

# FINE ART IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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## **Abstract**

Fine Art is confined to the Visual Arts, i.e, drawing, architecture, graphics design, and sculpture (Encyclopedia Americana, 1985). These different areas of Fine Art have in no small way contributed nearly to ail the facets of development of this great nation. This paper took a look at the Nigerian traditional art, its scope and impact as well as the contributions of the various ethnic groups; it highlighted the role of Nigerian contemporary modern art in the national development with the advent of Western education. Suggestions and recommendations were also made especially in the area of breakthrough and needed input to strengthen the role of Fine Art in national development.

## **Background**

Before the colonial era, fine art (especially in the areas of sculpture and bronze works), were widely practiced in a traditional way amongst the various ethnic groups that make up the present day Nigeria.

In the North, the Nok people produced wonderful sculptural pieces between 900 B.C. and A.D. 200. According to Biobaku (1976), the oldest sculptures found in Nigeria indeed in the whole of black Africa are terra cottas from the Nok culture so called after the mining village of Nok where the" first specimens were found in the 1940s.

The Yorubas are the most prolific sculptors in Nigeria, and are noted for their wooden verandah posts and ceremonial masks.

East of the Niger, among the Igbos, Ibibios, Ijaw, and Ekoi people are to be found some of the most exquisite carvings in the country. The Igala, the Idoma, and the Tiv in their own way, manifest in their various visual arts and originality of artistic tradition, which are often complex with numerous influential factors (Neyt, 1985).

The foregoing go a long way in clearly projecting the state of Nigerian art before and during the advent of the Europeans. It should be noted here that the practitioners never had forma! art education but acquired their skills and knowledge through the apprenticeship system of education. With this, they were able to produce great works that adorned palaces and courts of kings.

The metal and ivory castings that members of the British expedition found in large numbers in Benin astonished them and they took these to Europe where they were quickly bought by museums and art collectors (Dyson, 1998).

It becomes clear here that Nigerian arts of those days had all the Western World wanted in art. Such works would have been great sources of revenue generation had they been legally acquired. They would have also largely developed tourism in the present day Nigeria if they had not been removed.

### **1. Western Education: Its Impact**

A recent phenomenon in Nigeria has been the emergence of a substantial number of creative artists in the western sense. Today, Nigeria is the only African country with the largest number of

creative artists working in the fields of drawing, painting, sculpture and ceramics. Applied Art in the western studio sense has a recent history and it is directly associated with and influenced by western education (Biobaku, 1976).

The establishment of Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology at Zaria saw the training of Nigeria's foremost' artists like, Uche Okeke, Yusuf Grillo, Demas Nwoko, Bruce Onobrakpeya, etc. These and others became great instruments in establishing Fine Arts departments in our Universities, Colleges of Education and Technology where studies of art are tailored towards producing manpower for solving national

problems. For instance, our textile industries, television studios, national and private newspapers, research institutes, advertising agencies, national museums and galleries, printing and publishing companies, ministries of culture and tourism, ministries of agriculture and information, etc are all the various establishments where art plays laudable roles in moving the nation forward.

This paper will to a large extent create awareness as well as seek for more ways by which contemporary Nigeria can forge ahead technologically with the help of Nigerian artists.

### **The Role of Fine Art in National Development**

Nigeria in her quest to develop technologically and otherwise has over the years had the artists playing underlying roles, The artist's collective role in visually affecting the environment is a feat that speaks more about his ingenuity and indispensability in a developing nation like Nigeria. .

Everyday we receive messages from our environment through books, signs, illustrations, televisions, magazines and the like. All of these rely on factors such as colour, shape, form, size, position and style to pass on their messages (Crampton, and Finney, 1988).

The following explains more of the artist's role in national development:

- Historical development
- Religion
- Education
- Pictorialisation of research findings in research institutions
- Printing and publishing
- Television
- Manufacturing industry,
- Textile industries
- Culture and tourism
- Information and communication and
- Advertising agencies.

### **Historical Development**

Fine arts has greatly strengthened Nigerian history. This is true since the history of a people cannot be complete without their art and culture. The Nok culture of 900 B.C. to 200A.D., Igbo-Ukwu and Benin bronze give Nigeria a place in the hall of fame of world history as well as keep Nigerians informed about the ways of life our people who lived in the past.

