

Visual Art Practice And Professionalism; Beyond Academic Community.

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Abstract

There are artists, there are works of art everywhere in the society, one does not need to look far before one can feel the impact of art in homes, schools, offices, churches, hospitals, and many other public places in the society, which is as a result of professional practice in visual arts. Our academic institution are blessed, no doubt with expert hands in the different areas of visual art such as: sculpture, painting, textiles, graphics, photography, ceramics, etc who spend greater part of their days imparting knowledge in the different areas of specialization to student? Every year art graduates are turned out of these academic communities including universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, and expectedly, they are to practice what they have learnt in their different institution and where they fail to do so, this should be a source of worry to their institution especially about the quality of their teaching, research work and services to their community. This might further be interpreted to mean that the learner has not learnt because the teacher has not taught. Visual Art practice is often treated as mere manual activity that requires no application of intellect. There is a general over emphasis on academism to the detriment of professionalism in visual art practice. There are institution where art exhibition is not accepted as equivalent of journal articles for promotion, and this has forced a number of gifted and creative visual artists to abandon practice. Some of these professional drop outs, in defense of their actions, go about preaching the sermon according to academic tradition and regulation without which they claimed, there can be no advancement, yet there is a wide gap between

thinking in the academic community and the reality outside. This paper discusses visual art practice and professionalism and its significance in the realization of the societal developmental goals; economically, physically and culturally with recommendation that, as a developing economy, we need to encourage visual art practice for the society to grow physically, industrially and culturally among others.

Introduction

Human being are generally, irrespective of the social background, tribe, race, color or even level of education, are consumer of art products. One does not have to be an art collector to be a consumer of art products, socially culturally art and arts product are essentials part of daily living. The clothes we wear the shoes the jewelleries pot plates titles the house we live in the decorative items in our homes are examples of art product we consume on daily basis. In addition, Anidugbe [2003] opined that every human being instinctively is involved in the process of creating and recreating the visual environment. We build structures in form of houses to serve as a shelter, places of worship, business center as well as recreational parks, we discriminate between forms, colors, shapes, and values, we participate in the creative process by creating objects to satisfy our basic needs at homes, such as storage facilities, furniture and furnishing, outside the home, industrial and commercial items such as package labels and advert materials are also created by artists, all for human consumption made possible through practice.

One does not need to look too far to see and feel the impact of the professionally trained as well as self -trained artists in the society, meaning that the society needs artist; they need art for their socio cultural and economic well- being, collaborating thus view Whitehead [1985] stated that " artists are relevant to the society in general and to the fundamentals of education in particular". Basically, the services of professionally trained artist are needed in any developing economy, and for the artist to be able to deliver and play the expected role, professionalism is required, that is, high standard and quality production is necessary for optimum performance.

It is a statement of the fact that industries need artist, art products are needed in politics, educations, religious worship, entertainment etc but unfortunately the pace of professional practice is reducing, artists especially those in academics no longer consider visual art practice necessary. They feel more comfortable writing and publishing as a pre- condition for promotion.

Visual artist in the academic community according to Anidugbe [1998] are not encouraged to practice, art exhibitions are not adequately rewarded because they are not accepted as equivalent of published articles, and thus has forced many gifted professionals artists to abandon practice in order to write and publish like their counterparts who are non-artists. As a result, many visual artists in the

community are no longer exploring their creative potentials for economic advantage. By extension, products of institution where lecturers are not professionally active tend to feel that one does not need to practice after graduation to survive. Some practice for some time and then give up to become professional drop-out. There is generally over emphasis on academism to the detriment of professionalism in visual art practice. Visual art practice is considered menial because it is manually done and artists as unintellectual.

Beyond the academic communities, that is outside the four walls of academic institution, survival is the order of the day. Textile, industries need creative and innovative designs art collectors need original art forms to collect, industrial tools and design are needed for industries to grow. The society needs to enhance the visual quality of their environment.

