

Art is Everything and Nothing, in an Artistically Uninformed Nigerian Society.

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Abstract

Art is everything and therefore life, because life imitates art and art, life. Art fastens itself inseparably to every aspect of human project and lifestyle. But, it is highly unfortunate that in Nigerian society, the 95% of Nigerians are still very much ignorant of the roles, functions and contributions of art in their everyday lives and nation building, when it is still the same art that forms the integral parts of life, both in traditional and modern settings. This paper, therefore, sets to buttress more and make it very clear that art is everything and has been regarded as nothing and worthless in an artistically uninformed Nigerian society. It simply exposed the captivity held on to and the highly insipid and insinuating opinions on art by this 95% artistically uninformed Nigerian society. Also, in this paper, efforts were made to highlight how art permeates the entire Nigerian society. But, whether regarded or not, it is still art that shapes the Nigerian society in its entirety because of the very vital roles it plays in religion, politics, education, print media, tourism, advertising, social arena, therapy, carnivals, culture, architecture, commerce, textiles to mention a few. Art is everywhere and is long and it is through the longevity of art that the shortness of life is extended.

Keyword: Art, Everything, Nothing and Uninformed Nigerian Society.

1. Introduction

The Bible makes us know in the book of Genesis that God made all things by spoken words and that, He made man with sand and therefore breathe the breath of life into it and it became a living being. What is deducible here is that God Almighty is the first artist, having made man in his own image, and man has become second to God in creation.

Art is innate in man, and according to Ola Oloidi (2011: 63) all who produced works that became some of the greatest wonders of the world were practical men with creative sense and, those specially endowed with creativity have according to the *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* “common sense, creativity, great energy and design power” and are known as and called artists. These artists, both traditional, and modern (those that are formally trained) are responsible for the design of all kinds that sustain the society namely; the cloths we put on, lather trappings, sculptural pieces that adorn our homes, streets and in churches and traditional settings for religious worships. Others are stool, staffs, musical instruments, masquerade costumes and headdress, kitchen utensils, ceramic pots and cups (for storing water and as well for drinking water and wine), wall and canvas paintings and all product designs, sign posts, bill boards, labels, posters, cartoons, cards, banners, labels, logo, and so on. Other aspects of art in their various categories according to Chike Aniakor involve carved calabashes, horse ladder trappings, metal and brass bowls, bracelets, rings, pendants, coral beads, ivory, bands and anklets, pots, hair pins, comb, leader shoes, sandals, seats, men’s costumes and weaving apparels, (both traditional and those sewn by fashion houses), and currency. Visual arts in a broader sense according to Aniakor (2000:151),

is broken down into sculpture in wood, bronze, brass, and other forms of metal and ivory; textile which consist of women and men cloths, woven, and resist-dye cloths or batik, other varieties based on the appliqué technique and other modes of production; crafts of considerable type and variety of such as leather work, vix: sandals, seats, horse trappings; carved bowl, etc.

Having come thus far, we shall however define the major areas of art in modern terms so as to have a firm grasp of and understand better in other to drive home our points. **Painting** is the use of colours to produce pictures and these pictures could come in abstract or realistic forms. They serve and perform certain functions in the decoration of our homes, hotels, churches; they are used as visual aids in books by way of illustrations for easier comprehension. They also serve as visual documentation of history in museums. **Sculpture** involves the use of wood, sand and cement, fiberglass, plaster of Paris, among other things to create works of art that serve

for both functional and utilitarian purposes. **Textiles** involve the use of yarn, fiber and cottons to produce curtains, rugs, carpets, cloths for the covering of human beings, decoration and so on. **Graphics** covers the area of visual communications – posters, bill boards, banners, greeting cards, labeling, crests, packaging, typography, illustrating, cartooning, animations, and so on. **Ceramics** is the use of clay and glaze for the production of wares like cups, jugs, mugs, plaques, pots, tiles, among others which is usually fired in the kiln, and they are very useful in our in our homes.

From the foregoing, it is very clear and undoubtedly, that art cuts across every aspects of human lives. But it is very unfortunate, that upon all these designs and works of art from artists, that are part and parcel and the main fabrics of our existence, the 95% of the Nigerian society still regard art as nothing. It is rather very unfortunate that “art is ... strapped to the back seat in the scheme of things, to borrow from Ikwemesi (2002:137).

2. Art Playing Vital Roles in Nigerian Society

One of the most powerful tools of development in modern society is art. Art has fastened itself inseparably to every aspect of human project and lifestyle.³ To support this assertion, the important role of art has been with man from time immemorial... (Ajidahun, 1988). All over the globe particularly in Nigeria society, art plays numerous roles. They are religious, political, therapeutic, aesthetic, economic, ritual, psychological, entertainment roles, to mention a few.

