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# Visual Arts Culture as Indispensable Phenomena for Sustainable National Development

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Visual arts - Painting, Architecture, Graphics, Sculpture, Ceramics, Textiles designs, Photography and others are important phenomena in the development of advanced nations today. This is contrary to Nigeria situation where emphasis is shifted from realities to certificate and certification against the backdrop of skill acquisition, which could inspire sustainable growth and innovative technology. The study therefore, situates visual arts culture as indispensable phenomena that may trigger sustainable development, and calls for decolonization, deconstruction, reconstruction, restructure, de-emphasis, recomposition, and or decomposition of colonial administrators' mentality and system of education which appears inimical, consequently, dwarfed and crippled Nigeria's education and mentality, amounting to retrogression, epileptic, corona virusism as well as human capacity deficiency syndromes, thereby systematically, paving way to economic woes, chaos and anarchy in Nigeria social system. The study considers education as a huge process of effecting a desirable change in behavior and skill of man, helping him face the challenges and improvement of man and the society. Visual arts, not certificate acquisition position and promote the right values, skills and creative driven orientation that could restore the dignity of man and society. Little or no comprehensive studies may have been done in this direction, hence the research. Primary and secondary sources of data collation, including participant observations are employed to achieve the objectives of the study. Some of the findings include; visual arts provide avenues for creative exploration, self dependency, promotion of tourism and entrepreneurship, therapeutic, emotional and psychological comforts and others are achieved. These are followed by conclusion and recommendations.

**Keywords:** Visual arts culture, National Development.

## INTRODUCTION

Most often, in the contemporary Nigeria context, visual arts or Fine Arts as the case may be, are often times, mistaken for only drawing, sketching or painting. The study asserts that visual art goes beyond drawing and painting and every activity/activities of man aimed at expression of feeling, idea, concept (concrete or real) with the sole aim of aesthetically, appealing to the conscious and or subconscious state of man through the position of visual equilibrium. For

anything to be regarded as visual arts, there must be conscious or unconscious effort to communicate, convey, describe, illustrate, demonstrate ideas, concepts, feelings which must be appreciated or enjoyed through the sense of sight.

Therefore, every activity of mankind aimed at expression of feeling or ideas could be regarded as visual arts. Examples include Architecture, Painting, Sculpture, Graphics, Ceramics, Textile Designing,

Metal Construction, Assemblage, Upholstery, Found objects and others, and must be appreciated through the eyes. It is for this reason that it is often said that the "Artists see, while others look". The artists, architects, engineers, see beyond the ordinary eyes. They have the tenacity to create and recreate, structure and restructure and bringing into existence something anew. Examples, creation of novel situations, innovation, creativity, all these put together could inspire creative and innovative technology which in the long run could advance sustainable technology and development in the country.

Visual art culture if realistically and holistically embraced, provides a suitable platform for creativity, technology and entrepreneurial incubation which could reduce unemployment and catapult the individuals into job providers and not job seekers at the same time reduce poverty rate in the country. These, naturally, encourage and motivate development. However, development in this stance, goes beyond economic growth but involves situations in which people in a country have sufficient food, shelter, productive as well as income inequality among the people are significantly reduced. On this premise, Ikwuegbu (2010:143) citing Okereke and Ekpe (2002) assert that

*Development is more than just the acquisition of industries, but includes such ideals of modernization as rise in productivity, social and economic equalization, modern technical know-how, improved institutions and attitudes as well as rationally coordinated policy approaches.*

One may therefore, suggest that visual arts provides the much needed synergy and platform for sustainable development in the country. Visual arts helps to build and develop creativity, intellectual ability, emotional, psychological as well as cultural and physical development of man which help to equip him to overcome developmental challenges in the society. Society here goes more and bigger than one individual. It is for this reason that Morrish (1972:42) citing Marion Levy and others (1950) in a paper contributed to "Ethics" gave a more comprehensive and elaborate definition of society. They see society as

*A group of human beings sharing a self-sufficient system of action which is capable of existing longer than the life-span of an individual, the group being recruited at least in part by the sexual reproduction of its members.*

However, from the above definition, there are notable conditions which man must satisfy before they will be regarded or qualified to be a society. One of the basic conditions or criterion is "culture", which is a way a given society may be identified, recognized or differentiated from others. In the opinion of the study, culture is a total way of people's life which include their arts, religion, food, beliefs, customs, value system and

others which significantly differentiate them from other groups and or groups. In view of this, Ayakoroma (2011:5) sees CULTURE as 'the training and development of the mind; the refinement of taste, aesthetics, minds, arts, technology, and manners acquired by such training; the social and religious structures, intellectual and artistic manifestations and others that characterize a society.