This paper discusses visual art practice as a pre-condition for the economic growth of the society, and highlights the need to encourage and promote professionalism within and outside the academic community with recommendations that visual art practice should be encouraged to enhance economic growth.

Visual Art and Artists

According to Eisner [1986] visual art is a form that reflect a history, forms influenced by purpose, shaped by technology and that possess the signature of the authors. Visual art is one of the branches of art which deals with art forms of drawing, painting, sculpture, ceramics, textile design, graphics, craft, etc. As a discipline it has its own history, vocabularies and technologies that must be studied by anybody aspiring to be a visual artist [Anidugbe 2003]. A visual artists therefore is one who is knowledgeable about the history, the vocabularies and the technologies apart from the fact that he is a researcher using art media, tools and equipment to bring out the new forms and to create and re-create his visual environment.

Visual art originally refers to those forms, objects, image and expression created out of the desire to satisfy the basic need of life such as clothing, shelter, tools and equipment, but over the years, visual art as a concept has been subjected to so many interpretations. It means different things to different people. Gombrich [1983] opined that painting, statues and building created by the early men were not thought as mere objects or art works, but rather as objects which had definite function. To the AESTHETICIANS, art is about beauty. To the art THERAPHIST, it is concerned with healing, to the art EDUCATOR; visual is a product, as well as process. Itse [1995] opined that visual art embodies fine and applied art which involves creation of forms and objectification of feelings. In essence, Anidugbe [2005] stated that visual art forms are product of creative imagination, intricate and complex activities and manual dexterity, which necessitate regular practice.

The visual art together provide, the visual artist with a means of expression. Architecture is a functional art form experienced from inside and outside both visually and spatially. The architect is an artist who design buildings and spaces in which we live, work and play. Graphic design encompass a wide range of two dimensional image and advertising, and signs as well as the repetitive design found in continuous surface like wallpaper and fabric. The graphic designer is an artist who specializes in design crafts and product design are related forms of art, they both originated in the need to create tools and utensils for daily living. Craft includes fabric design like tie and dye woodwork batik pottery and other art objects made by hand and usually for everyday use. The craftsman and woman is the skilled worker who engages in the production of one craft or the other.

In creating each work of art, artist make an amazing number of choices. They consider what material - clay paper metal stone best convey their ideas; what are visual principle; composition balance contrast best communicate their intentions. Visual artists form part of human resources of our nation and their professionalism or possession of adequate skills and knowledge is essential for them to be able to play their expected role in a developing economy such as ours. Painters sculptors printmakers architects ceramists photographers and other artists who design and create forms and space are visual artists, but those who merit the professional title are those who have distinguished themselves as individuals who have spent much time learning researching and practicing those whose mastery of technical skills and control of art media have distinguished them. Among the Nigerian artists today, we have quite a number of such individuals, and the masters in the field include Bruce Onabrakpeya, Kolade Oshinowo, Abayomi Barber, Jimoh Buraimon, Josy Ajiboye, Uche Okeke, Late Irein Wangboje, Yusuf Grillo, to mention only a few whose professional accomplishment and commitment to visual art practice are worthy of emulation.

Visual Art Practice and Professionalism

Professional practice means active involvement in the creative artistic production. It means that artist must be involved in the creative process especially in his or her area of specialization. For a visual artist to be accorded respect and recognition in professional circle, he or she must have exhibited and demonstrated the skills and high standard of behavior expected of a professionally trained artist, oncit is expected that one must have acquired skills; these skills include drawing sculpting designing among others and the only to prove that we did acquire them is by demonstration through practice. Okeke [1998] opined that "any visual artist who cannot draw is really not a visual artist".

