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Full Length Research

A.A. Ibiam in the History and Development of Modern Nigeria Art

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Abstract

The study tries to situate A.A. Ibiam as, fundamentally, successful pioneer and one of fathers of modern Nigeria Art from Southeastern Nigeria extraction. Historically, A.A. Ibiam represents what Aina Anabolu 1882-1963 still represents in Western region of Nigeria today. The study is significant as it brings into focus, huge contributions of A.A. Ibiam to the growth and development of modern Nigeria Art. Primary and secondary sources of data collation including unstructured interview are employed to achieve the objectives of the study. Some of A.A. Ibiam's notable scholars and their works are captured to reflect his effective contributions to humanity. Some of the findings include; A.A. Ibiam was successful as a Christian and visual Artist of note. He taught Fine and Applied Arts from 1964-1983 in different schools like chief-Aina Onabolu did. He rose to the position of Principal in Government secondary school, Owutu, Edda in the present Ebonyi state, Nigeria. The study is significantly carried out from three(3) perspectives – family Background, Education and Achievements / Contributions to humanity. This was followed by conclusion and possible recommendations for futuristic focus.

Keywords: A.A. Ibiam, Modern Nigerian Art, Art Education in Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION



History, apart from being the study of past events in national and global contexts. The study is of the view that history represents a global phenomenon that contributes

significantly to the growth and development of the society by situating the past historical events in relation to present realities for futuristic focus, thereby advancing science,

2. Int. J. Arts Humanit.

technology, environmental health challenges and management, hospitality, aesthetic awareness engineering as well as modern architecture. It is for these reasons that history is imperatively inclusive in the modern-day school curriculum; hence, there is a history of every academic discipline, such as the history of art, architecture, medicine, quantity surveying, technology, including sciences, and others.

The study shares the view that history is fundamental to effective modern human existence, as exemplified by crucial activities of early and cave men, including prehistoric men and the environment, which hitherto shape or direct the paths of growth and development in contemporary times, particularly on the global stage. Therefore, there may not be sustainable development in the modern day society without salient knowledge of the past (history) hence, the study. The importance of history, indeed, art history may not be overemphasised. For example, the art historical accounts gave rise to the establishment of the National Gallery of Modern Arts in Nigeria. This is crucial in the history of Nigeria's artistic growth and development ever recorded, starting from the Nok period through the Benin and Igbo-Ukwu civilisations to the present day, spanning over 3000 years.

However, it must be noted that from this moment, the desired abode for an effective insemination of Nigeria contemporary art and artists started over half a century ago to the benefit of Nigeria's economic and socio-cultural development. Muku (2009), in support of the study, asserts that the graduates of the art department of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (ABU), have continued without stop to excel in their various fields of endeavour; by this, they have successfully placed Nigeria and their university on the cultural map of the world, which, indeed, is an achievement to be recognised, of which A.A. Ibiam is and was not exempted from this success and glorious achievement. A.A. Ibiam and other graduates of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria's art culture and enterprise formed the bedrock of the present artistic potency and creative models that are being enjoyed by the recent crop of young and contemporary artists in recent times. However, A.A. Ibiam is and was an integral part of this success. It is this huge artistic distinction and illustrious achievements that motivate and inspire this documentation, indeed, the study.

Family background

A.A. Ibiam, as he was popularly called was born on 13th day of December 1928, in Aba, Abia State, to the family of Samuel Aka Ibiam (the interpreter) as he was generally called. Sadly, just barely one year after his birth, tragedy struck; he lost his father to the cold hands of death on 14th October, 1929. As a baby, little did he know what awaited him as he was feeding fat and juggling with the mother's breast for breastfeeding. So it was, until the

mother, Roseline Misari Ibiam (née Cookey), brought him to Unwana, his biological place of origin, in the Afikpo Local Government Area of present Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

However, he was raised, singlehandedly, until his uncle, Dr. Francis Akanu Ibiam who was his father's only younger brother returned from England (Scotland) in 1934 and eventually took him to Abiriba in Abia State where he lived with him as his foster father.. at this point, Dr Francis Akanu Ibiam, sacrificed all, making sure, A.A. Ibiam was educated from primary school through university education. Apart from A.A. Ibiam, Unwana as a community in Ebonyi State has produced responsible and respected sons and daughters of note, too numerous to mention. In the opinion of the study, mention of a few of these great sons and daughters of the Unwana community may not be out of place for the purpose of clarity and wider understanding. The few names as noted by the study are as follows:

