

Adoption of Supremantism in Architecture: A Strive for Simplicity

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Abstract

The complexity of architectural design comes with its difficulty of harmonious composition. Even when a good one eventually emerges, it hardly withstands the taste of time. Objectively, this paper seeks a means of striving for simplicity of design in architecture. This was methodically carried out using the power of visual, to tell a historical trend of architectural development of the present and years gone by. The research was limited to Auchi as indigenous trends in comparison to world historical architectural practices. The major Architecture-influenced art movement (supremantism) was equally emphasized as a workable tool for simplification of design. The visual and text gathered resulted in the findings that the history of Architecture is from complexity to simplicity as the recent award-winning building in the world (Lessans House) is free from excessive decoration. It equally reveals the interconnectedness of painting and graphic design as with architects. For increased nexus between indigenous trends and world best practices in architecture, it was recommended that the concept of minimalism for which supremantist stand for should be a guiding principle in how we design building.

Key Words: Simplicity, Architecture, Visuals, Supremantism, Minimalism

Introduction

Globalization has led to increased nexus between indigenous trend and global best practices in architecture. The Internet has also made the world a transparent space such that getting information is just a click away from us. However, a majority of people seem to be in sensitive to the fast-changing nature of world best practices. Nearly all people have eyes, but a majority cannot see, they can only look. Therefore, this paper is meant to narrow the gap between the seeing and looking designers in the area of architecture.

The current remarkable building in the world seems to glorify the “concept of let me know the rule so I can ignore it”. Rules bring about rigidity which eventually give birth to imitation. The sense of how imitation is limitation makes some architect to break away from rules by redefining them. Malevich, the leader of supremantism was one of such genius. This paper will take you on a visual journey of architectural development of which some are predicated on minimalism-simplicity of how to design building.

Supremantism and Architecture

The concept of supremantism was made popular by Malevich, a Russian, who was not only a painter but an architect, philosopher, intelligentsia, and theorist. The exhibition of black, white canvas devoid of forms and tones was majorly a radical innovation in art history. It was indeed a shock to the world-Malevich contradicted conventions. In

summary he helped to change the future of international art, architecture and design (Hodges 2011:123). Moreso, as a philosopher he was relentless in the pursuit of his goals. As expatiated by Hodges (2011:123) in 1915;

Malevich began what he called the supremous group, joined by other artists including El Lissitzky (1890-1941), Liubor Popora (1889-1924), Olga Rozanora (1886-7-1918), Aleksandra Aleksandrovna Ekster (1882-1929) and some others. They met often to discuss their philosophies and their beliefs that supremantism could help to improve the society.

No wonder, his supremacy of pure feelings of perception in the pictorial arts had influence on Russian Revolution of 1917. In the end, it is how people feel that matters to them. This was why supremantism became universally popular. Similarly, Maxwell (2011) said, “people will not always remember what you said or what you did but they will always remember how you made them feel”. As part of an avant-garde art in Russia in the 20th Century his influence was great in their economy. Hodge (2011:127) further expatiated;

At first, avant-garde art flourished in Russia. Many of the Russian avant-garde thinkers were given positions in the new state institutions and construction and supremantism was encouraged as a progressive style that epitomized the new thinking.

Constructivism in Architecture

Constructivism was an artistic and architectural philosophy that had its origin in Russia, beginning in 1915. This movement aimed to reflect modern industries and society and urban space. From the word go, artists in attempt to promote universal visual language had led to the establishment of diverse art movements. They were established and dissolved and another would eventually emerge in swift succession. Some of these movements that were architecturally based were Constructivism, Bauhaus, and Supremantism. The fuse of Art and Architecture was aimed at maximising its excess, whereby an enduring, more creative and technological concept would be achieved. In line with this leverage, Hodge (2011:126) opines that “it rejected decorative stylization in favour of the industrial assemblage of materials.” Constructivism, like supremantism have brought a new dimension to architecture by 60 seeking a new world in a “radical” way. As explained by Whitebam & Poke (2000: 152), constructivism in Soviet Russia (USSR), created designs or objects that had particular or practical uses for the new world”.

Simplicity in Architecture

The work of art, like architecture, conveys a message. When a message is simple, then, according to Maxwell (2011:2) you communicate between by connecting with the audience. Moreso, Waldo (1997:229) made it clear that “To be simple is to be great”. Simple design of building has great presence that attract many. This is what contemporary

architecture strives for. The 21st century architecture believes in ‘Minimalism’. The concept of less is more.

In Nigeria, some buildings for banks have some peculiar character. For instance, a comparison of old First Bank and Union Bank with their present building explains it better. The box like shape of these building shows the correlation between the philosophy of suprematism and Architecture. The Lessan house in United Kingdom won “the best house design of the year, 2019”. Its simplicity is amazing. The choice of material, its uses and the structure have contemporary touch.

