2001).

Europeans View of Nigeria Arts and Relationship

It is widely believed by the Europeans that Nigeria Art is native and primitive because it is associated with religion (ritual art) and other cultural facts, which are little understood or totally misunderstood. They took the Art of Nigeria as that is Art for ritual purpose and not aesthetics disprove the assertion that if European has chosen to separate art from religion or social contexts this does not amounts to advancement. To the African Art, the importance of sculpture lies outside the realities of aesthetic rather the societal functions it performs. African art has to do with his environment i.e. the reconciliation, problems of birth, survival, well being, longevity, death and recantation.

Margaret (1937) in the past postulated that:

The most important difference between a European work of art and African one is its purpose. A modern European picture, sculpture, piece of material is made for the satisfaction of the owner and his friends, to make house beautiful and more pleasing to him. The African work of Arts has nearly always a religious significance.

In more broad outlines, it is only in terms of local and religious contexts that indigenous Nigeria ideas, philosophies, religious and politics that the meaning of a sculpture may be found or that it may be of direct benefit to the community. Most Nigerian Arts are in sculpture and pottery and were of ritual values, unlike the European's, which are mostly paintings devoid of aesthetic qualities. While Nigerian Art had total freedom of expression and communication, the European art are guided by refers which most often limits total freedom of expression. Nigeria Arts of the

past were mostly used for the glorification of King and rulers e.g. the Benin Court Art and the Ife Art.

The Roles of Government in the Teaching and Practice of Art Nigerian

In the past in Nigeria, before the advent of western education, indigenous education was used to train and prepare youths for good life. Art and craft was among the area they received teachings. The methods of teaching Arts then were through initiation and apprenticeship (Itedjere1990). And the apprentices learn through observation, participation and instruction.

The educators (teachers) then were men and women of immense experience; they could be of one family, traditional values and neighbours. They were able to offer first hand information and training to the trainees successfully. Many of these teachers became philosophers in their various fields

Ogunu (1990) submitted that:

The British educational policy and practice in Nigeria marked the beginning of government interest and intervention in Education of some selected subject in the schools, which included art/craft subjects. This is most evident in the 1887 Education Ordinance. When this was enacted, teaching of art/craft in the elementary school was well recognized and funded.

In recent times, education has been seen and taken by nations of the world as instrument for development and progress. It is seen as the only hope and tool for rapid transformation and improvement of a nation. The federal government of Nigeria in her National Policy on Education (2004) adopted Education as an instrument “par excellence” for effecting national development. It is in the above light that the NPE listed the subjects that will provide the enabling knowledge and skills for the students. These were grouped as follows:

At the JSS level;

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|-----|-----------|---|-----------------------------|
| (1) | Group ‘A’ | - | Core |
| (2) | Group ‘B’ | - | Prevocational electives |
| (3) | Group ‘C’ | - | Non-prevocational electives |

While at the SSS level it was grouped into:

- Group ‘A’ Core
- Group ‘B’ Vocational electives
- Group ‘C’ Non-vocational electives

However, Fine Art falls under Group ‘B’ pre-vocational and Group ‘B’ vocational electives at JSS and SSS level respectively.

Consequently, the NPE, Places high premium on functional Education with emphasis on relevant school programmes, practical and comprehensive study, while interest and ability should determine individual’s direction in education. It is in this above statement that Teaching of Art becomes so imperative since the policy is geared towards the social cultural, scientific, technological progress among others for self-realization and National harmony.

Art covers all areas of human life, hence the qualities developed through Art education cannot be over-emphasised, and it has the power of:

- (i) research for new skill;
- (ii) imagination;
- (iii) pure seeing and the faculty of Aesthetic apprehension.

Aghotor (1998) opined that:

Without technology, political stability, economic reforms and building of infrastructures will almost be impossible to attain. Since technology and art have been described as inseparable qualities, it is therefore wise to mention that Fine Art is the skeletal structure that acts as reinforcement for technology. For example, engineering cannot survive without drawing such as technical and engineering drawing. This demands a good knowledge of art for the power/skill of visualization, aesthetic and imagination approach to sketch the working drawing for the design of any machine. Also the medical doctors depend on illustration (Drawing) before carrying out their functions.

To crown it all, the government in its effort to achieve the goals and objectives in the NPE through the study of Fine Arts has empowered the following institutions to give the required professional training provided they continuously meet the required minimum standards:

- (a) Colleges of Education;
- (b) Faculties of Education;
- (c) Institutes of Education;
- (d) National Teachers' Institute;
- (e) Schools of Education in the Polytechnics, etc.

The current Art Educators are products of the above listed Institution. Presently, some practice privately and teach in the above listed institution too. The graduates of the above institution are therefore referred to as trained or certificated professionals, because of the specialized training acquired unlike in the old when all artists in Nigeria were regarded as craft men and women or artisans.