In support of the above, the cultural policy of Nigeria (1985:5) states that "culture" is

*Totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in a given environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization, thus distinguishing a people from their neighbors.*

Again, the cultural policy of Nigeria (1988) further states that culture encompasses arts and other ways of life of a people that give meaning, values and order to the environment or society they live in.

The study shares the view that visual arts and society are inseparable phenomena that play significant and complementary roles to one another for effective co existence. However, visual arts may be used to promote and develop a society. Again, huge and monumental statement may be made of a society through visual arts. Visual arts may be used to transmit knowledge as well as the cultural values, norms and beliefs of the people.

The study is of the opinion that despite huge and wide range of relevance, potential and others, visual arts culture offer to the society, its attendant and numerous benefits which are neglected and relegated to the background in a society that is in dire need of growth, technology as well as development.

In Nigeria's situation, apart from looting, corruption, and abuse of human rights, particularly, children's right violation, any venture or enterprise that may galvanize industrialization, development, employment, entrepreneurship, poverty alleviation, are not given due attention except politics, hate speech, falsification of records and history, empowerment of Fulani herdsmen to kill and destroy agriculture, islamization of Nigeria and senseless and heartless killings of Christians and others, which have led to chaos, anarchy,, instability of the economy, retardation and retrogression of international investors and investment within Nigeria, thereby, increasing poverty, animosity, agitation, kidnapping, human and drug trafficking and other vices that have plagued Nigeria, which also have inadvertently, ruined the status and image of Nigeria within and outside to the extent that international communities look at Nigeria and Nigerians with disdain and dishonour. These have amounted to huge and monumental strategies which kill and ruin the country from significant growth and development till



**Figure 1:** Artist: Carol Gold  
 Title: Untitled  
 Medium: Bronze  
 Size:  
 Source: Pinterest.com



**Figure. 2:** Artist: Nnaji Henry  
 Title: Untitled  
 Medium: Pen and Ink on paper  
 Size:  
 Year: 2018



**Figure 3:** Artist: Nnaji Henry  
 Title: Untitled  
 Medium: Pen and ink on paper  
 Year: 2018



**Figure 4:** Artist: Adiele Obinna  
 Title: Untitled  
 Medium: Steel wires and rods  
 Year: 2019

date. One may be left to wonder, Nigeria with a population of about two hundred million and slightly above, could be held to ransom and stagnated with impunity, based on shortsightedness and planlessness.

It is the view of the study that Nigeria should have been one of the biggest countries in Africa and beyond if the needful is done. The country (Nigeria) should not have been left in the hands of disgruntled, myopic, self centered politicians, including visionless uneducated few, including self acclaimed Igbo elders from Southeastern Nigeria's' geopolitical zone, known as "Ohaneze Ndigbo" All these, and more have deterred growth and development of Nigeria - the assumed (Giant of Africa). In the quest to identify and proffer solutions to the socio-economic, cultural,

underdevelopment, religious, technological problems of the country, including creative and artistic problems which are indispensable phenomena to sustainable development in Nigeria: Roy - Omoni (2010:89) seems to support the opinion of the study that the problems of Nigeria are foundational and platform under the territory called Nigeria today is formed including the negative influence of the Britain. The colonial administrators who merely rejected visual arts and functional education in place of Bible to the Southern parts of Nigeria, particularly, the present day Southeastern Nigeria. Roy - Omoni (2010:89) in support of the study observes that it is no longer news that Africa, particularly Nigeria through the imperialist arrogance especially by the British was branded as a "dark continent" and a country. In his opinion, first, it

was the navigators and travelers to Africa, latter, political adventurers and missionaries, and much latter, the European writers. These verbal bullets shot at Africa by the foreign scholars were misrepresentations of Africa.

