

The Future of Visual Arts in the 21st Century: A Critical Prognosis

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Abstract

This study examines the future of Visual arts in this 21st Century against the avalanche of global Technological and Scientific advancement. Coming home to Africa, the paper attempts at establishing the fact that African Art remains one of the greatest contributions of the Continent to the history of mankind. Presently, African modern art has not occupied its rightful place in the global art scene, partly due to their Colonial history. However, the sudden re-awakening and internationalization of African modern art, it will soon take the centre stage, thereby erasing the barrier of “centre and periphery

Introduction

Looking at the art of this Century one is bound to pause and wonder what art is and what is not? What can be done with art? And how can make sense out of it? Has art become the transfiguration of the common place? or is there a philosophical disenfranchisement of art as posited by Danto (2014).

In the past Socrates and Hamlet Spoke of art as 'a mirror held up to nature'. Socrates saw mirror as but reflecting what we can already see; so art like mirror yields accurate duplication of appearance of things. Aristotle however, approached art differently when he said that artists do not exactly duplicate or copy nature, rather they express nature. Aristotle meant more than copying when he called art an imitation in his treatise, Poetics. The idea of art as imitation led to mimetic criticism; which is the view the art/literature is primarily an imitation of reality. Mimetic theory held sway in Western art history until the emergence of structuralism, which was spearheaded by Levi Straus. Structuralism as a theory is explicitly opposed to mimetic theory. Indeed, it is a truism that not all artists are set to please the audience or to imitate nature.

Buser (2016) states that "some artists intend to disturb, provoke and challenge their viewers. The shocking and grotesque images express their deep anxieties about unspeakable atrocities and sufferings". By the end of nineteenth century, it has become clear that mimesis has fallen out of favour in the west when their art became increasingly less representational and gradually mimetic art was replaced by photography. This era also saw the emergence of Expressive criticism; which primarily express the feelings, temperament or creative imagination of the artist/author. It is also pertinent to note that in the late 1960's structuralistic enterprise was almost replaced by post-structuralism which included deconstruction.

Today, art could be categorized into three: Pre-Modern Art, Modern Art and Post Modern Art (otherwise known as the new modern art) Collings (2000) expressed interrelatedness between Modern Art and the Pos-Modern art when he observes thus:

New Modern art often imitates the exact surfaces of old modern art, precisely because it doesn't care about it. It doesn't the same to Pre-Modern art where an 'Old modern art' used to strive not to imitate the exact surface of older art, precisely because it believed in it. It believed in it enough to want to develop it and advance it, and developing and advancing meant not copying the surface but advancing the idea or principle that land beneath the surface.

Developments in Modern Art: The Three Big Myths

The three important myths of modern art are; myths of Picasso, Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol (Collings, 2000). These three myths are vivid and powerful and each myth once it emerged changed the codes of art history. They are all referred to unconsciously all the time by critics, art historians and artists. In the popular imagination they are also referred to because everyone knows them. Cubism for example, is everywhere in the surface of modern life undiluted amounts.

Telling art works from other things is not so simple a matter and these days one might not be aware that he was on an artistic terrain without an artistic theory to tell him so. One of the use of theories, in addition to helping us discriminate art from the rest consist in making art possible (Danto 2004) Edgar Degas insist that "Art is not what you see but what you make others see".

To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decri or deny as harmful an atmosphere of artistic theory, knowledge of history might invoke the *Labour Theory of Value to account* for the price he demands. The theories do not only guide our art production but could form bases of our practical/ studio productions in the spirit of matching theory with practice.

Andy Warhol, the Pop artist, displays facsimiles of Brillo cartons polled high in near stacks, as in the stock room of the supermarket. They happen to be of wood painted to look like card board. In trying to Justify it as a work of art, a critic from the *Times magazine* articulates that "If one makes a facsimile of a human being out of bronze, why not the facsimile of a Brillo carton out of wood".

What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo box is a certain theory of art. It is the theory that takes it up into the world of art and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is (in a sense of it other than artistic identification) of course without the theory, one is unlikely to see. It as an art and in order to see it as part of the art world, the viewer must have mastered a good deal of artistic theory of recent New York painting.

Development in Nigerian Modern Art

Most Nigerian art historians believe that modern Nigerian art emanated from a single point of origin, as if from a tap root and then proceeds linearly with a beginning. Scholars such as Ola Oloidi, Osa Egonwa and Chika Okeke-Agulu begin their art historical narratives with Aina Onabolu. Chika Okeke-Agulu, in his essay on the Development on Modern Art in Nigeria in "seven stories about modern art in Africa (1995) held in London, positioned Aina Onabolu (1882-1963) as the precursor of Nigerian Modern Art.

