

A COMPARATIVE APPRAISAL AND ELEVATION OF SELECTED MARKET DISPLAYS AS UNCONSCIOUS ART INSTALLATIONS

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Abstract

We encounter different forms of displays almost on a daily basis, while going about our duties. Though the aesthetics of the displays are judged interesting and pleasing by some, others might be quite indifferent about it. Attributing this interesting displays, to the fact that, all humans have some inborn creative tendencies; this paper sets out to appraise randomly selected market place display compositions, mostly encountered around Kwangila area in Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria, subjecting these market displays to formal analysis. The paper attempts to elevate the displays from just mere market arrangements, to the level of art installations. To achieve this, Laurie's (2007) position on the dynamic nature of art was adopted as the conceptual framework. Conclusively, the paper holds that these displays have been seen to possess some artistic inclinations, thereby serving as a basis for attaching the artistic appellation of 'installations' to them. However, this does not mean the vendors who install them are artists; as the idea of being an artist is a conscious act and process.

Key Words: Market, Display/Compositions, Unconscious, Installations, Elevate

Introduction

The colourful display of fruits and other commodities by the road side along the Kaduna – Zaria road, usually catches the author's attention, anytime he is travelling to and from Kaduna or Abuja. Interestingly though, the traders are not artists, the interplay of colours and forms in their displays appear to a learned eye to satisfy some artistic principles such as balance, harmony, rhythm, amongst others; hence, this paper. We encounter such forms of display almost on a daily basis, while going about our duties. Though the aesthetics of the displays are judged interesting and pleasing by some, others might be quite indifferent about it. Lazzari and Schlesier (2008:95) say that "we encounter art in different ways and in different places, and the nature of our encounter adds meaning to the artwork."

Order in process, presentation and techniques, as well as, sequential arrangement and organisation of materials, are some basic principles that underlie most artistic expressions, whether visual, applied or liberal arts. Lazzari and Schlesier (2008:85) in congruence, observe that "looking at art is a very different experience from looking at the general environment, which is visually disjointed and disorganized." By implication, despite the disorganized and disjointed nature of most markets, the order and organisation of these market display compositions, some of which are installed and uninstalled on a daily basis, would suffice in tagging them as artistic installations, if one is to agree with Lazzari and Schlesier's opinion.

However, viewed critically, a question that comes to mind is – "Does this mean that all human arrangements, or organised displays can be labelled as art? Or are we, as art critics and historians, supposed to propagate such ideas as 'art is everywhere'?" Arguably, it is bad enough that in the quest to define art, which seems to transcend human definitions, one of such attempts considers art as 'life – an expression of life'. As such, the generality of artistic expressions is hinted at. Also, since some psychoanalytical theories, propounded by psychologists such as Freud in Tatarici (2018) are in favour of the fact that all humans possess some inborn creative tendencies at birth, the boundaries and restrictions surrounding art making are further blurred. To further buttress this line of thought, one should consider Duchamp's appropriation of 'ready-mades' as art pieces, one of which is his 1917 submission of a urinal as an art work titled 'Fountain'; this served as a springboard for the material deconstruction of contemporary artistic expressions. Breaking the traditional line of what can be tagged as art, Duchamp in his artistic quest, elevated mundane objects that were not intended for art's sake, to the level of art.

However, as art historians, who amongst other responsibilities, are saddled with the task of appreciation and criticism, depending on the nature and context of such encounters, it becomes necessary to subject forms such as these market display compositions to analytical scrutiny, so as to better appreciate the coincidental artistic tendencies they possess. It is on such backdrops that this paper leans.

In congruence with the foregoing, such coincidental artistic and creative traits displayed by humans, owe gratitude to the creative ingenuity that humans possess naturally, even from infant. Writing about the human creative mind, Sporre (2009) avers that:

...something happens in which humankind takes chaos, formlessness, vagueness, and/or the unknown and crystallizes them into forms, designs, inventions, and ideas. Creativity underlies our existence. For example, creativity allows scientists to intuit a possible path to a cure for cancer, or to invent a computer (P. 25).

The same creative process applies to art creation. However, not all creative expressions are done consciously. The unconscious mind of man, has been seen, over the years, as the point of emanation for some of man's creativity.

In this context, the market is considered a hub of such relatively creative displays. This paper identifies and makes an appraisal of randomly selected market displays, mostly encountered at the Kwangila area in Zaria, as its focus. Subjecting these market displays to formal analysis, the paper attempts to elevate these displays from just mere market compositions, to the level of art installations. Before embarking on such analytical task, it is imperative to trace the historical background of similar works of art, that have been produced over the years.