However, the contemporary attitude or behavior of Africans, particularly, politicians of Nigeria extraction with references to the contemporary "Ohaneze Ndigbo" or Igbo Elders, *Fulani* caliphate, *Oodua* Congress, *Arewa* Youths, *Niger Delta* Avengers and others have almost proven aright that Africa is a "dark continent" and Africans may not have the potential to reason beyond their nose and psychophansy, pathetically and catrosphically inimical to one another as well as religiously myopic and enslaved, mentally, educationally, creatively, technologically and artistically.



**Figure 5:** Artist: Victor U.  
Title: Untitled  
Medium: Oil on canvas  
Year: 2018

These assertions could be upheld as authentic and nothing but the holistic truth as exemplified by the primitive acquisition and looting of wealth by the present Nigeria politicians, Southeastern Nigeria examples. Further examples include where the politicians will primitively and animalistically loot and convert public funds running into billions of naira from 1999-2020 into the private pockets with impunity. The study observes that, no domestic or wild animals on earth could exhibit such primitive acquisition of food or materialism like African race/people or negro, particularly, Nigerian politicians who lack futuristic thinking, value driven orientation, desire to grow beyond now, intuition, empathy, sympathy and every other elements that could significantly usher in development and civilization to mankind

Examples of these ideas of Africa's ignorance, enslavement and inferiority as propagated by the Europeans are captured in George Henty's account in his book *By Sheer Pluck* as noted by Killam (1968:21) citing Roy-Omoni (2010:89) where George Henty observes that Africans are just like children...always either laughing or quarrelling. They are good-natural and passionate, indolent, but will work hard for a time; clever up to a certain point, densely stupid beyond. The intelligence of an average negro (black man) is about equal to that of European child of ten years old. They are absolutely without inventive power. Living among white men, their initiative faculties enable them to attain a considerable amount of civilization. Left alone with their own devices, they retrograde into a state little above native savagery.



**Figure 6:** Artist: Nnaji Henr  
Title: Untitled  
Medium: Oil on Canvas  
Year: 2010

The study is of the view that Africans, particularly, Nigerians within the political fold have eyes, yet lack sight. They merely have sense, yet cannot reason, they are endowed with potential, yet cannot grow,, they are gifted with natural, physical and human resources, yet cannot develop, surrounded with many academics and professors of note,, without integrity and could only be useful in aiding and manipulating election results through systematic bending and twisting the electoral system and process. Artistically great, yet lacks creativity to transform the environment aesthetically and technologically.

Given the same opportunity and environment animals would have done better than black race of Nigeria extraction. However, in self defense, Roy-Omoni (2010:90) observes that some African writers

expressed their anger when they decided to reply the foreign scholars and writers in an attempt to prove them wrong and unconvincingly, asserts that Africa, (especially Nigeria) was not a continent without culture and tradition as such, not inferior to their white counterparts who dwell more on positivism, pursue and project the concept of positivity to the later.

The study is of the view that in the wake of contemporary realities, Africa and Africans are beclouded with inferiority complex, falsehood, retrogression, visionless, anarchy, nepotism, selfishness, awkwardness, crude mentality, even when they are artistic; they are creatively and technologically blind. However, from early 1950's till date, some Nigerian writers of note have written extensively, in the bid to change the narratives since, then, Nigerian writers like Elechi Amadi, Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and others have written in an attempt to reestablish and rediscover new Nigerian cultural dignity. In view of this therefore, Achebe (1975:45) observes:

*African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans, their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, they had poetry and above all, they had dignity and self-respect. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost in the colonial period and it is this that they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self respect.*

Unfortunately, while these writers were theoretically striving to change the narratives, the Nollywood actors championed by Pete Edochie et al were practically acting and demonstrating to the world that black continent, particularly, Nigeria have no dignity to regain, again, portray Nigeria as a dark fetish, ritualistic, suitable for dead ancestors hence Africa as a continent is regarded as a cemetery (Burial grounds) where vultures devour and mourn the dead.