1. Sculptor A.A. Ibiam
2. Dr Francis Akanu Ibiam
3. Elder Iduma Aka Ibiam
4. Prof. Williams Abang Eteng
5. Prof. Egwu, U. Egwu
6. Prof. Agha Uka Agha
7. Prof. (Mrs) Duvie Adamma
8. Hon. Uchenna Nnajofo Ibiam
9. Elder Olusegun Mbadiwe Ibiam
10. HRH Princess Alu Ibiam
11. Bishop Michael Nnachi Okoro
12. Emmanuel Okoro Agha (Okpe Udo)
13. John Lawrence Okoro (Footballer ECN)
14. Samuel Ibiam (Goalkeeper)
15. Ezinne (Mrs) Gloria U. Ukeni
16. Mrs Inya Agha (Chief Judge, Ebonyi State)
17. Dr Mrs Ogbonne Nnachi Ibiam
18. Mr. Ugwumba Inya
19. Samuel Aka Ibiam (the interpreter)

20. Barr. Nnachi Egwu
21. Dr Eze Ibiam Eze
22. Elder Kelechi Ibiam Aka
23. Dr Orji U. Akaa
24. Samuel Ezeogo U. Ibiam (Bro Sam)
25. Pharm. Sam Inya Agha (Ayo)
26. Madam Mary Arua (NneUgo Mmeri)

These are some few selected prominent sons and daughters of Unwana extraction. However, the justification for the selected few prominent sons and daughters of this great community is to minimise distraction, as the emphasis of the study is strictly on Sculptor A.A. Ibiam, a scholar of note and a compendium of knowledge and creative genius. A man whose creative mastery is matchless, as he left an impeccable creative dynasty in the field of fine and applied arts, globally and nationally.

Sculptor A.A. Ibiam, a contemporary Nigerian artist, believed that creativity is characterised by the ability to perceive the world in new but sustainable ways in order to find hidden patterns, to make connections between unrelated phenomena and to generate novel ideas for the purposes of attaining a new reality within the environment and beyond. For these reasons, sculptor A.A. Ibiam believed that a developed mindset, which is a creative mindset, will help one thrive at life challenges. This is as exemplified by his strong determination to lay a solid foundation for Government Secondary School, Owutu, Edda in now Ebonyi State by abandoning his car, and creatively finding a way to navigate the muddy terrain from his home town, Unwana to Onwutu Edda. Starved of necessary funds and resources by the education authorities. A.A. Ibiam creatively resorted to buying necessary working tools with his personal money to ensure smooth running of the school, including furnishing the principal's office and providing a healthy working environment, thereby promoting creativity and effective teaching of fine and applied arts in the institution. Today, this singular legacy has yielded positive result. In Unwana, his immediate community, there is the Department of Art and Design Technology in Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana, Ebonyi State. However, it must be noted. That the establishment of the Department of Art and Design Technology is strongly pioneered by

two of the sons of A.A. Ibiam – Iduma A. Ibiam and Osita, Williams A.

Education Background

Aka Aka Ibiam, popularly known as A.A. Ibiam, was born in 1928 in Aba in the present-day Abia State. His early education started around 1935 and 1936 at the then Church of Scotland Mission Primary School, Unwana. He later attended the Hope Waddell Training Institute, Calabar, and then the Government Teachers' Training College, Uyo, and finally, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, where he studied fine arts and graduated with a second-class upper division in 1964, specialising in sculpture (fine arts). However, his actual dates of attendance at the primary and secondary teacher training colleges are not captured following the effects of the Nigeria/Biafra War of 1967-1970. Again, according to "Zaria Art School in 50th Anniversary Exhibition 1955-2005" curated by Buhari, J. et al. (2009: P. 140), the records show that A.A. Ibiam graduated from the Fine Arts department of Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria. Before proceeding and upon graduation from Zaria Art School, A.A. Ibiam was a well-trained teacher and taught Fine Arts in different schools, including Aggrey Memorial College, Arochuku, from 1964 to 1971, and Women's Training College, Afikpo, Ebonyi State, as vice principal from 1972 to 1976. He also taught Fine Arts at Government Secondary School, Owutu Edda between (1976-1978). Between 1978 and 1980, A.A. Ibiam moved to Avutu Secondary School, Avutu, Obowo, and finally, Amasiri Secondary School, Amasiri, between 1981 and 1983. Where he headed the school as the principal.

