

REPOSITIONING ART FOR NIGERIA'S TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT

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Abstract

Over the years, successive governments in Nigeria seem to highlight science and technology as bases for the nations' socio-economic and political development. Nevertheless, several factors appear to impede the realisation of this dream. One of such is "art." Whereas government appears to believe art is mere "craft" practiced by the "no-do-well" in society, the author argues such assumption is not correct. Instances are cited to highlight why art is seen to be foundational to any technological advancement and in any field of human endeavour. Examples are also given to argue that art is needed in the efforts at forging technological contrivances that make humankind live easy lives. The sustenance as well as continuous improvement of such products will involve dexterous utilizations of acquired technical skills of artists who are incubator of ideas and creators of products, however crude. In addition, the paper discusses the potentialities of art as well as effective utilization of its practical "technicalities" in creating states-of-the-art products for personal, public and industrial purposes. It concludes by suggesting a number of ways of improving on existing states of the arts in aid of technological collaborations. It recommends that both the government and "well-to-do" individuals in the society should see art as foundation to Nigeria's technological advancement and its encouragement among other salient issue were made.

Keywords: Art, Science, Technology, Nation, Development, Reposition

Introduction

Over the years, artists, critics and scholars have continued to define art according to their own views. Some available literature such as Kleiner (2011) defines art as part of the present. He avers that artworks are something people can see and touch. He submits that tangible artwork is a kind of persisting event. In other words, if artworks, as Kleiner observes, are persistent events it means, they are part of the present, regardless of the time in which the works were created. Though Kleiner's definition helps shed light on what we consider art and artwork, more definitions are being offered daily. For instance, Yunusa (2013) defines art as any man made thing which is disparate to objects in nature. He submits that it is a vehicle used by artists in making commentaries regarding virtues and, or defects in societies. He differentiates art from craft which according to the Microsoft Encarta (2009) dictionary involves something produced skillfully by hand, especially in a traditional manner, e.g. a piece of pottery or carving are rudimentary technology. This is different from useful art such as automobiles, glass tumblers, woven baskets, desk and lamps that were originally made for certain purposes which, he believes have aesthetic and utilitarian dimensions.

As there appears to be diverse ways to state what art is, it is, perhaps, difficult for successive governments at the different levels in Nigeria to rationalise how technology can be harnessed through the potentialities of art towards developing the nation's economy. Grillo (1975) states an obvious fact when he avers that a society's progress is a product of its creative ideas. Grillo maintains that though most societies appear to

perceive artists as “unpractical and unrealistic”, he believes many business men would take it as joke if told some products they sell would not even exist if they had not been created in the first place by artists. Even though such perceptual errors abound in other fields of human endeavour, in art, the act of basket weaving, wood/calabash carving, gold/silver smiting and bronze casting as Kefas (2002) observes, are regarded by society as professions for the no-do-well. Such attitude, according to Uzoagba (2000) borders on sheer ignorance and it is mostly responsible for governments’ none or little understanding of why art is important towards the nation’s technological development. Again, such perceptual attitudes have led to a variety of negative outlooks that tend to limit art as the precursor to all forms of industrialisation.

Potentialities of Art in the Economy

Available data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) shows that Nigeria slipped into an economic recession in 2016. To understand the enormity of the matter, Osalor (2016) explains:

A recession is when the economy declines significantly for at least six months. That means there’s a drop in the following five economic indicators: real GDP, Income, Employment, Manufacturing, and retail sales. People often say a recession is when the GDP growth rate is negative for two consecutive quarters or more.

Data on the *Nigerian Gross Domestic Product Report Q2 2016* from the National Bureau of Statistics show:

The Second Quarter of 2016, the nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) declined by - 2.06% (year-on year) in real terms. This was lower by 1.70% points from the growth rate of -0.36% recorded in the preceding quarter, and also lowers by 4.41% points from the growth rate of 2.35% recorded in the corresponding quarter of 2015. Quarter on quarter, real GDP increased by 0.82%. During the quarter, nominal GDP was N23, 483,954.78 million (in nominal terms) at basic prices. This was 2.73% higher than the Second Quarter 2015 value of N22, 859,153.01 million. This growth was lower than the rate recorded in the Second Quarter of 2015 by 2.44% points.

A BBC Nigeria correspondent, Martin Patience in August 2016, reports how critics hold Nigeria’s current administration’s policies responsible for making a bad situation even worse. According to the correspondent, critics of the policy observed the policy failed because it allows the Naira to float while hoping to attract foreign investors. But it led to inflation. Nevertheless, the correspondent reports that the government is taking some measures at curbing the rising inflationary trend which was caused by the policy by importing less while encouraging made in Nigeria products.