In the bid to proffer solution to the demoralizing and heartbroken African situation, notable writers contributed to the book *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* where Chinweizu (1980:3) et al try

*to help release African culture from the death-grip of the West and to liberate and decolonize Africa's literary culture, to systematically destroy all encrustations of colonial and slave mentality, to clear the bushes and stake out new foundations for a liberated African modernity.*

The study observes that the primitive imitation and adoption of European's ways of life and entire culture have led to complete fail of African growth and development, in fact, African civilization till date. Africa cannot discover and develop her potential rather gets enslaved and entangled with colonial and European mentality which have led and contributed to

inexplicable retrogression in development, knowledge, science and technology. However, in support of these views, Chinweizu *et al* (1980:3-4) observe and describe the imitation of European ways and culture by African scholars including the elites and visual artists as:

*the manufacture of a stiff, pale, anemic, academic poetry, slavishly imitative of 20th century European Modernism, with its weak precocity, ostentatious erudition, and dunghill piles of esotopia and obscure allusions, all totally cut off from the vital nourishment of our African traditions and home soil.*

Following the historical antecedents and the present day call, particularly, Nigeria, to decolonize African cultures with the views to streamlining, harmonizing, inculcating, possibly, enculturating the values to the younger generations. It is for this purpose, Uche Okeke and his group "Zaria Rebels" called for "synthesis" of ideas, concepts, culture of the European and Africa against the backdrop of taking and accepting line, hook and sinker the colonial administrators' mentality and ideology which are counterproductive in the present day realities of Nigeria situation - economically, socially, culturally, scientifically, educationally, technologically, and artistically. Everything seems wrong and uncoordinated.

The study, therefore, suggests, if Africa indeed, Nigeria could be a little bit disciplined and focused in rediscovery and recreating her cultural, value and educational system to reflect the needs and aspirations of Africa. These, to a considerable degree may synergize, enculturate, catapult Nigeria into economic, cultural, artistic, educational and technological advancement which visual arts is a common denominator to all the facet of manpower, industrial and technological development of the world.

Visual arts therefore, becomes creative and technological incubator through which man and society may advance. Visual arts again, becomes a route or channel through which new concepts, forms and creative ideologies may be elicited and transmitted to different people, places and times nationally and globally.

One may observe that the early colonial education in Nigeria did not de-emphasize the dignity and use of indigenous languages in Nigeria, however, they de-emphasized the application, the study and creation of visual arts throughout Nigeria. What the early colonial administrators at that time could not understand, as noted by Oloidi (2011:8-9) was the culturally unique, potent, and conceptually fertile nature of Nigerian traditional art. However, while the European artists believe in undistorted and photographic representation of ideas, Nigerian traditional artists believed in symbolization,

restructuring, reorganization and intellectual conceptualization of their subject matter. The Nigerian

artists believed in internalization - the inward essence of his subject.



**Figure 7:** Artist: Obadan Chris  
Title: Family II  
Medium: Metal  
Size: 135cm x 30cm  
Year: 2008



**Figure 8:** Artist: Carol Gold  
Title: Banjo  
Medium: Bronze  
Source: Pinterest.com



**Figure 9:** Artist: Chris Afuba  
Title: Mbo Agu (The Tiger Asleep)  
Medium: Wood and Metal  
Year: 2008

If Nigeria had been consistent with rationality and value driven, visual arts should have been bedrock of creativity, tourism, technology, aestheticism and industrial architecture in Africa and beyond. The study therefore recommends that, Nigeria should de-

emphasize oil and politics for creative ventures that may foster industrial development. Visual arts should be encouraged at nursery, primary and secondary education and beyond as this may create a creative drive and instinct for self dependency

and job creation thereby widening the scope of sustainable development, at the same time reducing poverty level, increasing economic power and development including restoration of human dignity.

Nigeria should adopt visual arts and creativity as developmental metaphor that could inspire entrepreneurship, tourism, job creation, technological incubator, aesthetic awareness, cultural and developmental architecture. Visual arts provides a suitable platform for abilities in disabilities. In most cases, people considered to be disabled are job providers for most able bodied job seekers, this they could achieve through effective exploration of creative potential endowed them by nature. Examples, they could achieve this significantly, through Painting, Graphics, Textile designing, Architecture, Music, Drama, Poetry and other creative and artistic enterprise.

Again, some people with mental, social, physical, psychological, emotional challenges may be helped to overcome by mere viewing the art pieces within and around the environment. It is on this note that the study further recommends that Nigeria should de-emphasize certificates and concentrate on acquisition of skills in her educational system and policies, as it is in the developed and advanced countries. Nigeria should be proactive and futuristic in consideration of visual arts culture as technical and indispensable platform for sustainable national development.

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