A.A. Ibiam's Achievements to Humanity

As a trained and dedicated teacher of art (fine arts), A.A. Ibiam motivated and inspired scholars too numerous to mention in present-day Nigeria. Some of those notable scholars include Etu Okpara Ugo, Osita Williams, Egoronu Chizo, Attah Paik, Ndubuisi Theophilus Nwogu, Ikechukwu Ogbonna, Stanley Adiele, Uduma, Oko Ndubuisi and others. Most notable are Etu Okpara Ugo and Osita Williams A., whose works appear below; see figures 1-15.

Pictures below are the works of Etu Okpara-Ugo as exemplified in Figures 1-10. These are some of the visual expressions, being inspired, tutored and motivated by sculptor A. A. Ibiam of Unwana, Afikpo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria extraction.



Figure 1.



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

Figures 13, 12 and 17 are some of the visual impressions of Osita Williams who is also greatly inspired by Sculptor A.A. Ibiam



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16

Figures 16-17 are other advanced and experimental drawings by Osita, Williams A



Figure 17

. These contemporary artists are greatly motivated and inspired by the presence, influence, and contributions of A.A. Ibiam of Unwana, a product of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (sculptor).

Achievements/Contributions

Aka Aka Ibiam was a scholar of Fine and Applied Arts, a sculptor of Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria extraction. He remains an icon of art, honest and a complete gentleman of note. The study seeks to document the tremendous strides and other contributions modern Nigerian arts and artists have made in recent times, for which A.A. Ibiam is hugely viewed as one of the fathers of contemporary Nigerian art. It further seeks to discover the roles and contributions these icons and fathers of modern Nigerian art made in building and deconstructing Western influence, thereby projecting and promoting indigenous Nigerian art culture (a synthesis of Western and African, indeed Nigerian, traditional culture).

However, in the opinion of Dike (2006), it is a well informed opinion that development in any given profession, particularly, visual arts or other fields of endeavour must accommodate a thorough understanding and documentation of the past, which over time gives rise to the growth and development of today. He further observes that artistic development must be seen as depicting the continuities in experience and production as well as numerous changes that continue to take place and the dramatis personae that made this development and changes possible.

It must be pointed out that the society must strive to promote the knowledge of past developments as well as the influence which the pioneers have exerted over the younger generation of artists. It is, therefore, to the credit of A.A. Ibiam that Nigerian contemporary art has continued to grow from time to time and strength to strength. In a global space, such as the world has become

today, one must present to the world those indigenous efforts, ideas and variables that have relevance to national unity and international development. One must agree that to understand A.A. Ibiam is to understand a process of history. It is also a vital process of documenting some of the contributions of art as a factor of national consciousness and development.

In the opinion of the study, hugely supported by Dike (2006), what A.A. Ibiam and his peers have given to not only the people of Unwana, Ebonyi State, but to Nigerian artists, is the confidence to see themselves as equal to the rest of humanity and to approach their visual expressions or artistic expressions with the understanding that they are NOT inferior to anyone, as exemplified by Etu Ugo-Okpara, Osita Williams A. Anugwolu, Chinonye Emmanuel, Nnaji Henry, Ifeyi Uchechukwu and others.

The influence of Aka Aka Ibiam inspired and motivated many contemporary Nigerian artists, particularly modern artists and scholars of southeastern Nigerian extraction. He specialised in sculpture, where he carved out an impeccable niche for himself and his younger generation of artists and non-artists. Sculpture, in the opinion of Daval (2010) in the "Introduction" to the book *Sculpture From Renaissance To The Present Day*, shares the view that "sculpture offers the most objective evidence we have of man's power over the world." He describes sculpture as a three-dimensional art created by shaping or combining hard materials, typically stones, such as marble, and other hard materials like glass, metal or wood. Softer materials (plastic) such as clay textiles, plastics, polymers, and other soft metals including garri, fufu and sawdust. However, this view is useful to the study as it highlights the sculpture materials used by A.A. Ibiam as a sculptor of note. Following his impactful deportment, the Unwana community and beyond benefited from A.A. Ibiam's experiences and contributions to knowledge and community development, including religious organisations. In total support of these established facts,

Ibiam (2025) in an interview opines that A.A. Ibiam was determined to lay a solid foundation for Unwana, in fact, Government Secondary School, Owutu Edda, Ebonyi State, when he abandoned use of his car for motorcycle (CD.175) to enable him to navigate the muddy and untarred roads from Unwana to Owutu daily. What a huge flow of humility and impactful demeanour from a man of honour, which is rare in the modern-day generation.