The current economic recession offer citizens opportunity to find alternative means of supporting their regular source of livelihood. The need for citizens to turn to art in order to acquire skills and utilisations of same is now. Of course, creative art methodologies can be harnessed towards manufacturing of goods

as well as provision of services that have value. The potentialities that art offer towards creating various kinds of the state-of-the-art products cannot be over emphasised. Therefore, art is the basis on which technology develops while innovativeness is what should drive the process. Innovation brings value to production of goods and services because it saves time and cost (Akprara, 2009).

The techniques used in art and craft production are innovatively applied to large scale production with the aid of technology. According to Washor cited in Bob (2010), innovating is a fundamentally different way of doing things that result in considerably better and perhaps different outcomes to set in. According to Bob (2010) most inventions that are commonplace today are the results of thousands of iterations based both on success and failure. In this sense, technology is basically the creative adaptations of several arts and craft techniques geared towards mass production of goods and services. According to Yunusa (2013), this makes art science because it is logical, systematic and rational in both process and product. He avers that art is a catalyst to the development of any nation.

But in Nigeria, the story seems different because successive governments at different levels neither encourage the teaching or practice of art. There appears not to have been a clear cut implementation strategies put in place at the different levels of schooling. Such low perceptual relevance accorded art, even while it is a base for industrialisation in many ways affects policy implementation. Yes, it is not wrong stating the obvious that successive governments in Nigeria have openly encouraged the study of science and technology to the detriment of art and the social sciences. Most Governments believe its citizens should acquire knowledge of science and technology to develop its economy. However, non-recognition of art is probably due to errors of perception that it is craft.

Art, Craft and Technology in Nigeria before contact with the Europeans

No doubt, prior to contact with the Europeans, Africans forged items such as hoes and other sundry items of commerce for personal and societal needs. For instance, the ancient Binis, Igbo-Ukwu and Ife artists evolved workable technologies (however crude they seemed) that were used in creating bronze, as well as zinc-brass and copper alloy pieces comparable to any of their kinds elsewhere. The art pieces comprise of a variety of items ranging from sumptuous and layered regalia of Chiefs and Kings, stoles, special weaponry and handheld objects such as staffs, spears, knives, scepters, shields, umbrellas among others (Kleiner, 2011).

In the African context of building good neighbourliness and diplomacy, communities with technical know-hows of creating such artifacts and other items of daily chores had capacities to sanction those that did not kowtow to their wishes just as developed economies do to the lesser developed ones (Akprara, 2012). For instance, Duniya and Gyegwe (2014), observe that Cultures borrow from cultures. Citing Nicodemus (1993), Duniya and Gyegwe (2014) believe all the dynamic cultures of the world have borrowed from other cultures in a process of mutual fertilization. In the bid to develop, there is the need to look at the

positive aspects of other people's technology and adapt. Indeed, there is no gain saying that art plays functional as well as aesthetic roles in the establishment of a people's tradition and culture (Akprara, 2010).

Science, Art and Technology in the 20th century

Einstein's theory of relativity impacted 20th century art theorisation and practice. According to Kleiner (2011), Einstein's theory of relativity postulates that space and time are not absolute as postulated in Newtonian physics. Rather, time and space are relative to the observer and linked to what he called a four-dimensional space-time continuum. This provided artists the bases to engage in abstraction and other forms of un-mimetic conceptualisations and creation of artworks. Kleiner also adds that a number of artists such as Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), Pablo Picasso (1881-1975), and Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) worked with the Einstein's theory to develop various art credos and manifestos.

Different school of thoughts regarding what they think amounted to art or how it should be practiced came to the fore. Art became boundless as Einstein's theory began to be applied to virtually all aspects of human endeavour such as the creation of artworks with aesthetic and entrepreneurial values among others. As technology unveils, a lot of breakthroughs were made in other spheres of life such as information and technology. Bulky gadgets that were used for communication became reduced as a result of technological breakthrough. Since becoming reduced to the size of suitcases, the gadgets found their ways into the homes of both the poor and rich. Artists took advantage of the revolution by applying the computer for creating works of art.

Kleiner states, many avant-garde artists, embraced new technologies in their attempt to find fresh avenues of artistic expression. Among the media were video recordings and computer graphics. Several artists, in particular, Nam June Paik (1932-2006), Adrian Piper (1948) and a host of others used the new medium of computer graphics which combines both images and sounds to create works of art that can be viewed in small or large screens. Similarly, David Em (1952) used the medium to create illusionistic 3-dimensional forms. In the same vein, Jenny Holzer (1950) applied the light-emitting diode (LED) technology in creating artworks. This way of creating art opened up new possibilities for art and the artists. Ibe Ananaba, John Ogene as well as Rom Kalilu are among other Nigerian artists who have been using the computer to produce artworks in similar manners.