A Review of Selected Artists' Appropriations and (or) Installations

As part of the manifestations of postmodernism in art, artists have interrogated their environments through installations, as well as, artistic expressions, which appropriates some materials found around them, as art. Appropriations in art entails artists' use of pre-existing elements or objects found in their environments as art, with little or no alterations done to the object. Therefore, this section reviews the works of four artists who have, in relation to this paper's subject matter, either enacted artistic installations, appropriated other materials as art, or done both.



Fig. 1: 'Fountain', Marcel Duchamp, 1917. A Porcelain Urinal, 38.1 cm x 48.9 cm x 62.55 cm. Courtesy of: Adewumi (2017)

Without a mention of Marcel Duchamp, tracing the history of conceptual art and modernism can be considered an incomplete task. Duchamp's appropriation of readymade vessels as art, paved way for modern artistic expressions; such that identifies and embraces artistic possibilities in almost all physical element in the human environment. Based on his reviews,¹ Agaku (2018:100) deduces that "it means that Duchamp seems to reason that the intellectual sense of the art is hidden in the everyday functional object and not in the constructed ones." Duchamp's 1917 'Fountain' (Fig. 1), which is an appropriated porcelain urinal is one of such readymade pieces, which attracted a lot of criticism, owing to the novelty and the unconventionality that accompanied such a bold move. However, such readymade, according to Akpang's (2013:43) explanation, "assumed the dignity of art through dislocated contextual description." Ordinarily, the porcelain urinal had no business with art, but by the virtue of Duchamp's contextual description and appropriation of the urinary as an art piece, further enhanced by his signature on it; so it is. It is in the same vein, that this paper considers these market display compositions as art.



Fig. 2: Oil Siphon, Ngene Eze, (2014). Plate, Hose, Siphon, Oil and Water Containers. 102 x 24 x 35cm. Courtesy of: Ngene (2015)

As part of the proceeds of a doctoral research in sculpture titled '*A Metaphorical Exploration of Forms in Sculpture using Readymade Food Vessels*', in 2014, Ngene Eze, produced the installation titled '*Oil Siphon*' (Fig. 2). In making his metaphorical statement, the artist arranged plastic containers of different sizes, presenting a vertically oriented form. One would agree that a similar arrangement, though not for the purpose of art, can be encountered in local markets. Putting this piece into a comparative context, the installation embodies the concept of appropriation in art. Just like Duchamp, Ngene has chosen to summarise his ideas about oil theft and vandalization in the Niger- Delta region in Nigeria, by appropriating plastic containers which are used in holding liquids like petrol, as his art piece. The only alteration that the artist made to the readymade containers is in the arrangement of forms. Such minimal alterations and manipulations are done to appropriate pre-existing environmental elements is also seen in Ayo Aina's installation (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3: Child Trafficking, Installation, Ayo Aina, 2007. Found Objects, 150 x 230cm. Courtesy of: Obadofin 2015.

In appropriating the babies' cloth hanger to create an installation titled *Child Trafficking* (Fig. 3), Ayo Aina's alteration of the pre-existing babies' cloth hanger includes an introduction of two bicycle wheels, as well as, some silhouette of heads, hands and legs attached to the clothes hung on the hanger. Ayo, is an installation artist that is known for the appropriation and manipulation of readymade objects, to exert his artistic ideas, about issues affecting the human environment.

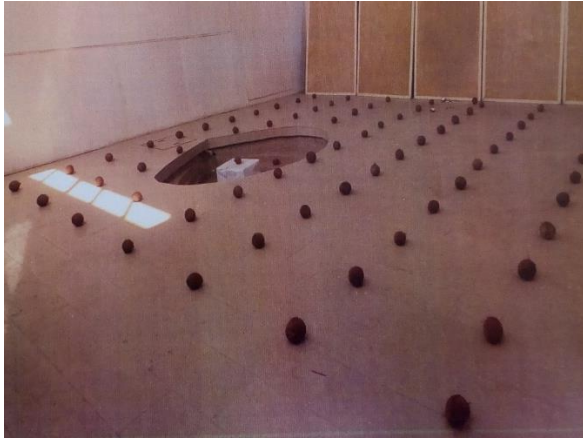


Fig. 4: Kwakwa Installation, Nadama Mustapha Garba, 2017. Coconuts. Courtesy of Nadama (2018)