In the easy entitled "The Quest form Zaria to Nsukka", Onabolu was acknowledged for his bold efforts in venturing into the interior of European art and

successfully standing up to the challenge that an African artist could master western modes of art. Onabolu was not only a portrait painter with a successful studio in Lagos, he was also the pioneer of academic art education in Nigeria. Other pioneers of modern art and academic art education in Nigeria include; Akinola Lasekan and Ben Enwonwu.

Another notable development in Nigerian art is the group action which took place before and after Nigeria's independence. This was the creation in 1958 of the Zaria art school by students at the college of Arts, Science and Technology, Zaria. The members of this group who were then students of Western approaches in their official tuition. Adewunmi (2004) Sums up this development thus:

The agitation between 1958 and 1961, of a group of students of the Nigerian college of Arts, Science and Technology in Zaria, led by Uche Okeke, argued against Colonial-inspired Western art academism. The counter-reaction by this group sparked a revolution in modern Nigeria art. Hence, the name, Zaria Revolutionaries. They revolted against Western styled. Education which promoted naturalism only and on the contrary advocate a style that merged the good values of western art culture with the good values of traditional art culture, a movement referred to as Natural synthesis. The eight students forming the Zaria Art Society were: Bruce Onograkpeya, Yusuf Grillo, Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, Simon Okeke, Oseloka Osadebe, Okechukwu Odita, and Ogbanaya Nwagbara.

It is also pertinent to mention several art workshops initiated by expatriates between 1940s and 1960s. These workshops aim at encouraging Nigerian artist to move away from purely traditional aesthetics and express themselves in more modern style. Prominent among these workshops include: Oye Ekiti workshop of father Kevin Carroll, and the Mbari workshop. Today, there are many art workshops organized by Nigerian artists, prominent among them is the 'Harmattan workshop' organized by Bruce Onobrakpeya. There is no doubt that the spirit of independence and quest for National and African identities all contributed in shaping the modern art of Nigeria.

King and Durbridge (1999) shares a lot of optimism that Nigerian art will continue to grow steadily until it takes its rightful place, independent of western agenda. They observe that vigilant artists have worked hard towards the threat of outside control and to create a position in which they determine decision of art in Nigeria.

Art Teaching and Practice in Nigeria

The teaching and Practice of art in Nigeria still left much to be desired. Art cannot put food on the tables of most practicing artists in Nigeria. Nigerian artists today need an attitudinal change towards their career. This change does not mean quitting art production for another vocation, rather they should take a deep look into their trade, from past to present. The artist needs to see the changes happening around him and must notice the new normal since change is the only thing that is constant. If an artist have been making a lot of money from his art, now he should expect a more competitive market because there are new technologies involved in art production and more competitors in the trade. This situation calls for planning ahead and preparing for the

future because is already here. This implies that the Nigerian artist should look beyond his/her immediate horizon and look up to something as yet unimagined, lastly, the artist should place his/her art above technology and globalization.

Art Teaching

In the academia, the Master of Fine Art degree (MFA) is a collectivity of education. It enables students to be uniquely propelled into conversations which become the proving ground of the artistic vanguard. It is expected that students should complete their programmes with a thoroughly researched, independent thesis which they should present in a public exhibition with numerous guest Jurors from respected art institutions across the globe.

Art Institutions should always bear in mind that MFA's studio pedagogy is centred on the idea of the practicing artists as educators; Art lecturers for the programme should be professionals of many years of experience in creating art projects. This will expose the students to learning from renowned lectures and instructors with ability to advance leading designs and art theory beyond the frontier of Academia. As an African Optimist, I for see a change in the global art space with African art coming up to the centre stage, a centre which is presently dominated by western art. Jantjes (1999) shares similar optimism when he avers that:

Our view of what the world of art will alter, the scholars who accompany and guide us through space and time provide tools with which to dismantle the single minded and sometimes Myopic authority of twentieth century modernist art history.

However, to realize this change, there must be calculated steps and pattern which the African artist must follow because every Journey, especially to a new level must involve a lot of innovation and originality.

Conclusion

The future of art in the 21st century appears predictable. There will be an expected transfiguration of common place, where there will be no centre, and no periphery. Nigeria with its rich cultural heritage will continue to play a dominant role in the African art scene. This idea was collaborated by Mabellimi (2014) when he asserts that "Nigeria is like a microcosm that contains in concentrated form, all the potentiality and contradictions of Africa".

I must also add that professional ethics demand that every visual artist holds art exhibitions to show case what he has produced periodically. This will serve as an evidence of functioning and visibility in the art circles. He/she also needs to travel far and wide to attend other people's art exhibitions, art seminars, conferences, workshops and other art events. Indeed, African art has all it takes to play a dominant role in the art of 21st century and beyond.

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