

Visual Arts Practice: A Catalyst for Developing a Local Economy in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria operates a mono-economy, which can be assessed based on its operation despite other numerous potentials that abound. The indices that make for economic growth if well harnessed can lead to Nigeria out of the wood. One area of focus is the visual arts practice vis-à-vis its capacity to be a catalyst for developing a local economy in Nigeria. The institutional capacity to develop art to contribute to the GDP (Growth Domestic Product) of the economy is lacking or they are not playing their role as expected. Record sales have been achieved of Nigerian artworks and of other artists around the globe. It is envisaged that in the near distant future, art will become a part of the major drivers of the Nigerian economy.

Key words: Local economy, Auction houses, Art practices, Art collection and Art pricing

Introduction

Visual Arts (paintings) has been an article of great investment and is becoming more in the 21st century even with higher stake than ever. These investments are yielding good returns for collectors as pieces are appreciating over time. There is a paradigm shift from looking at just one area of income for a country such as Nigeria to a multifaceted one. It is of interest to note the enormous economic potentials in the present direction of investment in the visual arts with an emphasis on paintings. How can it be imagined that one painting could worth \$300million? The worth of one painting, can build roads such as Ore or Lekki-Epe express which was a hazard to the motorists, paralyzing the economy of the affected areas? Could worth of one painting build a car assembly plant in Nigeria? Yet there are so many investments in different sectors in Nigeria without corresponding results to show. The world over especially in African, less attention is given to and little funding is made available to art institutions and schools. The spectrum of the visual arts is neglected in a way that even policy makers do not regard it as a field of human endeavour that has the potential to contribute substantially towards developing a local economy. To make the matter worrisome, those who passed through art institutions in Nigeria, especially the theory sections are at loggerhead with studio trained artists over issues of Ph.D. in the studio areas, instead of developing more capacity. Therefore, funds cannot be attracted into this quagmire without concerted effort at adding value in developing the requisite capacity for visual arts practice.

How can visual arts in a developing economy contribute to the GDP (Growth Domestic Product)? Nigeria has great artistic potential in the visual arts which, when harnessed can contribute to developing our local economy like any product and even much more after oil. Our perception on economic growth indices is narrow when it comes to art in the face of current economic challenges. The visual art in developed communities like the US, UK and the Asian nations have made appreciable progress beyond what African countries are doing. Most of the investments in visual arts still depend on these foreign powers. We may not appreciate the place of visual arts in economic development until we know our current state, our challenges and what is happening in the art market in other parts of the globe. If the arguments by the different writers are to stand on the contributions of visual arts to an economy, this sector requires urgent attention in the Nigerian setting to maximize its potentials. Reeves (2002) in arts Impact Research in the UK: History, Rationale and Policy Context, the economic and social importance of the arts, reveals that

... from the early 1980s onwards, arts and cultural activity became an increasing feature of urban regeneration programmes in Britain, as cities, in particular, sought solutions to economic restructuring and the decline of traditional manufacturing industry. Taking their inspiration from the experiences of American and European cities, major cities such as Glasgow, Manchester and Liverpool embarked on ambitious cultural development strategies, often based on flagship capital projects. These strategies were given added momentum by the publication of the Policy Study Institute's seminal study, *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain (1988)*, which established the arts sector as a significant, growing and value-added sector in its own right, with a turnover of £10 billion and employing some 500,000 people.

It is observed that most of the highest earning artists in Nigeria today are graduates. The impact on the economy then becomes enormous as these artists constitute a part of the skilled workforce in Nigeria. Their contributions cannot be overruled despite lack of statistical data on them and mostly on their activities.

Reeves (2002) also states

The findings of the study confirmed the cultural sector as a significant employer, and showed that it was

characterised by: a highly educated workforce; significant 'nonstandard' employment, with up to 40% of those working in the sector in self 'employment or temporary jobs, and nearly 30% working on their own; and higher levels of unemployment than in the labour force in general. Further, the Study highlighted differential earnings across the sector, with some cultural workers enjoying higher levels of earnings than other white collar workers, while others were poorly paid. £5 billion was estimated to be generated by consumer expenditure on the sector (Casey et al, 1995).

What is the current state of visual arts in the development of local economy in Nigeria?