Practice promises perfection. We cannot emphasize the importance of professional practice. It was practice that gave Leonardo Michelangelo and Raphael

to mention only a few of the great masters so much recognition that even today we still talk about them and their professional accomplishment remain a reference point even among the academia. Through years of practice and experimentation, Leonardo invented sfumato a technique whereby blurred outline and mellowed colors are used to avoid giving its figure hash and rigid appearance. It was practice that fetched Aina Onabolu so much recognition and the MBE award in the Queen's new- year honors in 1957; it fetch Akinola Lasekan recognition, honor and seven hundred dollars through the portrait painting of Wistin Churchil and through dint of hard work and commitment to practice, Kolade Oshinowo was also given a National Award.

It is important to identify some of the activities considered as evidence of professional practice. They include:

- Studio practice; For a visual artist to qualify as an establish artist, he or she must have a functional studio. A functional studio maybe define as workshop or room equipped with necessary tools materials and equipment with which form and object can be produced.
- Exhibition; Exhibition can be define as organized display of works privately or publicly. Visual art exhibition or participation in art shows is another professional activity. An active and professionally alive must exhibit or participate in an exhibition.
- Membership of professional bodies; A number of our professional colleagues do not belong to any professional body. This is not a good professional attitude. It is important for visual artists to belong.g
- Publications; Apart from art shows in museums, galleries and saloons, publication in form of exhibition catalogues, with write-ups on works, techniques new concept media etc, is necessary. A practicing visual artists may also publish his work in form of pictures post cards and books, result of experimental works and other findings about techniques and use of media may also be published.
- Visual studies; Visual study means day to day exploration of the visual environment in form of sketches notations and observations of appearances and effect of light on forms and color movement and moods among others.

Academic Culture and Artistic Production

Academic pursuit and artistic production have a lot in common, none is superior and none is inferior, rather they complement one another.

The scholarly culture such as reading, writing, publishing and participation at conferences are not an anathema to the visual artist. He studies from time to time, the greatest achievement in art, make notations, tries new media and techniques before the final execution of an artistic project. The same thing the academics gather

to do at the conferences and seminars, visual arts gather to do at exhibitions. In the same way papers are criticized and appraised, the creative efforts of the artist are also critiqued.

Writing and publishing are creative tasks, so also drawing, sculpting, painting etc, the creative stages identified by Chapman [1978] are inception [when we take in the idea] elaborating [when we try to develop the idea], refinement [when we try to develop the idea] and execution [when we execute either by writing of creating an art piece]. Everybody does this, the academics as well as the visual artist. The process of writing an article or conference papers, and practical execution of visual art project are practically the same as stated by Leonardo Da Vince. He argued that painting was a liberal art, and that the manual labor involved in it was no more essential than was the labor of writing in poetry [Gombrich, 1983].

According to Ajaiyi [1993], lecturers in the academic institutions are expected to teach, research and engage in community service. Similarly, visual art practice has the same goal. Pope Gregory the great observed that painting "can do for all illiterate, what writings does for those who can read [Gombrich 1983]. Traditionally, paintings were used to teach about God's image as contained in the Holy Bible. Walls of churches in Rome and other places in Greece were filled with storytelling murals. The use of art works as illustrations in teaching is an educational function of art.

The research function of academics is part and parcel of the day to day experience in visual arts. Strand [1986] cited in Anidugbe [2005] state that the true artist like the true scientist is a researcher using materials and techniques to dig into the truth and techniques and the meaning of the world in which he lives. And, what he create or better perhaps, brings back are the objectives results of his exploration. The measure of his talents, his genius, if you will, is the richness he finds in such a life's voyage of discovery", and Leonardo Da Vinci demonstrated the veracity of this assertion. He was one of the first to probe into the mysteries of the growth of the child in the womb; he also investigated the law of waves and current among others research efforts. Service to the community is another expected function of lecturers in the academic community; organized to promote the cultural heritage of the people. It could also be organized as way of identifying and promoting the indigenous crafts of the people. Furthermore it could be organized to show the case the talent of the youth in the community.