The Artist and Architecture

Artist is a broad name for designers or creators, while architect is a narrow or specialized word for the people that design houses and its equivalents. The etymological development of words show their nexus by making the two words start with “AR”. Historically, there was never an Architect from the beginning, it was an off shoot of Artist. Hence, architectural works in the material form of buildings, are often perceived as cultural symbols and work of art. The philosophy of architecture is a branch of philosophy of art, dealing with aesthetic value of architecture, its semantics and relations with development and culture. The Bauhaus school of Arts later brought these distinctions. As never before, painting and architecture became more classified. According to Hodges (2011:133):

The Bauhaus was the first modern art school, combining both fine art and design education. Built around the concept that craftsmanship is the basis of every art form, all students took a six-month preliminary course which covered a broad range of practical and theoretical aspects of art, craft and design. Next, students – entered into specialized areas for three years where they were taught by two masters, one artist and one craft person. The specialist areas included Metal working, Cabinet making, Weaving, Pottery, Painting, Typography, Photography, Printing, and Sculpture and after a while, Architecture.

Hence, the researchers in this paper are collaborating their visual experiences with their inherent interest in architecture to create an awareness on the power of simplicity by adopting suprematism which is more of art terminology. The suprematist influence on architecture originated from Malevich who was a Painter (artist) whose idea of composition was equally relevant in architecture. Kelly (2001:8), said, such response to a good composition is what suprematism of feedings equally stands for.

Architectural Experimentation of Suprematism

Below are the visuals showing the influence of suprematism in the work of contemporary architects. (Kasimin Malevich and Zaha Hadid):



Plate 1: Kasimir Malevich, *Soccer Flower in the Fourth Dimension*



Plate 2: Kasimir Malevich, *Eight Red Rectangles*, 1915

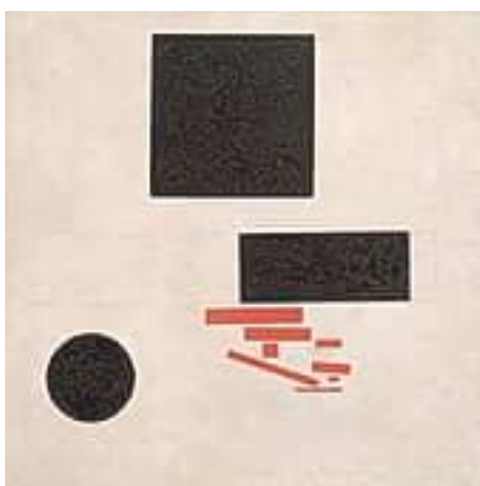


Plate 3: Kasimir Malevich, Supremantist composition



Plate 4: Kasimir Malevich,
Untitled



Plate 5: Zaha Hadid
Spittelan Viaducts Housing
Bruno Womfay



Plate 6: Kasimir Malevich
Half-hgurs in a yellow ship

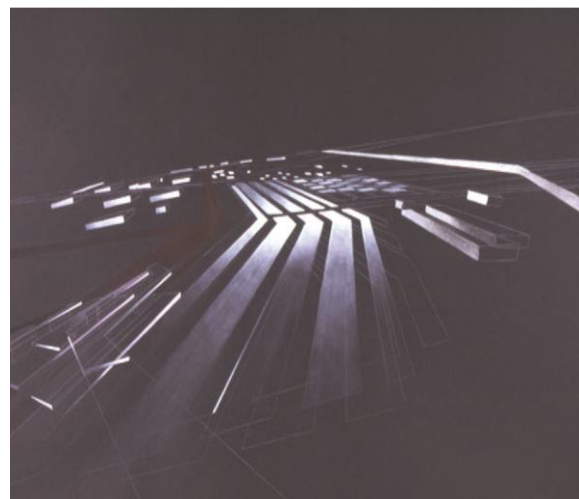


Plate 7: Zaha Hadid Half-
Hoenhelm-Nord Terminus
and Car Park



Plate 8: Zaha Hadid Architects, Spittelan Viaducts Housing. Courtesy: Bruno Womfav

Hadid contributed indirectly to the comprehension of the supremantist movement with her practical works. Not only her preparatory drawings, but also her early works done between 1980 and 1990, before she adopted the fluid aesthetic for which she is today recognized, shaped what supremantism architecture could have been.

Brief History of Architecture and Design

Architecture is as old as just when man decided to create shelter. Consequently, phases of architecture have influenced one another throughout the ages Avila (2018) said Universities have the tendency to focus on western architecture, which refers to architecture in Europe and the impacts in the America and other nations around the globe. Plate II provides the visual of some major architectural periods showing what building of that era look like



Plate 9: Classical Architect, *La Madeline Pierre – Alexander Vign on Era – Classical, Avita*

This era is tied to Greek and Roman empires which used elements such as stone symmetry to create their monumental designs.



