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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF VISUAL ARTS WITH HUMAN ENVIRONMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the impact of visual arts and human activities in his environments. It discussed areas such as ceramic industry, textile industry, graphic industry, education, photography and crafts to mentions but a few where visual arts have played and are still playing vital roles in human and national development. However, the paper discusses the significant roles which visual arts play to achieve the needed development to humanity. This paper which is based on functionalist, theoretical framework views art works as playing significant roles in the society. It concluded by stating that art is a human activity aimed at helping man to face the challenges in his environment. It recommended that visual arts remain compulsory as core subject from primary school to tertiary levels as obtained in the educational system.

KEYWORDS: *Significance, Visual Arts, Development.*

INTRODUCTION

Art means different things to different people. They define it based on their personal experience. Visual arts as used in this paper represent those expression from the artist who can be perceived through human optical activities such as touch, emotion and others which tend to affect aesthetic judgment, Ikwuegbu (2012). However, Art, product of creative's in human activity in which materials are shaped or selected to convey an idea, emotion, or visually interesting form. The word art can refer to visual arts, including painting, sculpture, architecture,

photography, decorative arts, crafts and other visual works that combine material or forms. We also use the word art in a more general sense to encompass other forms of creative activity, such as "the drama, dance and music or even to describe skill in almost any activity such as "the art of bread making" or the art of travel."

So, Visual art fall under creative arts and can be sub- divided into fine and applied arts (or industrial arts). They include: ceramics, painting, drawing, sculpture and photographic design, textile design, architecture and photography. We also have theoretical

areas of visual art namely: art education, art history and art appreciation and aesthetics.

The key term in the definition of visual arts according to Katz (2011) is “perception” which convey in us, the ability to recognize and understand things we experience in our environment through sensory awareness, especially of sight and touch”. Visual arts are creative activities on which the human and national development stands. They are human activities aimed at helping man face the challenges in his environment. Eze (2007) while emphasizing the view of Folarin said that, Art is an awesomely versatile site of human creative engagements. These creative activities according to Eze (2007) “are indeed capable of inculcating values, skills, abilities and competencies that will promote the physical well being and psychological health of an individual as well as resulting in creating gainful employment and opportunities for financial rewards for the artists”.

Within the context of all human activity in his environment, art expresses the way people reveal and share their most important values, beliefs, concerns, profound thought and emotions, Ecoma (2011).

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to find out:

1. The extent in which visual arts contributed towards human and national development
2. The role which visual arts play in Nigeria society
3. The ways visual arts are related to human environment

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent has visual arts contributed towards human and national development?
2. What role does visual art play in Nigeria society?
3. In what ways are visual arts related to human environment?

The purpose of this paper is premised on providing answers to the above questions. Macropaedia (2003) describes economic development as, the simple process whereby, low-income national economies are transformed into modern industrial economies. In continuation it points out that, the term is sometimes synonymous with economic growth, and describes change in a country’s economy involving qualitative as well as quantitative improvements. From the above, it is understood that all economies are ambitious, and that they desire the progression from mere simple low-income to improved, Industrialised, with qualitative and quantitative economic growth

ART AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Art in all ages had aided in the development of mankind. Before examining the role art play in

human and national development, it is important to understand what development is. Development is inevitable to human life because no human being can afford to be static in every respect. Amucheazi (2006) sees development as “multi-dimensional process involving the totality of man in his political, economic, psychological, social relations among others”. Human and national development would therefore involve human and nations’ strive for improvement in every endeavour over the years and adopting different strategies in the process.

Development starts from childhood. Ikegwuonu (2011) citing Leonard observed that development of skilled creative spirit of the highest order is one of the paramount objectives of art. The International Labour Organization (ILO), views development in terms of basic human needs. According to Ecoma (2011) “development in human society is a many sided process, at the individual level, it implies skill and capacity, freedom, creativity, material well being and at the societal level, it implies the capacity to regulate both internal and external relations”. development and art has a major role to play in all its ramifications be it mental and academic, cultural or economic, technological, religious and moral, scientific, social and cultural to mention but a few.