Nadama Mustapha Garba's (2017) installation titled *Kwakwa* (Fig. 4), which is also an exploratory proceed of the artist's doctoral research in painting, have been seen to intersect with the subject matter being considered by this paper at three points. First, just like Nadama's installation, virtually all market displays are ephemeral, in the sense that, they existed for specific periods in time; hence the reason why they are referred to as 'installations'. Secondly, in the installation, the artist appropriates coconuts, which is the literal interpretation of '*Kwakwa*' in English, in postulating his ideas about corruption within the Nigerian context. As such, he rhythmically and consciously arranged the coconuts in different linear patterns all around the Gallery of the Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria – the exhibition venue. Although the installers of these market displays also arrange their wares consciously, their intentions are quite different from that of an installation artist. The third intersection lies in the installation's material similarities to some of the selected organic market display compositions considered by this paper.

Stemming from this review, it has been established that the idea of appropriation in art is not strange, rather, it is the manifestation of an artist' divergent expressions; a quest to propagate artistic ideas beyond just formal aesthetics and confines. Alluding such artistic ingenuity to artists' imaginative prowess, Ngene (2015) says:

since the advent of modernism, a new wave of interest, in exploration of forms in sculpture, became a concern of most sculptors. Modernism created the opportunities for sculptors, to explore sculptures from other perspectives that, involve the imaginations (P. 125).

The paper is grounded on psychoanalytical ideas and explanations about the creative and behavioural patterns of humans, as proffered by psychoanalysts such as Freud, as well as, Laurie's (2007) explanations on the nature of art.

Conceptual Framework

Over the years, psychologists have given explanations as to how the human mind works, with respect to their behavioural tendencies and more specifically, their creative inclinations. For Carl Jung (1875-1961), a Swiss psychologist, according to McLeod (2004), the human mind has innate characteristics 'imprinted' in it, as a result of evolution. These universal predispositions stem from our ancestral past. Fear of the dark, or of snakes and spiders, might be examples. Journalpsyche.org (2018) is of the opinion that, since the introduction of the theory of Sigmund Freud, in the early 1900's and despite the many advancements in the study of psychoanalytic theory, Freud's basic thoughts retain a strong hold on the shaping of views regarding the theory of the human mind.

Freud, according to Ajayi (2015), "sees consciousness, sub-consciousness and unconsciousness as a 'tripartite system'. While he employed a three dimensional analogy to describe this system, he sees unconsciousness as a large entrance hall where different mental impulses fly around independently, leading into a second narrower room in which consciousness resides." Freud further explains that, at the entrance in between the two rooms, resides a 'watchman' who acts like a 'censor' checking the different impulses to admit anyone that he pleases to. This entrance where the watchman stands, Freud refers to as the level of sub-consciousness. He says:

it is perhaps the most important site of meditation within the entire system, as it is at the preconscious level that impulses are either censored and sent back to the unconscious repressed, or admitted to pass on to consciousness.

This subconscious display of creativity can be vividly pointed at in children while innocently engaging in their activities, with little or no concern for the approval or disapproval of an audience. Freud is of the opinion that these inborn creative tendencies, which are present in all humans, regardless the race, are responsible for the ingenious acts and the behavioural traits men display in different capacities later in life. Such creative tendencies are encountered in different places and in different forms. Some consciously or unconsciously manifest their inborn creativity in the arts, sciences, social sciences, and several other spheres including the day-to-day activities of humans.

The creative ingenuity exhibited in the organisation and display of these selected market display compositions have, been seen to fit into Freud's explanations for the creative process of the human mind. According to Tatarici (2018), Freud believed everyone is creative and that an artist creating, psychologically does the same thing as a child. Watching children play, he observed they gain an enormous amount of pleasure from it and rearrange things in the world in new ways which please them." Just as a child's rearrangement of things come naturally, so also are adults' unconscious manifestation of diverse creative traits, which are mostly inborn. Laurie (2007) avers that:

we can say that creative people seem endowed with an ability that we call talent, or genius. If we think this talent comes from an inner source, we might say that someone has inborn genius, or we might say that artists are divinely inspired, implying that talent and genius are divine gifts (P. 17).

Having established that all humans have, in different degrees, inborn creative tendencies, this paper is therefore grounded on Laurie's (2007) opinion which reads:

...just as the value of major works of art can rise and fall from one generation to the next, so it is often the case that what is made for a utilitarian purpose at one time might be considered a serious work of art at another time (P. 35).