Plate 10: Notre Dame – Various, Gothic. Courtesy: Avita

Gothic was an era of buttresses, new technology and gargoules. It brought about daring designs, pointed arches and technology that allowed for the weight of the building to be distributed via slender columns (Avila, 2018). This later evolved.



Plate 11: Santa Maria dal Fiore-Variou, Renaissance, Courtesy: Avita

Renaissance was a breaking point in the history of architecture. **Timeline:** It is known as the age of awakening for many countries in the European nation starting with Italy. The Brunelleschi's Dome from the Santa Maria dal Fiore is one of such.



Plate 12: Paris Opera House-Charles Garnier, Beaux – Arts Era, Courtesy: Avita

This was inspired by elements of the classical era in architecture. This style is present in the city of Chicago. Raised first storeys, symmetrical and classical – like columns are elements found in this era of heavy ornamentation (Avita, 2018).



Plate 13: Casamila – Antoni Gaudi, Art Nouveau Era, Courtesy: Avita

Art Nouveau was popular between 1890's to 1910. These designs were influenced by fluidity and nature. Organic designs were explored in this era of using curvature in their body of work.



Plate 14: Casamila, Antoni Gaudi, Art Nouveau Era, Courtesy: Avita

This modern is the era of the box. Function was prioritized over form and simplicity. Putting away all the ornamentations and producing minimalist concept was the main goal.



Plate 15: Disney Concert Hall, Post Modern. Courtesy: Avita

This is the most recent architectural movement that originated in the 1960s, which came on board as a reaction to modern architectural and cultural shifts. The Herald Washington

Library in Chicago was influenced by this era. This became a platform that challenged designers to continue to design efficient, safe, sustainable buildings for everyday use.

Visuals of Indigenous Architecture

The indigenous architecture in Nigeria, has a global outlook, hence, Auchi town was chosen to exemplify this architectural practice. The global best practices of architecture have presently influenced the Banking buildings. The comparison of old United Bank for Africa (UBA), First Bank, and Union Bank buildings with their current buildings is clear-cut evidence of the influence of suprematism and constructivism on indigenous building.

Below are some of the architectural indigenous pictures.



Plate 16: Guarantee Trust Bank: Contemporary era. Courtesy: Efuoghena



Plate 17: Title: United Bank for Africa Plc (UBA), Contemporary era
Courtesy: Efuoghena



Plate 18: Title: Union Bank, Contemporary Era. Courtesy: Efeoghena



Plate 19, Access Bank, Contemporary Era. Courtesy: Efeoghena



Plate 20: Fidelity Bank, Contemporary era. Courtesy: Efeoghena



Plate 21: Lecky Lodge and Event Centre, Auchi.
Contemporary era. Courtesy: Efeoghena

A closer view of these indigenous buildings shows their square-like underlying structure for which supremantism was committed to.

Analyses of Findings

From the visuals gathered, there is a growing nexus between indigenous trends and global best practices of architecture. However, in Nigeria, especially in Edo State, most private home owners are not sensitive yet to the global best practices of simplicity of design. What we see around is busy environment with unharmonized design. Maybe this is one reason Nigeria is part of the developing countries.

The banking sector has shown a tremendous response to the world best practices of architecture. Guarantee Trust Bank (GTB) has more of this innovation such that it's building anywhere in Nigeria is the same. Their buildings are designed in square shapes and the bank logo seems to borrow Malevich idea of canvas painting (supremantism). Their landscaping, car park, choice of flower is equally simplified, which give an uplifting feeling to the viewers. Even more remarkably, the building is painted in limited colour of simple tones. Most bank buildings are in line with best world practices of architecture. This may be so as they currently have offices in many parts of the world.

Conclusion

The historical trend in architecture reveals its development complexity to simplicity. Many styles have emerged and replaced swiftly others, but the memories they left behind has been an inspiration for the artist and architect. Such eras like Classical, Gothic, Renaissance, Bauhaus architect, Art nouveau, modern, and Post Modern were remarkable. Moreso, the revolutionary concept of supremantism which Malevich founded became a platform of rethink in painting. This philosophy equally influenced architecture and even more remarkably the economy of Russia and by extension the world. Consequently, the supremantist reduction of pictorial elements to simple geometric shapes and block of plain colour of monochromatic tones in painting is presently influencing architecture worldwide. Hence the adoption of supremantist philosophy in architecture will further create awareness and narrow the odd of the "nexus between indigenous trends and Global best practices, since the world of design is getting more minimal. The RIBA best house of the year 2019, "House Lessan" by Daid Sheppard Architect is a clear testimony of the intriguing power of simplicity. The judges selected the house based on a universal recognizable truth about beauty.

Recommendation

The concept of minimalism should be guiding principle in how to design and build a building. Houses and their environment should be free from excessive decoration. So, they will speak the language of international modernism.

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