Art has fulfilled many different roles right from the development of human intellect in tool making; designing of concepts in virtually every structure and objects found in our environment. In other words, before any invention is made the first form of interpretation is through drawing, painting or any other form of visual art. It is interesting to note that despite heavy reliance on mechanical recording such as photograph, video, cinema, television and a host of others as means of presenting events, art still occupy a central position in filtering visual appearance in all these areas.

However, without visual arts, we would have no idea of what people from the past looked like hence; art provides us with visual images that can be preserved for historical references. Before the invention of cinema and printing press in early 19th century, artists kept records through drawing painting, pottery, textile, sculptures etc. Art has the capacity to enlighten and inform; it says something about continuity and change. All aspects of visual arts are the Mirrors through which human and national developments are viewed for instance; ceramics could be used in exposing the child to the use of materials and tools

VISUAL ARTS AND THE SOCIETAL CULTURE

Visual arts play very vibrant roles in all facets of human environment,. It contributes a lot in projecting the people's culture as it mirrors the life style of the people. Culture is used to describe a people's way of life. Culture therefore includes the people's language, their political and social organization, their beliefs and religion, their literature and arts

Anyanwu (2011) observed that: *“Culture encompasses all human efforts, achievements and attitudes. It manifests in religion, language, philosophy, music, dance, drama, architecture, political organization, technology, education, values, knowledge system, social system, judicial or legal organization morality and a host of others”*.

Culture is that which identifies a people. Culture basically is grouped into two namely: material culture and non material culture. The material aspect of culture has to do with artifacts (namely tools, clothing, food, medicine, utensils, and housing, among others. On the other hand, non-material culture is concerned with values, norms and moral ethics of a people. These include material, traditions, beliefs, language, manner of greetings and dressing styles for men, women and children.

Art plays a unifying role in bringing the various ethnic groups into a single national entity thereby encouraging a sense of national allegiance, national consciousness providing young people with an authentic learning experience that engage their minds and bodies. The arts transform the environment for learning. Thus, visuals assist individuals to generate ideas, to bring ideas to life, and to communicate them in work places.

Through visual arts, children learn their languages faster. Generally, children learn about their environment through visual communication which their mother interpret their meanings. Children from infancy appear to understand faster through visual learning. Ekeada (2007) notes that, “Children at early stage of life are naturally endowed with skills but they tend to lose it at school because of discouragement from their teachers or parents.” No doubt then that they scribble early on the walls, floor and ground as to express their ideas and feelings about the world. We can see that it is inborn by observing children who make pictures, sculptures and model buildings before learning to read or write. Thus, Nwaugha (2005) remarks that “we cannot effectively teach the pupils with only words, these pupils are too small to express their feelings, so, they learn and understand faster and better with visuals or objects they can see, touch or

hear its sound. This in effect helps the children to remember faster what they are taught in school and at home as well as promote their languages and cultural identification in Nigeria.

Visual arts play important, roles in displaying posters, bill boards adverts for important information effectively and vividly. The space and computer technology is generating a visual culture that thrives on new ideas, new ways of doing things, new areas of explorations and experimentations very much the same way in which art is constantly seeking for new and identities. Visual arts convey the cultural occupation of the society including carving, pottery, crafts, weaving and architectural designs, to mention but a few. According to Brain as cited in Ecoma (2011) visual arts can also be used to determine cultural values, beliefs, taboos, norms and geographical features of any ethnic group.

Ecoma (2011) says: *“The choice of symbols and signs on the calabash, reflect the passionate care with which the Fulani have worked out their relationship with nature and the universe. They reflect their ideas of God, family, fertility, social rank, milk, cattle, water and track's with God, water and milk as the predominant symbol”*.