Information and Communication Technology and the future of art in the 21st century

Einstein's theory of relativity changed how art was practiced in the 20th century and the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the 21st century have taken centre stage. Abass, Akhetuamen, and Oyaniran (2015) observe that the 21st century ushered in better inter-connectivity, accelerating flow of data, and shrinking time and national boundaries in the manner that humans conduct business. Eribo and Eribo (2015) believe that developing and a logical handling and retrieval of

information has given rise to the idea of communication technology. They hold the view that communication technology has changed the way information is gathered and disseminated. They observe that different facilities such as mobile phones, televisions, radio, computer, satellite, e-mail, scanners makes transmission of voice, text and visual messages easy. At the moment, students as well as professional artists are seeking best ways of applying ICT for creating works of art. In Nigeria, a significant number of artists have explored a variety of media for creating contemporary art works.

Duniya and Gyegwe (2014) carried out a research that borders on application of technology in art. They state that computer application in Nigeria includes the manipulation, distortion, and enhancement of photographic images to create paintings. Works by Felix Adakuno, and Ben Atanu and Professor Kalilu were cited. They also mentioned the computer and other appropriate software such as CorelDraw, Painter X, and Photoshop amongst others, which are used for illustrations. One of such works is titled *inter house sports day* created by Nwachukwu Ifeanyichukwu. According to the authors, the “use of Photoshop in creating paintings is another dimension in the use of software.” In other words, the importance of the computer in the 21st century creation of artworks can be likened to Leonardo da Vinci’s reflexive sketches of what today appears to be the flying and war machines that were precursors to great inventions of today. Duniya and Gyegwe further mentioned the Ornithopter believed to be a model for an aircraft with flapping wings to being the brainchild of Leonardo da Vinci. While citing Magurn (2008), both authors claimed that Leonardo invented a large number of ingenious machines, many potentially not practicable, embodied sound principles of aerodynamics. According to the authors, the helicopter, airplane, space rockets, wind mills and wind energy may have been developed from Leonardo’s sketches. While Leonardo’s exploratory sketches can be equated with the scientific process of enquiry, Kleiner and Mamiya (2005) state that such made him a better painter and a genius.

The use of science and technological gadget appears to have extended artistic explorations by painters as Gyegwe in 2008 applied a Microscope in resolving artistic problems in a study titled *An Artistic Contemplation of the Watermelon Fruit in Painting*. Also the use of scientific devices for creating works of art was further explored by Duniya and Gyegwe in 2014 in the study titled *An Investigation of Computer Application to Painting in Nigeria*. The study exposes the inherent possibilities of using the medium for artistic creations.

As a nation, Nigeria benefits so much from art. Her citizens who have knowledge to apply its principles bring about technological innovations in general education as well as in agricultural sciences extension services as well as graphics and textile productions. For instance, it is the works of graphics artists that help the agricultural sciences extension workers in disseminating information to farmers through posters illustration showing how farmer should cultivate seedlings. They also create illustrations portraying how simple and heavy machinery such as harvesters and tractors should be used. Art knowledge is also applied

in mass producing a variety of products in graphics such as Posters, Stickers, T-shirts, Banners and Badges to mention but a few. Art also contributes aesthetically to how farm tools and machineries appear.

In similar ways, it would be seen that John Ogene, Victor Ekpuk, Rom Kalilu, Ibe Ananaba, Edward Lapang, Ben Atanu and a host of others have become skillful users of the computer in creating works of art. Some of the works created by the above mentioned artists portray cultural diversities of the Nigerian people. Access to the computer is now gaining acceptance as a new way of creating works of art which preserves a peoples' cultural heritage (Abass et al., 2015). While social, economic and political aspects of a peoples live get improved, the immediate advantage which accrue to nations which artists' are applying computers for creating works of art is that their cultures get documented and kept alive in the newest retrieval formats. The application of technology to art has shown that those traditional exhibition spaces built for exhibiting works of art are gradually given way to a variety of social media platforms such as Facebook and Whatsapp. In order to reach a wider audience, therefore, these platforms are currently being used by Nigeria's artists in displaying their works.

Conclusion

As long as man lives, art has been offering humanity opportunity for expressing itself. Both the able and less privileged persons in society find it natural in many ways to communicate their thoughts through art. The adaptation potentials that art offers in auto-designing, agricultural sciences and in the applied arts of graphics, textiles, photography and printing in creating of a variety of the state-of-the-arts products would not only help Nigeria economically, it would place her amongst the fastest growing industrialised nations of the 21st century.

Recommendation

Both government and the private organizations should support buying works of art created using technological gadgets, such as computers because they are fast gaining ground. In addition, the government and the well-to-do individuals in society should encourage talented individuals to either teach or practice art either privately or in schools because it plays a vital role in nations' technological advancement.

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