Art practice in Nigeria has improved and grown in the last two decades. Thanks to the number of art galleries and the level of art activities-exhibitions, conferences, symposiums et cetera which have culminated into the development of visual arts in Nigeria. Nigeria is experiencing what can be referred to as a surge in prices of paintings, but still far below what is obtainable in places like New York, London, Canada and Tokyo. Buhari (2014) avers that, the 1980s-90s saw the outburst of contemporary art practice, promotion/consumption and appreciation in an unprecedented manner. It is in this period that we saw a dramatic growth in indigenous art appreciation, collection by individuals and corporate organizations who are Nigerians, exhibitions, as well as the opening of many private galleries; even the featuring of salons, auctions, art competitions with handsome/beautiful prizes, et cetera.

Iriwieri (2010) posit that, from the eve of the 1990s up to 2000s, there seems to be a re-invigoration of the creative consciousness among practicing artists and radical tendencies at experimentation rose to a level that installation art became something to marvel upon. Academic discussion emanating from the stylistic tendencies stimulated art discourse among Nigerian artists, art teachers and art managers from all nooks and crannies of the country. Nigeria art works are attracting global attention by the reason of the recent auction in London and other exhibitions held outside the shores of Nigeria. A visual arts graduate of the 70s through early 90s can hardly boast of selling a piece of artwork for a #100,000 not even professional artists could. Today, a fresh graduate can quote a piece of painting for as much as #120,000-200,000. This current trend when sustained can lead to where developed nations are in art activities. The worth of a piece of painting has so appreciated that the living standards of professional visual artists have improved to self sustenance without the need for a second job.

Who are the major players in the art business?

Art is a big business now in Nigeria because of the entrant by new galleries springing up, building and enlarging the clientele base. The major players in the art business in Nigeria are gallery owners; among them are Arthouse Contemporary Ltd, Signature gallery, Terra-Kulture, Treasure House, Nimbus gallery, Mydrim gallery, Galleria Romania, Nike Okundaye gallery, Quintessence and others. Private collectors are also on the increase and one of the avid art collectors, Oyasaf under Engineer Yemisi Shyllon perhaps has the largest single collections. Others are corporate collectors like Total E&P Nigeria, Hotel Presidential, Portharcourt, ExxonMobil Producing Nigeria, religious bodies and government establishments. Their patronages can be viewed from a different perspective and angles and so are their involvements in contributing to the business of visual arts in Nigeria. Kwanashie, Aremu and Oladukun (2009) hold the view that, cultural revival is expected to empower African peoples to take their place not just on the cultural map of the world but in transforming these societies into viable participants in the global economy. Cultural goods if properly packaged and marketed could play an important role in creating a niche for African societies in the emerging global economic system. For this to happen it is necessary to establish the extent of the creativity of African society and the possibility of transforming them into tradeable commodities.

Dele Jegede (1984) States that, 'for the artists in Nigeria, patronage has become the essential factor that makes the difference between limelight and oblivion, between inventiveness and stagnation. Patronage has to be related to the audience acceptance'. This account reasons why some collect to resell; others do as an investment against the future, while others for decoration on their walls with the notion of having pieces or a collection of art without seeing any future in it. These players collectively make the making of art in Nigeria a business.

Freeborn (2011) writing on Art Pricing and the Nigerian Economy, 1960-2008; the Rising Profile of Modern Nigerian Art, observed that,

From the middle 1980s, an aesthetic revolution or reformation took place in Nigeria, a new generation of educated and wealthy Nigerian art patrons emerged. Most of them are business people, owners of large commercial concerns while others hold enviable positions in paid employment. This group of Nigerian art connoisseurs lives in the big cities, town as well as the rural suburbs, but most especially in Lagos, Kano, Kaduna, Ibadan and Benin. To the newly emerged group of art patrons, possession of Nigerian artworks became a symbol of wealth. The magnificent architecturally designed homes and office blocks erected in places in the cities or in the suburbs by this group of newly emerged art patrons were hardly completed without art commissions adorning them.

Most often, it can be stated that collecting Nigerian modern art is a great investment for a collector. Recalling, paintings that were sold in 1992 at the cost of N10, 000 have appreciated to N300, 000 to N500, 000 in value. At a Joint exhibition of 'Creation of the Mind I' 1992, a watercolour by John Oyedemi went for N3000, but today the story is different. Different avenues of marketing art pieces are available today which can add to revenue generation if well harnessed. Galleries are paying taxes to the coffers of the government but with little or no recognition to their activities for better promotion of the visual arts. This implied the rejection of a culture that can contribute to the effort of diversification of the Nigerian economy. There is the need to promote Biennials to attract the attention of the society to arts making and products. This will further contribute to capacity building and contribute effectively to the GDP of Nigeria. According to Udeze (2015), "The Abuja Biennial is an art market that will bring together artists, art and culture administrators, art collectors/connoisseurs, political leaders and administrators, tourists and tourism practitioners. It is so named to identify with the world standard as every biennial is named after its host city.