Hence, the paper's conceptual framework. It is on this premise that the paper considers some of these market compositions, as art pieces. In appraising the selected market displays, the compositions are subjected to formal analysis. Formal analysis, according to Lazzari and Schlesier (2008:84), "is an integrated study of all the formal qualities of an art object that are apparent, just by looking at the work, and the meaning that can be derived from them." Though meaning making is part of what the authors consider relevant to formal analysis, in appraising these compositions, this paper however does not concern itself with probable meanings they might suggest. Comparative analysis is also used, in identifying artworks which share similar formal characteristics, with the selected market displays being considered by the paper.

Comparative Analysis of Selected Market Displays against existing Art/Sculpture Installations

This section comparatively analyses four (4) different market displays alongside art installations that bear similarities with such displays, either in the choice of materials used, formation of display or simply in the elements that each work constitutes, which were chosen randomly, within the Kwangila area in Zaria, Kaduna state. Though aesthetically pleasing, the traders who install some of these displays, install them consciously for the sole aim of attracting prospective customers to their stands, as well as, managing their trading spaces. As such, the artistic inclinations inherent in the compositions were unconsciously enacted; perhaps, as a result of the inborn creative tendencies that humans possess, as postulated by Freud. It is imperative to note that these market display compositions being considered, were captured in their natural state, with no manipulation of forms from neither the author nor the photographer. As such, the pictures taken are entirely products of the vendors' creativity.



Plate I: Torchlights: A Detailed View of a Hawker's Display, 2018.
Kwangila Road, Zaria, Kaduna State. Photo by Jimoh Taiye.

If formally analysed, the image in plate I could perhaps be regarded as an art piece in its own right. Given that contemporary trends in art are such that have relatively shifted their course from the traditional approach to art production, towards the exploration of diverse media found around the environment. In the image (plate I), which is majorly comprised of torchlights and other lighting props, elements such as lines, colours, shape and form are vividly displayed; creating balance, emphasis, dominance, as well as, rhythm. Perhaps one might think this piece is a conscious arrangement of a postmodern artist, in making his artistic point. After all, so many artists have made use of similar objects like the torchlights arranged in the image, as their medium of expression. For instance, Ngene (2015) adapted Readymade Vessels (Plate. ii) such as plastic bowls, bottles, plates, amongst others, in making his metaphorical statements. Also, Ayo Aina, an installation artist, has made use of objects like baby dolls, Jeri-cans, plates, wood, amongst others, in his installations over the years (Plate. iii).

Regardless of the motives and philosophies behind them, if one compares the formal characteristics of the image in plate I, which is an excerpt from the picture of a torchlight hawker, the author encountered along the Kwangila road in Zaria, with Ngene's piece in plate. ii, they probably would pass for artistic expressions emanating from the same era – the postmodern era.



Plate II: A Vulcanizing Workshop, 2018. 280cm Kwangila Road, Zaria, Kaduna State. Photo by Jimoh Taiye.

Plate ii shows a tire composition at a vulcanizer's stand. Standing at about 280 cm, the display is comprised of tires of different sizes, piled on one another to create pillars of varied heights, with which the workspace is defined and perhaps managed. On the outermost pillars that flank the entrance to the workspace, are two tires, erected on each of the tire pillars, with the one on the left facing the road, while the other is faced sideways.

Though unconsciously introduced, in arranging the tires, some sculptural principles have been put into use. For instance, the erection of the two topmost tires have introduced negative and positive space into the composition; creating a hollow through the pillars. Circular shapes and forms are dominant in the composition. The various tire tracks also create variations in textures. In installing most of these market compositions including this one (plate ii), balance is a key principle considered. Balance is important because of the disorganized nature of the market place in which they exist, which makes the installations prone to disturbances, that could scatter such arrangements. Also, for the vendors that move about to hawk their wares, balance is significantly required in the arrangement of their carts.

Apart from the general reason which is to attract customers and manage his space, Abdullahi (2018)² explains that, with such a display, he does not need to spend money on making a signboard. This goes on to tell of the iconographic tendencies of such stands, which is one of the numerous characteristics of art itself. Also, going by Laurie's (2007) opinion that "...what is made for a utilitarian purpose at one time might be considered a serious work of art at another time", as well as, the foregoing formal qualities, the vulcanizing stand could be tagged a work of art; despite the initial purpose for installing it. Though Abdullahi's intention while installing the stand was probably not anywhere near art, the installation has been seen to align with some artistic principles.