### **Religion**

Religiously, art has also strengthened the beliefs of many Nigerians, especially that of the traditional worshippers who use art (art objects) as medium of worship. More so, amongst the Christians, artistic impressions of Christ and crucifixion, the imposing cathedrals with stained glass

windows, etc help to create stronger impressions about God as well as spiritually strengthen the beliefs of many (e.g the Catholic relics). The artistically prepared *tasbih* are used by Muslims during their prayers.

### **Education**

Educational development in Nigeria has been realistic because of the immense role of the artists have over the years been in the business of designing and producing study aids for the kindergartens and primary school pupils (the foundation level of education). Children have been known to be attracted to books with pictures and drawing illustrations; these have to a great extent enhanced their understanding abilities of the different subjects.

It can be said here that artists and writers have worked side by side in over all development of the Nigerian child for future national development.

### **Architecture**

The artists have positively influenced the architecture profession. They are employed to teach architectural graphics and drawings in polytechnics and universities to produce more proficient architects for national development.

### **Pictorialization of Research Findings in Research Institutions**

Artists in the employ of Research Institutes contribute immensely to national development by way of pictorializing research findings to aid adoption. In the National Cereals Research Institute, Badeggi, Niger State for instance, research findings are artistically illustrated to aid illiterate and semi-illiterate farmers to understand farming systems or methods. By this means, farmers acquire new technologies to make for improved food production.

### **Printing and Publishing**

The artists' role in the development of printing and publishing industries cannot be over emphasized. Over the years, the artists have continued to strengthen the productions of publishing outfits by way of their designs, innovations, etc. Already, the introduction of colour in newspaper printing has gone on to create awareness and increased readership.

The graphic artist in the newspaper industry, apart from planning the layout is also involved in making cartoons and illustrations that go a long way in attracting buyers and patronage through advertisements (Amadi, 1986).

### **Television**

The development of the television industry in Nigeria has had the artist playing immeasurable role. It is quite apparent that without the artist television production may not be wholly acceptable to the viewers.

The graphic artists in the television provide captions and illustrations and also do stage designing. They are also responsible for show-card writing, cartoons, etc.

### **Manufacturing Industry**

Artists have also been playing laudable roles in product manufacturing and development. This is in the area of designing and production of packages for goods and corporate identity designs for the various manufacturing companies in Nigeria.

### **Textile Industry**

Artists have also boosted the nation economically through textile designs and production. Nearly all the textile industries in Nigeria engage the services of artists whose designs go a long way in creating market for the industries, There is now a limit to the importance of wrappers (cloth) and this helps to conserve foreign exchange. Our indigo dyed cloths enjoy wide markets locally and internationally, especially Europe and American markets.

### **Culture and Tourism**

Through our arts and cultural activities, many foreigners are drawn to the country on daily basis. They come to pay tribute to our arts and cultures, which to them are visually rich and extra ordinary in meaning, since they are tied to our ways of life. By so doing, culture and tourism have been immensely boosted over the years.

### **Information and Communication**

Artists are employed by the Ministries of Information; Agriculture, etc to produce visuals in form of posters, handbills, billboards, etc. for mass mobilization of the people towards campaign against AIDS, cigarette smoking, economic sabotage, destruction of oil pipelines, child-abuse, early marriages, etc. In the area of agriculture, visuals are produced to encourage food production and afforestation of farmlands, etc.

### **Advertising Agencies**

Advertising agencies are known to be image makers of several governmental and non-governmental organizations in Nigeria. Artists play underlying roles here in visually projecting these organizations through designs of logos, year planners, etc,

### **Breakthrough**

There has been a major breakthrough in the art profession. This is in the area of computer graphics designs. Indeed, many design software that can aid artist execute his designs, carry out colour separations, etc. have been developed. Software like AutoCAD, Aldus free hand, Corel draw, Super Paint,

Power Point, Page Maker, Print Master, etc are being used by artists, architects, and engineers to execute their jobs.

The computer has not only revolutionized the art profession, it has gone on to make the artist spend less time in doing his work. Most design studios today make little or no use of poster colours, drawing boards, T-squares, etc.