It is also important to note that great collections of artworks are found in the possession of the National Gallery of Art and Council for Arts and Culture. A visit to the Council for Arts and culture in Abuja revealed that priceless works are hung on the walls outside and in the various offices. Buhari 2014, on National Collection of Contemporary Art, asserts that

There is a collection of contemporary works by both government's culture institutions and private collectors. The institution charged with the national collection of contemporary art is the National Gallery of Art NGA. It has the largest collection of artists' works among the other cultural institutions created. Its collection was first documented in 1981 in a publication titled "The Nucleus". There are also private galleries and collectors who have in their keeps works of prominent contemporary artists and arguably have the largest private collections of contemporary artists' works both of Nigerian and non-Nigerian artists.

What are the challenges?

There are challenges just like in other businesses in Nigeria, especially when transactions are tied to government budget release which in most cases is dependent on economic and political climate. Lack of good art education is hampering the growth of the art business in Nigeria. A question that should be asked is how many in a population of about 170million people are art consumers? Very few insignificant numbers are involved in the purchase of art for the love and investment opportunities, while the majority of the populace did not see anything in it. This is worrisome when we have artists turning out art works from different studios yet without good patronage from the general public. Buhari states that, part of the problem here is the absence of a structure of funding artists and art programmes, defined guidelines that one can apply to. However, inspite of all of these numerous challenges, progress is being made considering the recent auction sales in and outside Nigeria of Nigerian artworks .

Auction houses are recording good sales whether by public or private bidding with prices of art pieces going beyond market speculations and expectations. The year 2014/2015 witnessed most of these record breaking prices. Some selected works of certain artists are used here to represent the art market tempo, starting with Nigeria.

Osae-Brown 2015, states that,

Interest in Nigerian art is taking a new turn as the May art auction organised by Arthouse Contemporary recorded a sale of N124, 834,000, with a total of 116 lots sold from Africa's most celebrated artists. For example, at the April 2014 auction, Bruce Onobrakpeya's 'Dance in the Bush,' sold at the hammer price of N3.65 million, while El Enatsui's untitled piece and Kolade Oshinowo's 'At the Party,' sold at N3.05 million and N2.2 million, as second and third highest sold works, respectively.

From the various reports on art sales by Osae-Brown, it reveals that Nigeria art has a great future taking part in global art market. Her write up brings to fore the economic potentials of art pieces in Nigeria. She quoted an auctioneer, Nana Sonoiki of Art House Contemporary Ltd, as saying, "we are not surprised at the outcome in 2014. There was high expectation, so we were not surprised at the result at all. In spite of its laudable growth, Sonoiki also said a lot of factors are affecting the explosive growth of the Nigerian art market in the country. 'Some of these factors are: the quality of works coming out of the country, the creativity of the artists has not improved greatly, and the poor state of the economy has also affected consumers' purchasing power. But largely, it has been a good growth.'

According to Osae-Brown, writing on the art market and art promotion posits that,

Nigerian contemporary art, a segment of cultural preservation, which began some years ago, was sustained in 2014. At the annual auction organised by Terra Kulture in April 2014, as many as 64 lots were sold at N38.5 million, which is also a decrease in income haul, compared to 60 lots that were sold at N47.4 million in 2013. Meanwhile, Terra Kulture had a 23 percent increase in 2013 sales, compared

to 2012 sales of N38.1 million. While Terra Kulture experienced a drop in sales, Arthouse Contemporary Ltd, made total sales of N186.29 million at its May and November 2014 auctions. At the 2013 edition of the Arthouse Contemporary Ltd auction, 82 percent of the lots were sold at N124.9 million, a 22.9 percent increase, compared to the 2012 figure of N101.6 million.

The potentials of visual arts cannot be under estimated in the generation of foreign exchange for the Nigerian economy going by the captured official recorded sales figures in auctions of about N1.186billion in eight years according to Osae-Brown. Many unrecorded sale figures within the same period can be estimated to be between N500millio-1billion. This kind of income is found not to be taxable since it is not properly coordinated nor made official.

Osae-Brown 2015, further reported that,

Some of the record sales of Nigerian artistes in London include: Ben Enwonwu's 'The Mirror sculptures' sold for £361,250 (N108.4 million) while El Anatsui's 'New World Map' sold for £541,250 (N162.4 million) . Yusuf Grillo's 'African woman with Gele', Uche Okeke's 'Motherhood' and Kolade Oshinowo's 'Sisters' sold for £80,500 (N24.2 million), £51,650 (N15.5 million) £43,250 (N13 million) respectively.

