

14

The Role of the Visual Artist in a Visible World

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Abstract

Globally, visual art is simply an expression of any conceptual idea into a visible and functional form. Creating better awareness in this area will bring about better acceptability. It is an aspect that involves both the fine and applied arts which involves the use of both lines and colours on any surface in the form of painting, clay, ink, dye, wood, metal, fabric or yarn (cotton) among others. Therefore, the role of the visual artist entails the adoption and transformation of the available materials into visible and functional media that most often serve aesthetics, socio-cultural, symbolic purpose and used also in communication as well as in creating wealth and prestige.

Many people are ignorant of the immense role the visual arts play in their lives today, hence the need to create visual arts awareness and help people to appreciate the enormous responsibility of the visual artist.

Visual art awareness is very essential and cuts across every area of human endeavour. The contribution of the visual art sub-sector transient (that is lasting for only a short time) all spheres of the Nigerian economy with so much talk about numeracy, literacy with little or no attention paid to visual literacy or awareness. Visual literacy is the key to numeracy (ability to read and understand figures) and literacy (ability to read and write) and giving credence to this, Egonwa, (2001) suggested that visuality should deserve better attention than numeracy and literacy, he expressed further that it is impossible to live in the contemporary world without art and its multi-forms. Visuals are not only informative, they are edifying and entertaining, they are superior to words, the visuals thus transfer attention, facts, dreams, emotions, messages into clear and simplified reality. No wonder an adage says "a picture is worth a thousand words." Visual arts is simply put as an expression of creativity, it communicates ideas, feelings and solution in such a way that text or spoken words cannot convey. Because the arts are both universal and culturally specific, they connect people across time and culture. They are powerful means of increasing international and inter-cultural awareness.

Potentials of the Visual Arts

The visual art has always been a bridge between man and his environment, the artist activities in the world we live is our link with the past and our gift to the future. Through art, it is possible to tell the history of a people, how they lived in the past, their religion, occupation etc. It is also possible through art to predict or see into the future. Broken ancient pottery pieces called shreds for instance have over the years proven to be of great advantage to the archaeologist, for such pieces from archaeological sites have helped in identifying local cultures and the date of development. Style and decoration of such discovered shreds are also essential for dating the remains of our non-literate cultures. It therefore means that ancient pottery wares have been confirmed to be of great importance in archaeological study by supplying means of dating and launching man into his early chronology. Apart from these, it has also been of worth to mention that the historians and the literary world have gained knowledge from inscribed writings and records of the Assyrian and Babylonian preserved on clay tablets. (Otimeyin, 2009)

The visual arts is basically concerned with works created both to be seen and to be felt, it involves the demonstration of skills and technology. The visual art sub-sector has always contributed its share to the society right from early civilization, be it religion politics, commerce, communication, city beautification, architecture etc. Thus, Russell, (1989) expressed that throughout the history of civilization, works of art have served to enrich our lives in many different ways. The contributions of the visual art sub-sector to the economy therefore transcend all spheres and strata of the Nigerian economy. The visual art in our society has continued to suffer decay and neglect because enough awareness has not been created about its relevance to a developing society like ours.

Egonwa (1999), averred reasons for why Nigerian technology is seemingly crude, this to him is partly because the visual art and artist creativity are been relegated to the background. This is because art and science are inseparably interwoven. The artist is needed to put in finesse, the artist is needed to design logo, symbols, posters, billboards to inform and create awareness, design scientific inventions, he is needed to design the product packages and illustrations. He creates the distinctiveness of the product on the mind of the consumer by making the product unique, attention getting and memorable. In other words, he provides the key idea or the guiding light to the product (Esebameh, 2001). No wonder Egonwa (2007) observed that most of the significant ideas are best communicated in finished product and not the description of the product.

Multifaceted Nature of the Visual Art

For science and technology to make the desired progress, there must be enough awareness of the benefits from the visual arts. Egonwa (1999) expressed that no industrial and technological decision or education can be meaningful or valid if it excludes the ingredients of art and design, he expressed further that art is everything and everywhere. It makes the difference between the crude and the refined, the primitive and the civilized, the big and the small in personal dressing, house or office decoration, newspaper layout and reportage, urban design and product packages, in short, art adds quality to life, not money.

Over the years, the visual arts have served the purpose of politics, symbolism, wealth, prestige, social status, communication etc. Ebeigbe, (2010) states that it can serve a practical medium of instruction and a potent means of communication of ideas (politically, spiritually or philosophically), expressing further that visual symbolism not only adds value to the things it represents but also makes it more meaningful and forceful. The fine and visual arts are fundamental ways of knowing and thinking, of developing intuition, reasoning, imagination and dexterity into unique forms of expression and communication.

Artists explore the vast and mysterious world and the tales it holds bring awareness to societies that have been isolated from the struggles that the populations of these places face, for example, Geirge Gittoes develops a practice of visiting troubled spots of the world, working in areas that would normally be reserved for journalists and reporters to give the society a powerful close up to conflicts such as the famine and peace keeping in Somalia.

On religion, visual art is often used to bring to the forefront the essence of the variety of religion, with various religious symbols; with these it is often easy to tell one from the other. Art, as it is today cannot be totally divorced from science and technology as it has supported great inventions, be it in the area of design, craft or

pottery. One cannot but agree with Uhunwangho, (2008) who opined that beyond its primary connotation as it concerns aesthetics, art as we all know has left its mark in the history of man.