The Fulani delicate and simple calabash carvings reflect their simple and pastoral life, and love for milk and water, the peculiar cultural style of hair plating especially among the Fulanis, Hausas, and Igbos in Nigeria are widely spreading through artistic sculptural manipulation, and is also a way of identifying culture. Brain (2006) observed that, “Their hairs are coaxed and teased in fantastic shapes, plaited, padded, held back with comb”.

Visual arts represent a means of communication and are essential in the education of both the young and the old. Visual arts impact on the learner by providing young people with an authentic learning experience that engaged their minds and bodies. The arts transform the environment for learning. Thus, visuals arts, assist individuals to generate ideas, to bring ideas to life, and to communicate them in work places.

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VISUAL ARTS AND EDUCATION

Visual arts performs significant roles in the education sector as it exposes the child to the use of tools and instructional materials which is rooted in visual art, right from the first cave dwellers who drew on the walls of their caves. Onyejemezi (1996) states that meaningful learning takes place when the learner is fully involved in the process through the use of well prepared instructional media. This gives the learner the opportunity of experiencing as he/she observes, hears or listens, touches or manipulates things, carried out some experiments or interacts with some concrete objects and situations. According to Okere (2011) through the use of interesting visuals, educators can ‘inject’ into scholars, the vitality and zeal to learn. Besides he, continues, it will lessen the severity of learning processes. Hence, he asserts that: device is to serve as a more concrete referent to learning than spoken or written word. Words are arbitrary symbolize. They don’t look or sound usually like the things they represent.

Supporting the above view, Broekhuizen (1995) contents that visual arts help to educate the illiterate masses how to prevent certain diseases such as HIV (Human Immune deficiency virus, diabetes, malaria and a host of others. He contends that “because these people cannot read, write or understand English language, it is helpful to translate what we have to say into pictures”.

Art education programmes in Nigerian higher institutions of learning are designed to provide intellectual background for general education as well as tailored towards manpower development in specialized practical skills, acquisition of relevant skill for creating value or applied, industrial, commercial, cultural or aesthetic and social development purposes. The philosophy of the art education programme is

geared towards construction, selectivity, creativity, organization and order, which emphasize the value of “making” as a knowledge process. The Nigerian artists are trained to be technical, professional and self-reliant which enhances self-employment, vibrancy in the labour market as well as creates employment opportunities.

VISUAL ARTS AND RELIGION

Visual art performs vital roles in religious worships in the society. The Christians of the Renaissance period interpreted religious matters symbolically through visual forms. For example, dove represented peace, lamb as Jesus Christ; apple as evil, blood as life or soul and palm as triumph over death.

The use of visual art for religious purposes started earlier than the 16th century when Michelangelo (1475-1564) was commissioned to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel by Juliana II. The ceiling, which covered about 5800 square feet and a long corridor were covered with paintings numbering about 300 figures drawn from the theme “the creation, fall and redemption of man”. These sceneries, which provoke some inspiration to ardent Christians in our contemporary period, are seen in various, churches around us. We can see some sculpture pieces of the crucifix, the last supper, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the shepherds, the three wise men and a host of others in our churches today. Hence, the use of art to project religion is not a new idea.

Basically, the function of African traditional art was for the worship of the gods and ancestors. It served as a mediator between the living, the ancestors and the gods

VISUAL ARTS AND ECONOMICS

From the prehistoric time to the modern period, artists have created, myriad of interesting art works, and designs used for different purposes. The objectives of engaging in such activities were often inspired by the need to express themselves. These creative activities have led to creative experiences resulting in creating gainful employment and opportunities for financial rewards to the artists.

This human endeavour “visual arts” can be used to enrich an individual and the environment where it is practiced, the community and the society at large. Art techniques and processes are technically applied to reflect human achievements, needs and feelings. According to Eze (2011) “most people are now becoming aware about the relevant of the discipline in manpower development. For example, many nongovernmental organizations have incorporated Fine and Applied Art as aspect of their entrepreneurship”.