The Roles of Studio Artists and Art Educators

The efforts of Studio Artists and Art Educators cannot be over-emphasised, when considering the innovation in teaching and practice of Art in Nigeria. Historical findings show that until the end of the second decade of this century, there was no appreciable introduction of art into Nigeria primary schools. What was found in the Education Policy then was craft and not Fine Art subject. Western form of art owns its first informal appearance around 1895 through a young student Aina Onabolu (Ola 2000). He was one of the few Nigerians who fought for inclusion of Art into the school curriculum having found out that Art, as a subject was not inclusive. When Government finally listened to Aina on Art inclusion in the school curriculum, he was faced with problem of shortage of indigenous Art teachers. He was able to lobby the Government to recruit expatriate Art teachers to assist in teaching of the subject in Nigeria schools. The recruitment exercise brought Kenneth Murray, Dennis Duerden and Wilfort Brown to Nigeria respectively (Ola 2000 and Emu 2007).

It is pertinent to place on record that the prominent beneficiaries of these expatriate teachers in Nigeria today are artist like Ben Enwonwu, Akinola Lasekan, and Bruce Onobrakpeya among others. Thus, Onobolu became the first African to be an Art teacher not only in Nigeria but also in West Africa Countries (Ola 2000). With his training background, he was a Painter and an Art educator. Onobolu in his teaching stressed the importance to strictly adhere to the rules guiding Art in the schools. Onobolu today is regarded as the founding father and teacher of modern Nigeria Art, which brought innovation in the teaching and practice of art in the history of Nigeria contemporary art. He later died in 1963 at the age of 82 years. Some of his pioneering students who later became notable Artist or Art teachers were Godffrey Okolo, a Painter; Albert Odunsi, a Painter and Adenuga (also known as Israel Ala) a Painter (Ola 2000). The growth of Art education was slow but had a remarkable achievement in the face of so many militating and inhibiting factors occasioned by colonialism that regarded African art, as primitive Art.

Nigeria naturally began to evolve her own style of Art. Culture position and ideological security has also created various stylistic abstraction trends or artistic predications, which have internationalized modern Nigeria Art. Later there were natural stylistic dialects that gave beauty to a more advanced formal abstraction in Nigeria Art. Some of the artists like Bisi Fakeye, G. Bamidele, Are Ogun, Otoro and Bamigboye as group believed on natural style that aids abstraction (Emu 2007).

Innovation and practice of art in Nigeria was popularly brought to lime light by the Zaria art society based in the Nigeria College of Arts, Science and Technology Zaria which presently is called Ahmadu Bello University. This institution became a nucleus for cultural artistic re-orientation, advocating a total rejection of western aesthetic and style of artistic evaluation of standard arts in Nigeria. The landmark of this institution was that it made culturisation the signature tune of the students in search for identity in the Nigeria art. Nigeria art tradition became very interesting and stimulating.

Uche Okeke, one of the students of this institution was also supported by Onobrakpeya and Demas Nwoko to attain the aims and objectives of the Nigeria cultural style of tradition “based on natural synthesis” ideology the students were able to achieve their aims and objectives. In 1961, an all embracing art movement of Mbari writers and Artist Club was founded. This was formed in Ibadan with Ulli Beir as the arrowhead of the club. The club later had its extension in Osogbo, Lagos and Enugu.

Apart from the first all embracing art movement, the society of Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, Zaria was formed, in 1963 having Yusuf Grillo as President and late Solomon I. Wangboje as Secretary since its formation. Also this society is a unifying professional umbrella for contemporary Nigerian Artist. Nigeria is endowed with so many higher institution where Arts is being taught, Prominent among them are, Yaba College of Technology, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Auchu Polytechinc Auchu and University Benin, just to mention but a few.

The graduates who attended these institutions and other unmentioned institutions have been able to display the artistic tradition of Nigeria Art in forms,

styles and beauty and in most obvious manifestation of naturalism, abstractism and figuritism. There are also other Nigerian artists/art educators who had produced masterpieces using different stylistic methods. All these have joined the train of innovation in teaching and practice of Art in Nigeria today.

Finally, along the trends of Art innovation and practice in Nigeria is the visual culture of people including the growth of traditional industries of pottery, weaving, dying, metal casting and calabash decoration all over Nigeria, this could be said to be a summation of the trends in 20th century contemporary Art in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to highlight the innovation in teaching and practice of Art in Nigeria. It also highlighted the various major efforts or contributions of Artist and Art Educators to the trends of Art in Nigeria. The pioneer artist, Onobolu with the expatriate assisted the training of more professional Artist like Grillo, Okeke and Onobrekpeye among others. These Artists had their stylistic imprint in contemporary Nigeria Art.

Nigerian Artist shall continue to give form to cultural values and ensure physical manifestation of peculiar ideas, experiences and world view through aesthetic appeal placed on imaginativeness, creative and more than the norm in modern Nigeria Art.

Recommendation

- (1) Nigerian Artists/ Art Educators should continuously practice and teach Art in order to give it more cultural values and ensure visual manifestation of peculiar ideas, experiences through aesthetic appeal placed on more imaginativeness and creativity that will enhance modern Art in Nigeria.
- (2) Government of Nigeria and other stakeholders should give maximum financial and moral support to innovation in teaching and practice of Art in Nigeria.
- (3) There should be linkage between Art Education, practice of Art and other discipline in Nigeria.

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