To be considered a visual artist, to earn respect in professional circle also to attract the attention of connoisseurs, patrons and even ordinary layman who idea art is the production of objects for functional purpose, an artist must be actively involved in practice and to attain the peak of academic ladder through hard work and certification. This is understandable. Socrates opined that, he is not only idle who does nothing; he is also idle who can be better engaged, while some derived great joy and a sense of fulfillment from purely academic activities, there are others

whose focus is purely on visual artistic production and since an artist requires as much time to create an art piece as necessary to produce a scholarly article, there is no way one area will not suffer neglect, there is really not a issue. The serious issue is the situation where by some of our professional colleagues who have reach the top of their academic career now look down on visual art practice as unintellectual and therefore unworthy to be considered for upward mobility of fellow artist. This attitude is tantamount to display of parochialism and the thought itself is unintellectual. John Dewey [1934] an internationally acclaimed Professor of Art Education stated many years ago that, "any idea that ignores the necessary role of intelligence in the production of work of art is based upon identification of thinking with use of one special kind of material, verbal signs and word. To think effectively in terms of symbols, verbal and mathematical. Indeed, since words are easily manipulated in mechanical ways, the production of a genuine art probably demands more intelligence that does most of the so called thinking that goes on among those who pride themselves on being "intellectual".

The origin of academic culture can be traced to Plato's academy in Athens, an institution that represent the first university in the western world. Plato according to Molaren [1983] was to create of the academy, a community of scholars engage in original research. To achieve this goal, he attracted experts in anthropology, astronomy, and medicine etc, turned his attention to mathematics and the natural sciences, thus planted the seed which later germinated into academic culture in tertiary institution today. In the same vein, in the 15th century, the term academy was extended to mean the place studio or some patron's place where according to Leymarie [1979], professional practicing artists and scholars meet to study the theory and practice of art. The first art academy according Leymarie [1979] cited in Anidugbe [2003] was the one which began meeting in the sculptor Bartholdo's studio in Florence in 1490.

The world academic is not peculiar to writing and publishing alone, it also artistic production. Academy from where the word academic was coined originated from Plato's academy and studio where artists met to discuss the theory and practice of art was also referred to as academy. The creation of an art piece requires much thinking and application of intellect as is required in writing. Academy simply means a place originally, not the activities, it was much later that participants started referring to what they did as academic because they came from an academy. The visual artists have every right to refer to their works too as academic because studio practice also started first from an academy. The only difference between the academic culture and studio practice is in the medium. While the scholars from the Plato's academy used written and verbal language; artists from bartholdo's academy used visual language which is universal, because it can be read and understood by illiterate and literates.

The practice of art is not anti-academic both academic culture and artistic practice are rooted in the same philosophy which is to advance the frontier of human knowledge, therefore none is superior and none is inferior. They are partners in progress and should be treated and accepted as such especially in respect of consideration for advancement.

Significance of professional practice

The art critics art historian, and scholars need the artists and their products to keep busy. All over the world, the history of civilization, not simply the western version, owes a great deal debt to the artist, be he the pre-historic man, the bush man, negro, cave dweller, Egyptians, Greek, Roman, American, African and Nigerian.

Regardless of origin or geographical environment, artists have left, are still leaving and will continue to leave examples of their work which will make the writing of history possible. Temple and tomb, utensils and weapon, costume and houses, a carving on stone or a painting on the wall, a mystical symbol or an utilitarian tool, war implements, according to De Francesco [1958] comprise the sared ruins from which the story of the struggles and the achievement, the joy and the sorrow, the play and the worship of man are constructed.

The physical development observed in our visual environment testifies to the professionalism of the visual artist. Most of the gigantic structures we see and appreciate as churches, public halls, and residential buildings, created by architects are significant because they enhanced our visual environment.

Professional practice provides opportunity for expression of emotions and when emotions or feelings are expressed, they serve dual purposes; they help the creator to let out steam, feel fulfilled and actualized, at the same time, the consumer or the viewer of the art product is affected on way the other. The visual art product therefore becomes an avenue for sharing and infecting others with the experience of the artist.