Plate III: *Let's Play*, Deborah Maikarfi, 2006. Tires and Metals, 330cm.

Sculpture Garden, Dept. of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Photo by Faida (2016).

Comparatively, the vulcanizer's installation shares significant similarities in terms of form and material with a sculpture in the Sculpture Garden of the Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Titled '*Let's Play*' (plate iii), the sculpture which stands at 330 cm in height, was erected in 2006 by Deborah Maikarfi. Manipulating Steel pipes and tires, the artist produced an interesting abstract form with horizontal and vertical orientations. The playful nature of the work, going by the title, is given visual form through the use of hues such as blue, yellow and red on the tires – the three primary colours, as well as, in the arrangement of the tires, which makes sitting on some of its parts possible. Just as in Abdullahi's installation, Deborah's manipulation of the tires created some positive and negative spaces within the sculpture. Since it is generally believed that the environment within which an artist resides, serves as sources of inspiration to the artist, thereby, influencing their art; it is therefore safe to infer that perhaps, Deborah was inspired by such displays, not necessarily Abdullahi's stand in particular, but vulcanizing workshops in general.



Plate IV: *An Orange Vendor*, 2018. Kwangila Road, Zaria, Kaduna State. Photo by Jimoh Taiye.



Plate V: An Orange Vendor. Photo courtesy: http://www.shutterstock.com/editorial/search/barrow?search_source=base_Search_form&sort=date&cat=&page=eyJ2IjoxLCJzIjo0Nzh9

Plate iv carries the image of an orange vendor, pushing his cart containing oranges. While moving about taking pictures in the Kwangila area of Zaria, the pyramidal arrangement of the vendor's display, caught the writer's attention. Considering the round form of oranges, and their unstable nature, the vendor skilfully arranged the oranges in such a manner that helps in maximising his relatively restricted display space and also bring about stability for the oranges. Perhaps this vendor in particular, is not the originator of this form of arrangement. But it is probable that whoever introduced this pyramidal arrangement into the selling of orange or other commodities of similar form, might be familiar with the Egyptian Pyramids or the groundnut pyramids of Kano.

Balance, as earlier pointed out, was put into consideration in arranging the oranges. Balance and stability become even more essential, given the unstable nature of the oranges, as well as, the mode of retailing. Though an artistic installation was probably not the intention of this orange vendor, however, he consciously decided the form he intended to achieve. He could have just heaped the oranges in a cart and sell, like the vendor in plate v, but perhaps, going by Freudian explanations of the creative process, the inborn creative tendency in him, which comes in different degrees in people, made him decide otherwise. Though monochromatic and quite monotonous, the aesthetic satisfaction the form gives a prospective buyer, artist or not, is undeniable.



Plate VI: Silver Palace (Choir of Chimes), Agaku Saghevwua Amos, 2017, Steel Pipes, Fish line, Wood, Square Metal Pipes, 122cm x 97cm x 92cm. Courtesy Agaku (2018)

Forms such as the pyramid have been explored by artists over the years in their various distinctive styles and media. A product of such explorations and manipulations of forms is seen in Agaku Saghevwua Amos' 2017 'Silver Palace (Choir of Chimes)' (Plate VI). Though the piece is a derivative of Agaku's exploration – 'Using Abacus Imagery for Creation of Kinetic Possibilities in Painting', viewed frontally, 'Silver Palace (Choir of Chimes)' depicts a kinetic composition of four pyramidal forms, connected to one another at their apexes. Thereby, sharing an incidental affinity with the pyramidal arrangement of the oranges displayed in Plate iv.



Plate VII: A Fruit Vendor's Display Composition, 2018.
Kwangila Road, Zaria, Kaduna State. Photo by Jimoh Taiye.

Plate vii is an excerpt from a fruit vendor's display. Consisting of pineapples, whole watermelons and a slice of watermelon. It is imperative to note that the angle at which the picture fruit display was taken, also enhances the artistic quality of the composition. The composition illustrates a linear arrangement of fruits, as though they are progressing towards a particular destination. An interesting highlight of the composition is the slice of watermelon, carefully placed on a balanced arrangement of whole watermelons. The composition is majorly characterised by oval and curvy forms. The fruit vendor creatively places a slice of the watermelon at the top of the composition, showing the red flesh of the watermelon; breaking the almost monochromatic orientation of the composition. The red highlight, as well as, the apical position assumed by the slice of watermelon, enacts emphasis and dominance, thereby, making the slice, the point of focus in the composition. Also, overall balance and stability is introduced into the composition.