Visual Art Existism

Every work of art always constantly reflects the veracity of our day to day existence: the way we see things, the way we live, the way we work, walk, talk and think. It can be observed that the expressive view of an artist in any piece of art is not just a show of skill but an expressive totality of the socio-religious importance of the art as conceived in the mind, for art is the only known medium through which a person can present an inner knowledge and spiritual participation rather than a result of critical approach.

Some objects of art may still be seen in some quarters as items of invoking ancestral spirits or as a medium through which concrete form is given to allow the ancestral spirit entrance into the human world, the fact remains that these objects are human products that cannot but mirror the value system of its makers through his encounter with ideas, material and experiences.

Some artists may maintain the traditional craftsmanship of continual carving or modelling of ancestral figures in the old style for the local people who still believe in ancestral worship and ancestral representation while some are preoccupied with the realities of life as dictated by economic necessity in the creation of the art, but it remains a fact that every artist is bound by the economic or traditional artistic nature of the environment, but the expressive nature of man cannot be suppressed else he becomes a slave to himself. The artist in this part of the world (Nigeria) is saddled with finding a market for the art in the midst of political insecurity, insincerity and economic bastardization before making an end meet, and it is the art that serves as a solution to meeting this end.

Art is yet to be accorded its proper place or reach its full potential. The idea of isolating art because it is not a biological necessity is an under estimation of its useful and practical purpose. The art is of great meaning and relevance especially to our lives and the human situation. Take away art from our very existence and see how miserable we will become. It takes the art to create the science and technology of our time. Every policy decision affects the very art and the artist in practice, be it at the federal, state or art institution like ours, for the result of baseless and stringent economic policy decisions reflected in societal negligence, a discouraging trend in art coupled with the use of materials which are highly expensive, are just a reflection of political high handedness. If we as a people must become relevant in this

dispensation like the Benin Kingdom known throughout the world for its art, must be relevant in the way we live and do things.

Okpalaoka, (1999) observed that culturally, art features in the culture of the people. It serves the need of the society, messages accompanied with visuals, increases public awareness of any given message " science and technology cannot effectively progress without sound creative and aesthetic principles of design techniques" he further expressed that art and aesthetic principles aided industrial revolution in America, Britain and other countries of Europe.

At one time or the other, efforts have been made by various people (persons) to consciously create awareness in this sector, be it the portraits of Aina Onabolu, Akinola Lasekan's landscapes or political cartoons, Rev.Fr. Kevin KaroU's workshop in Ekiti in the 1940s, Ulli and Georgina Beier,s Mbari workshop in the 60s, Suzanne Wenger's Osogbo workshop experiments, Kenneth Murray, Uche Okeke, Abayomi Barber, Prof. Uwangboje's various workshops, Bruce Onabrakpeya's Harmattan workshop, the efforts of various early art galleries and patrons like Felix Jdubor. The British council, the Goethe Institute ford Foundation, the National Gallery of Arts and several corporate organizations who have funded the visual arts through thick and thin and helped raise the banner of this noble profession. According to Caoimhghin, (2010) a painting may be just physical pigments of colour applied to a canvas but how the image is constructed in terms of composition, tone, colour and line is a very particular process that contrasts sharply with music and literature. In visual arts, the politics of presentation is just as important as the presentation of politics.

The visual art sub-sector can be used to achieve the much desired economic growth, the solution lies in educating and enlightening the populace, we can do more if the desired supports are made to improve the lot of the visual artist, such efforts will stimulate and develop the lots of the visual artist, Nigeria has produced great artists that have made their marks at the world stage. Ojewumi (2011) supports this when he asserted that " it is no secret that Nigerian artists have blazed their country's name in glorious songs of recognition and respect across the globe, our artists have opened up new forms, new media, new consciousness for other countries of the world", he further expressed that Nigerian artists have excelled everywhere across the globe and they continue to bring fame and value to their country's name for no section has promoted Nigeria in and out, like the visual art sub-sector. Government on its part is yet to come to terms with the immense value or benefits of the visual art sub-sector as a major component in the promotion of tourism and as our national aspiration into a truly great nation. In fact the;visual art subsector is a potent instrument of diplomacy and of influencing the psyche of others. There is no nation on earth that aspires to be truly great or taken seriously and neglects the visual art subsector. Throughout the time, the arts have

The Intuition

been essential to the human experience. They are unique tools that allow all people to express their feelings and emotions, connect with contemporary and other times and cultures and develop new insights. The arts enrich the quality of life by linking hope to memory, inspiring courage, enriching celebrations adding beauty to life and making tragedies bearable.

Conclusion

As expressed by the people's art council, Geordikaklar, (2006) Young children respond to gestures and movement before they react to the spoken word, they understand and explore sound before they learn to speak. They draw pictures before they form letters, they dance and act out stories before they learn to read. Exhibitions must be mounted with sufficient awareness created. The visual artist must cultivate the habit of writing and writing well to educate the ignorant society of the potentials of the visual art. Awareness for the visual art can be created through regular and well planned art exhibitions, workshops, seminars, and writings with the able support of the various tiers of government, their agencies, non-governmental agencies, corporate organizations, wealthy individuals and the visual art professional bodies.

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