Things have certainly changed for better or worse, it will not be unusual for a computer to be the only tool in a design studio (Campbell, 1993). It becomes pertinent for art practitioners to avail themselves of this opportunity of strengthening themselves professionally by acquiring computer knowledge for overall national development.

### **Recommendations**

There is already increasing art awareness in the Nigerian society today. Art is currently reflected on birthday cakes, furniture, buildings, foot wears, textiles, greeting cards, carpets, etc. Artists have waded nearly into all professions; this situation therefore calls for the following:

#### **Establishment of More Art schools**

This dispensation requires that more art schools established in Nigerian universities and polytechnics. This will cater for the teeming population of talented young Nigerians seeking to study Fine Arts. It will also pave way for continuity since Nigerian arts has over the years positively affected European and even American arts. More Art teachers will also be produced to educate the younger generations.

#### **Revisiting Benin Bronze for Tourism Development**

Benin bronze works have over the years boosted Nigeria's image abroad. The works that were carted away by the British during their expedition of the Benin kingdom in the 18<sup>th</sup> century have always been cynosure of eyes in foreign museums. Since Nigeria's efforts to buy back these works were not fruitful. The much sought-after art treasures could be revisited by way of research and production to boost culture and tourism.

#### **Sponsorship of Artists**

The foregoing actually explains the fact that art is woven into Nigerian history and culture. The artists have to be patronized if our art must survive. Individuals, government and nongovernmental organizations must come to the rescue by way of sponsoring art exhibitions, conferences, workshops etc.

**Art**

#### **Education a Necessity for the Nigerian Child**

In the advanced countries, early art education is made to become part and parcel of a growing child because it enhances physical, mental, emotional, creative etc development of the child. Mbahi, (1997) stated that most technologically developed countries realized right from the Outset that one of the conditions most favourable to invention is to accumulate knowledge and experience in Art and Creativity.

This creativity of the spirit is the first ontological root of the artistic activity. And in fine art, it is pure, cleared of all adventitious elements. And the pure creativity of spiritual intelligence tends to achieve something in which spiritual intelligence finds its own delight, which is to produce an object in beauty (Maritain, 1977).

#### **Computer Literacy for Art Educators**

Art educators of necessity must be computer literate to effectively function in this age of computer. Presently, modem graphic design (an applied art) requires use of computer for precision, accuracy and ease. Therefore, for fine art graduates (especially graphic designers) to be relevant in the industries (such as newspapers, advertising agencies, etc), the knowledge of computer is wholly required.

#### **Forum for Artists and Engineers**

As artists and architects have forum that is yielding wonderful fruits in the building industry. It becomes important that the artists and engineers have a forum for technological advancement of the nation. In the United States of America for instance, most auto designers are artists who work hand-in-hand with engineers. Such conducive atmosphere could be created here if we must forge ahead technology

### **Forum for Artists and Town Planners**

Artists with their deep sense of aesthetics are needed to work with the town planners for result oriented planning and development of Nigerian towns and villages. At this stage, art works that depict our ways of life should be used to give face-lifts to our towns and cities.

### **Institute for Study of Nigerian Arts and Culture**

Nigeria is of age to have a Research Institute for the study of the study of Nigerian arts and culture, Our rich cultural heritage makes this pertinent at a time when Nigerians travel to United States to look for information in Smithsonian Institution's and others.

### **Conclusion**

Nigeria has become famous in terms of world culture through her fine sculptures in wood, ivory and bronze. It is well known that the early twentieth century discovery of African art caused something like a revolution in European art and today; many of Nigeria's greatest works of the past occupy places of honour in the world's major museums (Biobaku, 1976).

The Nigerian nation has been able to influence the world through her art. It has become very pertinent at this time of dire need for national development, to re-enact the Benin bronze, ivory works, etc through consistent research and production for cultural and tourism development. Britain with its North Sea oil pays more attention to tourism and by this has been able to create wealth and employment over the years. Over dependence on oil as a source of revenue has left Nigeria myopic and visionless at a time the country would have been a haven for tourists as a result of our exquisite works of art and rich cultures par-excellence.

Overall national development through technology would at this time of our economic cross roads require industrial design (which has basis in Fine Art) to be part of our Art Schools' curricula to produce manpower for a total technological breakthrough in this 21st century.

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