In Nigeria, Mbari, Ife, Igbo ukwu and Yoruba arts are other classes of art and design used as creative

traditional enterprises for tourist attractions and fund raising. Tourists buy Nigerian arts as gifts to their loved ones thereby, increasing the economic growth of the nation.

THE PRACTICING ARTS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRODUCT DESIGN:

From antiquities, we are informed, the artist is an inventor, a product designer and a producer of novel ideas in theory and practice. In today's free market the creativity of the artist is adequately exploited by the industrialists. The products are fashioned with the intention to appeal to the public sense of beauty. One of the early renaissance artists, Leonardo da Vinci is known for his prodigious designs, from architecture to aviation, (Bacc1978). Today, the artistic and intellectual capabilities of the artist are adopted for the manufacture of variety of products, such as cars, aircrafts, ships, as well as household objects. Many industrial and manufacturing companies have design/creative departments, where creativity flows to impact on the company. The automobiles are seemingly devoid of popular aesthetic form, or artistry, its popularity is more of utility than aesthetics. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the artists' visual impression begets the engineers and technicians ingenuity. That notwithstanding, the aestheticians craft cannot be avoided when one views the interior.

Children enjoy playing with clay which is plastic in nature, Konkwo (2012) observes that working with clay enable children of all ages to be aware of it and understand three dimensions as forms that have length, width and depth. Konkwo (2012), postulates that ceramic art should prepare pupils for manual industry. Sculpture could also be used in recording an invent, an aspect of it in the form of sculpture in the round or relief sculpture. Painting can achieve the same purpose in a pictorial form. The same event could be advertised in graphics using posters, billboards. Textile designers/artists can produce any type of fabrics relative for any purpose in a pictorial form.

According to Nwabuike (2010); *“These materials could be woven in a particular fashion desired by the people”. Most important events in the church, political parties and a host of others have specific fabrics designed for them, hence; we find dresses bearing the figures of certain people living or dead which they want to celebrate. All these make the human develop creatively and also learn about the past”*.

Adams (2001) cited by Charles and Anselem (2014) opines that “we study the arts and their history because

they teach us about our own creative expressions and those of our past”

Visual arts gives tangible form to feelings, which convey the artists own feelings as expressed in two or three dimensional medium. According to Ecoma (2011) the feelings expressed in works of art are shared by humanity; it may be emotions of love, hate, despair, fear, anger, among others. When we participate in the emotions evoked by a work of art, we are sharing our experiences with the artist and others who feel the same way.

The benefits of visual arts in human development which translates to national development cannot be over-emphasized. Art which is as old as man was acquired by man the day he was born. Since then art has been helping man to solve his numerous problems and that of his surroundings. Supporting this view, Obizue (2006) said “Art encompasses every human endeavour. It includes everything we do in life”.

Man had always had problems in his efforts to survive his environment and this led to the discoveries and exhibition of skills of making tools and drawing in their cares which led to the beginning of visual arts. Egornu et al (2011) citing Frank wrote, “the making of these tools enabled our predecessors to extend their skills and thereby gain a measure of control over their surroundings. Supporting this view, Anubobi (2011) citing Obizue wrote thus: The early man noticed their finger prints on their caves where they lived, they started imitating such in drawing. That is why drawing is seen as the first practical form of art known to man

Konkwo (2012), observed that human being developed the ability to reason and visualize and the development of hands, capable of making those images set us apart from other animals”

Visual arts have provided people with opportunities to use their imagination to create multiple solutions to problems. All human endeavours are known as art and man cannot succeed in the world without art.

From the foregoing, it is deducible that art can be seen in all spheres of life and is necessary for human development either as creative expression or as cultural, religious or moral, economic, social, political and societal growth to mention but a few.