However, in his days at Government Secondary School, Owutu, Edda, A.A. Ibiam made personal sacrifices by buying necessary working tools with his personal resources (funds) to ensure the smooth running of the school and other immeasurable contributions he made, which, hitherto, brought the name of the institution to the limelight till the present day.

Further studies reveal that, when inspectors visited the institution, they were amazed and congratulated A.A. Ibiam for his measurable and immeasurable contributions to the development of the institution and the community at large.

Conclusion

In the opinion of Daval (2010), he states that from all the periods that have preceded our own, sculpture offers the most objective evidence we have of man's power over the world. While painting is apt to be travestied by time, sculpture more easily retains its original form and more often remains in the place for which it was made.

A.A. Ibiam studied sculpture, where he expressed his creative ingenuity and excelled creatively and productively. Therefore, one may be safe to see creativity as characterised by the ability to perceive the world in absolutely new ways. Again, to find hidden patterns, to make connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena and to generate solutions. A.A. Ibiam believed that a developed mindset will help facilitate creativity and certainly helps one to thrive at life challenges.

Historically, A.A. Ibiam became the first indigenous scholar to pursue a degree in fine art in Unwana, Afikpo, and indeed Ebonyi State, Nigeria. He was among the best scholars of his time, graduating in 1964 from Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria. He became the first trained artist from Unwana in the present-day Ebonyi State in the Southeastern Nigeria geopolitical zone. He specialised in sculpture and remains a monumental figure in the field of fine arts in Nigeria as well as a huge influence on so many contemporary Nigerian artists, virtually in all the areas of speciality in fine arts. His contributions and influence inspired the establishment of the Department of Art and Design Technology, the School of Environmental Design and Technology, and Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana, Ebonyi State, in the immediate and direct community of A.A. Ibiam. In view of his vision, influence and contributions to the development and growth of

modern Nigerian art, the study may be safe to situate A.A. Ibiam as the father of modern art in Unwana, Afikpo, of Ebonyi State extraction. A.A. Ibiam is what Chief Aina Onabolu represents to the Yorubas. The study records that A.A. Ibiam taught fine arts in different schools in Southeastern Nigeria, including Abia State, Imo State, Enugu and Ebonyi State. He taught Fine Arts in different schools in Cross River and Akwa Ibom, thereby promoting art scholarship, and finally rose to the position of principalship before his life was pathetically cut short on 20th September 1983 through a ghastly motor accident along the Lafia-Akwanga Road. A.A. Ibiam was happily married to Rebecca Nnennaya Ibiam (née Oko), and the union is blessed with three (3) surviving children.

A.A. Ibiam, as noted by the study, was a practical Christian in the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, Unwana Parish and as a dedicated servant, he was the Board Chairman that saw to the building of the Church Manse. However, as parts of his contributions to humanity, A.A. Ibiam was the vice president of the Town Union (Nzuko Unwana), where he contributed to and chaired the building committee that constructed the science block at Unwana Community Secondary School, Unwana.

However, A.A. Ibiam, as noted by Mbadiwe (2024), had a penchant for growth and development of individuals and the community at large. He inspired and encouraged people, not just to study fine arts, but to build, develop and make Unwana community great, the Unwana including Calabar in Cross River State. Historically, A.A. Ibiam had an undying penchant for hunting, as he shot without missing. Following his dexterity and proven ability to shoot accurately, the birds learnt to fly without perching, and animals ran without notice. A.A. Ibiam was incredibly good at shooting and hunting.

Recommendations

1. The study recommends that further studies should be made on Sculptor A.A. Ibiam to capture further contributions, ideologies and legacies he left behind for the younger generation.
2. Further enquiries and documentation must be made of his works, including 2- and 3-dimensional art pieces (works).
3. Art exhibitions should be held in his honour to promote his dignity.
4. Art historical scholars should as a matter of importance include the name of sculptor A.A. Ibiam in the Art historical curricular to reflect his contributions for the growth and development of modern Nigerian Art.
5. Immortalise sculptor A.A. Ibiam by erecting a monumental sculpture of him at the Department of Art and

10. Int. J. Arts Humanit.

Design Technology, Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana, Ebonyi State.

6. Sculptor A.A. Ibiam could be immortalised and recognised as a pioneer artist in Nigeria, and moreover, a father of contemporary Nigerian artists of Ebonyi State extraction.

7. Sculptor A.A. Ibiam must be hugely situated as a father of modern Nigerian art from Southeastern Nigeria extraction.

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