For example, in religion, art is very important and useful that it is impossible to do without and cannot be separated in worships. In our modern churches today most especially the Catholic Church, statues and images of Christ, virgin Maria, other saints, and other paraphernalia alike are conspicuously seen. The church relies heavily on visual images for the purpose of helping to explain some spiritual meanings. In the traditional worship, the images represent the gods who cannot be seen with ordinary eyes by mere mortals. They are regarded as the strange forces and as such are appeased through these images made by artist. In social arena, art plays important roles in marriage, child-naming, yam festivals, coronation, masquerading, and title taking, and so on. Mask being the most popular art objects are used to change the atmosphere that is tensed up by its appearance. The colours and the design of the costume by artist are usually highly aesthetical. The silk-linen fabrics decoration of different colours beautifies wedding reception hall and arena, churches, halls, and other places and is highly the vogue. Art heals in three different ways - naturally, psychologically and spiritually. Take for instance, in psychiatric hospital; works of art of different types are used in making the mentally derailed ones to stop wondering in imaginations. By teaching them and as well making them engage in art production, naturally helps for their emotional stability.

In mass communication, art plays an important role. Newspaper designs, magazine and texts are aspects of art. Come to talk of films that involve moving images. What about the drawings and photographs. They are aspects of art that enhance the media. In tourism, art is the ultimate for it entails metal working, wood carving, and raffia weaving. And it is from them that objects like raffia bags, mats, woven dolls, bronze objects, masks, bronze plaques, coral beads, carved ivory tusks, and many other art objects are produced. Culturally, art has become that “head that is seen and the cap is being made”. Consider *Eyo Festival*, *Mmanwu*, *Iri ji Festivals*, *Carnivals*, *Argungu Fishing Festival*, *Durba* and other festivals in Nigeria. Ikwemesi and Agbo (2012:408) while citing Abimbola (2003:34) consider these cultural festivals and carnivals as hybrids of painting, textiles, and sculpture on one hand and performance on the other hand. For them, it is art that gives culture visual representation. Architecture according to Aniakor (2012:359) is a social art and index for economic growth and development. In his essay “Architecture as a Social Art and Index for Economic Growth and Development”, he tells us that architecture as a special discipline is regarded as art which associates with function, form, and structure. He further tells us that it is concerned with the expression of forms through space definition because creativity and aesthetics to him are fundamentals to architecture. He caps it with this: “architecture has become a social metaphor of man’s productive system, the application of art and technology within the building process, as the built or planned environment”. Architecture as a built and planned environment is central social institution and the mother of arts.

Art is the backbone in the learning process. The visual aids, as in illustrations in books make for easier understanding of what is being studied. Do you know that in commerce, art is the main pendulum on which production and marketing of products swing? Without artistic packaging of these products, their attractions to customers will be very low and thereby affecting the marketing of the products completely if not entirely. The saying that art is long and life is short and that it is the longevity of art that is used in extending the brevity of life is true, because portraits and bursts have been made of Jesus the Christ, saints, men of timber and calibers that have left legacies in history. So if not art, one wonders how it would have looked like. It is still the same art that events in historic and spiritual books like the holy Bible and so on are described visually. In the game of football,

coaches use drawings to make players understand faster the kind of pattern and formation to be played in a particular march.

2.2. And yet!

Upon all these and many other functions of art in the Nigeria society, it is very unfortunate that art is being made less important than it really supposed to be and has been taken for granted by the artistically uninformed Nigerian society regardless of the obvious facts that it has the enormous capacity to developing the society. Ikwuemesi and Agbo (2012:408) writing on art, society and the politics of development in Nigeria, aptly capture the true situation of art in Nigeria society when they lament that, “in spite of all the evidences of what art can do and has done in society; it can be argued that in Nigeria, it is not well received by majority of the population. In fact, there is psychological and physical separation of art from daily national life...”

3. The way forward

The reversal of the uninspiring reality in the art scene may depend on more fructifying concert between the artists and other factors in the society. It may also presuppose a new attitude that would demonstrate ample appreciation of the meaning, role, and significance of art, not just by the artist, but also by the government and public at large. (Ikwuemesi, 2002:142). Art should be properly introduced and run in all Nigerian public and private schools from primary, secondary levels, through higher institutions of learning so as to enhance much awareness and also bring about national development. In this way Nigerian ignorantly uninformed society would be informed artistically. Parents should also allow and encourage their wards to choose careers in art. Artists on their own parts should make bold to always talk about the importance of art where ever they are instead of shying. Without adequate propagation and dissemination system, the roles and functions of art to the society will continue to be everything and nothing in an artistically uninformed Nigerian society.

4. Conclusion

The focus of this paper is straight, clear and quite understandable. Its focus is on those vital roles and functions that art play in Nigeria society. These roles and functions are found in the very center of the so many facets of human endeavor, be they in politics, religion, fashion, education, communication, architecture, culture, tourism, and the environment in general.

Quite unfortunately, though, the same art that is the back bone, life force, and the main fabrics of our collective being is being regarded as nothing by the artistically uninformed Nigerian society because of the “synthetic or artificial compendium of people’s concept of art” (Oloidi, 2011: 44).

Notes

1. Krydz Ikwuemesi (2002) in his essay, “Living in the Deep: Problems of Propagating Art in Africa”, in *Changing Attitudes*, published by the Pan-African Circle of Artists is of the view that in Africa, therefore... art has become everything and nothing.
2. The phrase that completes the title of the inaugural lecture of the University of Nigeria, delivered on April 28, 2011 by Ola Oloidi, a professor of Art History and Criticism, is used by the present writer to complete his own title’s sentences as well.
3. See Chris Echeta (2011). “The Indelible Experience at CRUTECH”, in *Indelible* art exhibition catalogue by the Visual Art and Technology Students’ Association on 17 – 22 December, 2011.

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