VISUAL ARTS AND CRAFTS

Visual Arts cannot be separated from crafts. The traditional system could not have made substantial development without input from the crafts. Artifacts such as woven textiles, ropes, diggers, hoes, pots, knives, fans, pottery, carved architectural doors, cane chairs, beds, trays and a host of others contribute to the economic well being of the Nigeria society

ART AND AESTHETICS

Visual art develops man's sense of beauty by training one to appreciate the importance of harmony and beauty in both objects and society. According to Idiong (2000) "one can also see artistic ideas used aesthetically in designing the entire nation in architectural designs, erection of monuments and status, arrangement of ornamental trees in appropriate locations, designs of wares, furniture, clothing and utensils. Buttressing the above Obizue (2006) highlights that "Dr. Ekeada contributed immensely to the beautification of Owerri metropolis with sculptural pieces." These aesthetic developments might not be unconnected to the declaration of Owerri as the cleanest state capital in Nigeria, during the Babangida administration.

In this era of industrialization, one observes that technology must not be devoid of aesthetics. For instance, a technician or cabinet maker will only reach the aesthetic value if only he employs a sense of balance, beauty and ugliness. He has the ability to arrange a living room and its environments to meet interior standards. He also knows what fits where and what must be kept or removed in a space. Positively Nigerians have made a great stride in her artistic development through aesthetics.

Today, art works because of their aesthetic value attract tourists to the country. By such interaction, they migrate from one area to another to view beautiful landscapes and environments. These landmarks educate people and unite Nigeria as a country. It therefore implies that art can be used to improve the aesthetic quality of an environment. Art is an environmental friendly product(s) that give(s) an intrinsic perceptual appeal to the viewer.

It must be noted that the modern African artist not only worked in pictorial and plastic forms, he/she also designs and beautifies his society through his artistic contributions to the environment. He/she sees periodic art exhibitions as an indispensable platform from which his/her art can speak to his environment. In support of this view, Azikwe in Osita (2012) asserted that "No modern society can develop industrially or meaningfully without art".

Pottery/ceramics, to mention but a few are other areas of visual arts used in the beautification of the environment to men. Pottery/ceramic pots are used to decorate the environment by planting beautiful flowers on them and placing them in strategic places to attract the attention of their beholders. It is an important aspect of visual art that could be used to improve upon the standard of a given environment economically, domestically and aesthetically.

The same is applicable to architecture, graphics, illustration, painting and graphics. These are all part of visual arts that contribute immensely to the development of one's environment. The functional roles of these areas of endeavour cannot be over emphasized. From the aforesaid, it is the writers view that any environment or society without these areas of visual arts is like a tree without a root.

CONCLUSION

The problems with a fresh outlook, with innovation, creativity and knowledge in Nigerian economy has waited too long for the needed diversification and improvement of the natural resources and harnessing the inherent talents of the citizens (human resources), in order to put into proper utilization for sustainable development.

The Arts is nature's heritage, a gift and talent that have made the people unique and sophisticated. The combination of the two resources can no doubt be a strong factor in modern economy. Micropaedia to the nation (2003), points out the factors of unemployment of which the visual arts address. The universal language of art can cross barriers and boundaries, thereby bringing Nigerians of diverse ethnic background together in order to promote greater understanding of one another.

Visual art is important in foreign relations as an instrument of cultural diplomacy. Nigeria's artistic heritage and contemporary visual culture are sometimes shown overseas. "The artist is a sea and a prophet, through his arts, he makes available both truth and mode of existence that are essential to human being within state of the federation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Due to the value of visual arts aforementioned one would realized that arts spread is tentacle to all subject taught in the school system and visual arts should also be made compulsory since it serve as a core subject from primary, junior secondary levels
2. Government should encourage the students of fine arts through scholarship scheme at all level.
3. The museum and galleries should be encourage to help the students familiarizes them self with the important of antiquities excavated for national development and those already in existence should be made to be functional. Also our society should be educated about the importance of arts.

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