The art pieces below are from the foremost auction house in Nigeria, Arthouse Contemporary Ltd except the one by John Oyedemi. These works represent the development and worth of visual arts in Nigeria at the may, 2015 auction.



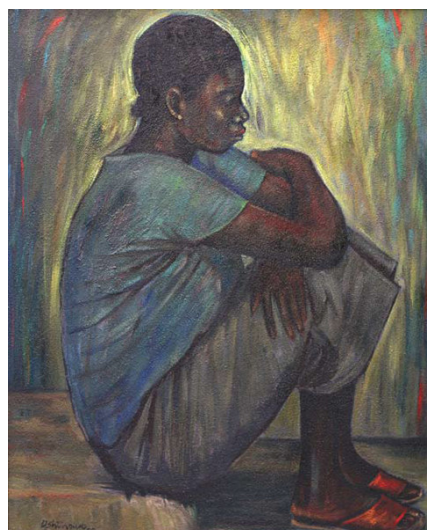
El-Anatsui(b.1944) ZATA 2015,Wood Panels. 109x258.5cm (43x101Inc)
Source: Arthouse Auction Catalogue, 2015



Bruce Onobrakpeya (b.1932) Sahelian Masquerade.metal foil on board 150x239cm (59x94Inc)
Source: Arthouse Auction Catalogue, 201



Yusuf Cameron (b.1934). Truly Hijab? 2011-2012. Oil on Board. 114.4x60cm (45x231/5Inc)
Source: Arthouse Auction Catalogue, 2015



Kolade Oshinowo (b.1948) Maid 2009 oil on canvas 111.8 x 91.4 cm. (44 x 36 Inc.)
source; <http://luxuryreporter.com.ng/2015/04/06/art-auctions-rake-in-n224-8m-in-2014/>



John Oyedemi, *The Woman I*, 2012, Oil on Canvas. 130 x 110cm
Source: Artist

One interesting thing to note is the happening outside Nigeria in the arts which can influence our art and make it a global player. Many promoters of arts in Nigeria are not resting on their oars in projecting Nigerian visual arts. Most art dealers take these works outside the shores of Nigeria for auctioning. What is not yet clear is whether the artists are involved or partake of a certain percentage of the proceeds that comes in through these sales. Sales from artworks from Christies' auctions have shown that so much is in the offing for the artists worldwide.

Izuzu 2015, states that Christie's made history Wednesday 14 May, 2015, by becoming the first auction house to cross the \$1 billion mark in art sales in just one week. Sedghi (2015), wrote on the 10 most expensive paintings ever sold at auctions, that a painting by Pablo Picasso has sold for \$179.4m, earning it a place on the top ten list of the most expensive paintings ever sold. A list first published in February this year, 2015, shows a piece of painting by Paul Gauguin became the most expensive painting to have ever been sold. This reveals the investment potentials of visual arts that can be tapped in Nigeria by Nigerians when properly exploited.

It is important to note how paintings could appreciate when Nigerians get involved in art collection as an investment. For example Timmons wrote in Quartz (2015) that Picasso's painting, *Les femmes d'Alger (Version 'O')*, 1955, was last sold in 1997 to the seller for \$31.9million and has appreciated by \$147.5million in the past 18 years. Also it reveals that the buyer was not disclosed, and the bidding for the auction—which contained a range of modern art masterpieces—was conducted entirely by telephone fetched \$179.4 million in a Christie's auction on Monday night in New York, the highest price ever paid for an artwork at an auction.



Pablo Picasso's 1955 painting *Les femmes d'Alger (Version 'O')*

source: <http://qz.com/402938/this-179-million-picasso-is-now-the-most-expensive-painting-ever-sold-at-auction/>
In February, 2015, it was also reported that a painting by Paul Gauguin (b.1848-1903), *Nafea Faa Ipoipo (When Will You Marry?)*, 1892, was bought for \$300m (£200m), making it the most expensive painting ever sold, at

auction or in a private sale. Reyburn and Carvajal (2015), states that Paul Gauguin painting of two Tahitian girls has been sold from a Swiss private collection for close to \$300 million, one of the highest prices believed to have been paid for an artwork, according to European and American art world insiders with knowledge of the matter. It is been speculated that the painting was bought by a Qatari buyer.