Art is a universal language which everyone can read and understood by anybody anywhere the work is taken irrespective of the spoken language, color of the skin or level of education. In this respect a major function of an art exhibition is the visual experience; not all person gain full understanding when the sole medium of communication is written or verbal language. Many people are visual minded, and they seize upon ideas rather quickly if confronted by pictures, objects, diagrams and similar vehicles of communication. Message and fact are often passed across to the viewers or audience through exhibition. Through such viewing, people may become more knowledgeable or appreciative of life's experience. This view is corroborated by Pope Gregory the great. When he tried to remind the people who were against the use of painting in religious worship. He explained that many members of the church could never read nor write and that for the purpose of

teaching them, visual images were as useful as the picture in a picture book designed for children.

Practice and experimentation lead to discovery, mastery of technical skills and control of materials.

Beyond the Academic Community

The original mandate of the academy initiated by Plato is to discuss, theorize and philosophize on the disciplines or subjects of concern to them and that explain why professors and academics today, are not deviating from that original mandate. They are to train people on the original academic tradition and for this reason acting on the ideas of their founding fathers, our professors would always insist on the possession of higher academic qualification and demonstrated of academic ability before any consideration for promotion in the academic community. On the other hand, the original mandate of the founding fathers of the academy of Art [Studio practice] is to discuss the theory and practice of art. They are not just to theorize or talk about art, but to practice, create and experiment.

Nigeria is confronted with many problems today. Some of these problems are; unemployment, poverty, starvation, economic stagnation, insecurity of lives and properties and many more. Solution to these problem is not within the purview of the academic community, the solution is beyond them. The solution lies in the hand of the professionals, hence the need for practice. Academy refers to themselves as academic because they came from Plato's academy and their major concern is to theorize and talk about issues. The visual artists comes from the Bartholdo's academy which represent the first studio practice concerned themselves with not just theories but also practice and for this reasons, they did not adopt the title "academics" but rather professionals. Hence the concern for professionalism in visual art practice.

The professionals know their onions, they have used times tools and materials to create and for industrial and economic growth of the nation, their expertise is needed because they have successfully combine theory with practice to ensure service delivery. The practicing visual artists are the professional whose products are needed to provide tools, implements, packages and other industrial and architectural designs for the industries and manufacturing companies to use for their growth. With the growth of these industries, jobs will be available for the graduates of this nation and money will flow around culminating in economic self-sufficiency.

The problems of this nation are beyond what the academic community can solve. The professionals need to come to our rescue through practice.

Conclusion

Visual Art refers to art forms such as sculpture, painting, graphics, textiles, ceramics, photography etc, produced by visual artists who engage in professional practice.

Not all professionally qualified visual artists engage in professional practice for a number of reasons. Some abandon practice because they belong to the academic community where the emphasis is on academism and visual art practice is not encouraged.

Academic culture and professional practice are both rooted in the same philosophy which is to advance the frontier of human knowledge, therefore none is superior and none is inferior.

Visual art practice plays a major role in a developing economy especially industrially and technologically also domestically.

The major problem of the society which include unemployment, poverty, and starvation are beyond what the academic community can solve. They are not problems can be solve by academism but rather by commitment to professionalism which is the only way to ensure availability of the essential products needed for industrial and economic growth in a developing nation such as ours.

Recommendations

In other to promote professionalism and encourage more visual artists to practice and contribute more meaningfully to the development of the nation economically, it is recommended that;

- Exhibition should be accepted as equivalent of published journal articles for promotion
- Academic institution and communities should encourage professionalism in visual art by sponsoring exhibitions.
- Industries and manufacturers should also contribute a percentage of their annual profit to patronage and promotion of arts especially industrial design. They should also sponsor exhibitions and practical workshops.
- Academic community should align their programmes to meet the needs of the society for economic self- sufficiency.

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