Textural variation, evidenced by the smooth rind of the watermelon, as against the rough bracts of the pineapples, as well as, the sharp edged and pointy nature of the pineapple crowns, creates variety in the composition. This is further enhanced by the pop of colour in the decaying slice of melon balanced atop the display, serving as the visual pinnacle of the composition. Though meaning making is not part of the set task for this paper, one cannot help but see the composition as that which depicts the pineapples, with their rough textures, and the relatively imposing size of the watermelons, as foot soldiers, carrying and protecting something, seemingly delicate, important and fragile – the slice of watermelon. Leaning on Laurie's (2007) idea on the adaptive nature of objects, depending on the viewer, the historical background of appropriation in art, as well as, the postmodern inclination of artistic explorations, some of which explore ephemeral materials such as fruits; this piece (plate vii) could pass for an interesting work of art.

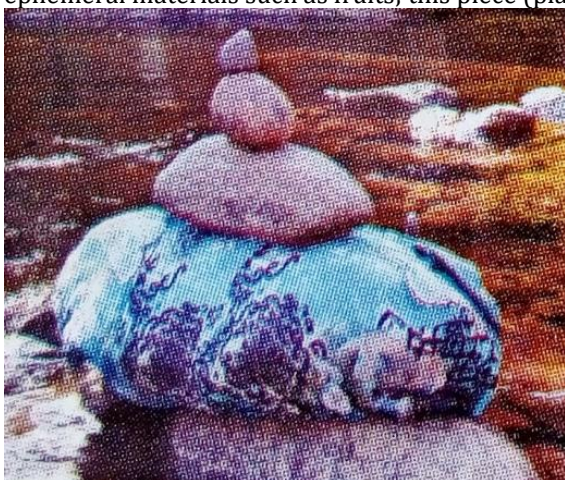


Plate vii: Laundry, Jerry Buhari, 2005. Site specific. Old fabric collected from family homes in Johnson. Installation. Unspecified display format. River Gihon, Johnson, Vermont U.S.A

In terms of arrangement, the fruit vendor's composition (plate vi) shares significant similarities with Jerry Buhari's installation titled *Laundry* (Plate vii). Both arrangements have the smallest element of the composition at the apex of the form, and the largest, at the base of the composition, in a conical or pyramidal orientation.

Conclusion

Just as most human activities, Hicks (2001) says “art begins in the mind of a creative individual.” These market compositions which are mainly created for entirely different reasons like space management, customer attraction, as well as, to serve as a 3-dimensional ‘signboards’, have been appropriated as art by this paper. Considering the vendors’ unconscious use and manipulation of some elements and principles of design, it is apparent that creativity really emanates from the unconscious level of the mind. The ephemerality of the compositions, characterised by the perishability of some of the materials, and transitory nature of the displays, makes them even more interesting art installations. The foregoing, coupled with Laurie’s explanations which imply that different materials whether ephemeral, utilitarian, or otherwise, could be adapted as art; summarizes the philosophy of this paper.

Therefore, it is imperative to note that, the fact that these displays have been seen to possess some artistic inclinations, thereby serving as a basis for attaching the artistic appellation to them, does not mean the vendors who install them are artists. This stems from the fact that the idea of being an artist is rooted in conscious actions and processes. Corroboratively, Dickey in Torres and Kamhi (2000), submits that, “an artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art”; here, ‘understanding’ is the keyword. As such, based on his understanding, an artist will consciously use these materials, elements and principles to create his art. For instance, the manufacturer of the porcelain urinal Duchamp appropriated as art, did not intend it for the purpose of art; Duchamp’s appropriation however, was a conscious artistic or creative act, despite the fact that he did not produce the urinal.

This doesn’t rule out the possibility of an artist creating a form or motif by accident, but his activities are majorly products of his conscious intentions to create art. Also, the different angles from which the displays were captured, which were decided by the author or the photographer, enhances the artistic and aesthetic qualities of the compositions and furthers the elevation of these displays to the level of art installations. Consequently, this is the main reason for tagging these market display compositions as ‘unconscious installations.’

End Notes

5. Agaku’s (2018) review of some critics’ statements and positions on Duchamp’s philosophy of the nature of art, with regards to his readymade explorations. This review was made in Agaku’s doctoral research thesis in Painting.
6. An interview held on Thursday 3rd May, 2018 with Abdullahi, a vulcaniser at the Kwangila area, Zaria Kaduna state.

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