Gauguin's "Nafea Faa Ipoipo (When Will You Marry?)," from 1892, was sold by a collector in Switzerland in a private transaction. CreditArtothek/Associated Press

Many other paintings have attracted headlines in the media in the past like Sun flower 1889, by Vincent Van Gogh. Most importantly is the fact that many artists did not live to see their works appreciate in value with the exception of very few like Pablo Picasso and Willem de Kooning. Sedghi (2015), lists the sale of each painting based on the order of value in the May 2015 auction. Paul Cézanne (b.1889-1906), *The Card Players*, 1892/93 a post-impressionist art, was collected by the Qatari royal family from a private auction house in 2011 for a rumoured \$250m - adjusted for inflation figure of \$263.1m in today's money. Though the figures quoted by different writers are still not certain and seem conflicting but falls within the same range.

Jackson Pollock (b.1912-1956) an American painter, painting titled No.5 an 8'x4' fiberboard was sold for \$140million. Willem De Kooning (b.1904-1997) painting Woman III, 1953, 68x48.5 inches racked in a price tag of \$137.5 million. Gustav Klimt (b.1862-1918), a Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer 1907, 54x54 inch.oil, silver and gold was bought for \$135 million by Ronald Lauder in 2006 and it was displayed in his gallery, Neue Galerie in New York City. Edvard Munch (b.1863-1944), The Scream 1895, oil, tempera and pastel sold at an auction for \$120 million. Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Nude, Green Leaves and Bust, 1932 went for \$106.5 million. Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Boy with a Pipe, 1905. \$104.2million. Pablo Picasso (b.1881-1973), Dora Maar au Chat 1941, \$95.2million. Vincent van Gogh (b.1853-1890), Portrait of Dr.Gachet, 1890, 23.4x22inches. \$82.5million. Pierre-Auguste Renoir (b.1841-1919), Dance at the Moulin de la Galette, 1876. \$78.1million.

The total earnings from auctions in Nigeria in the last eight years only recorded about N1.8billion. This is very low when compared to \$1.5 billion of art sales in three days by Christies in New York. It is certain that there is no any product in Nigeria which can generate this amount in one year without engaging close to 50,000 workers and with an investment of far beyond \$10billion in estimation. It should also be noted that art speculators actually do lots of promotion propaganda whether privately or through the media to step up prices. When the prices of old master artists like Bruce Onabrakpeya, EL-Anatsui, Yusuf Grillo, Kolade Oshinowo, Dele Jegede, Gani Odutokun, Jerry Buhari, Jari Jacob, Sani Muazu Mohammed, Abiodun Olaku, Kunle Filani, Kunle Adeyemi, Victor Ekpou, Edosa Oguigo, Duke Asidere, Kunle Ajayi, Sam Ovrity and other young artists, Wale Ajayi, Ayesan Segun, Diseye Tantua, John Oyedemi, Bimbo Adenugba, Fidelis Odogwu, Adekusibe Odunfa and many others are stepped up, before most younger artists will begin to grow. This is because the level of appreciation of art pieces are making them items of great value with minimal investment in most cases but with future returns.

Conclusion

It is pertinent to state that visual arts have great potentials in generating economic activity in any community. Therefore, localizing art activities within our Nigerian communities can bring about the desired growth for sustainable development.

Murray (2011) posit among others:

1. Arts and cultural activities can draw crowds from within and around the community. Increasing the number of

visitors as well as enhancing resident participation helps build economic and social capital.

2. Planners can make deliberate connections between the arts and culture sector and other sectors, such as tourism and manufacturing, to improve economic outcomes by capitalizing on local assets

The capacity to promote our comparative advantage is what is lacking because of the inability to see how wealth can be created through visual arts. All visual arts graduates cannot be found to practice art, but can work to see it as a sector that requires a division of labour to function. Every artist should locate where they can fit in the promotion, opening galleries, packaging for exhibition, framing, selling art materials and many other areas. A private economy can be developed in visual arts outside of oil to take Nigeria to the next level. The gross earnings from visual arts can be harnessed to boost economic activities that could create more jobs.

Recommendation

It is the position of this paper to recommend as follows;

1. Visual artists should be encouraged by way of creating an enabling environment for art practices to thrive through sponsorships of exhibitions by private and corporate organizations.
2. Art festivals should be organized on yearly basis to attract the attention of galleries from around the globe.
3. Artists should package their works to meet internationally acceptable standards
4. Buyer education is necessary to make a one time buyer a life time collector of art pieces.
5. The teaching of business of art should be encouraged in our all art colleges.
Art communities should identify areas of their strength in art making and encourage it.

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