

Visual art exhibition: An agent for political stability in Nigeria

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Abstract

Visual Arts exhibition, by its nature, holds a mirror up to society, reflecting its interests and concerns while at the same time challenging its ideologies and preconceptions. With the state of political instability in Nigeria today, artists through the medium of visual art exhibition have distinct role to play that may ensure that those factors that accelerate instability be curtailed. The problem this paper addresses is that, these roles played by visual art through exhibitions are being overlooked and not recognized by some artists in Nigeria and the non-artist alike, of which, this paper is aimed at portraying. Information was gathered using primary and secondary sources and the findings made shows that visual art exhibition can serve as an agent for fostering political stability in Nigeria.

Keywords: Visual Art; Exhibition; Politics; Stability

1 Introduction

Visual art has been an age-long instrument that many societies have employed in their successful development. Art deals with socioeconomic as well as political facts in the community. It is the mirror of the society that helps reflect the state of the society. Its utilitarian function has also serve as a means of solving the problem of man and its aesthetic function has played a significant role in the built environment.

According to Peters 2018; the creation of art and design for cultural and universal communication are actualized through the creative exploration of potentials of environmental elements. The quality of this concept in the visual art making by the artist and designer is inspired and boosted by creatively articulated basic senses of sight, touch, test, smell and hearing. The implication is that one can derive motifs for eloquence visual communication purposes within the immediate environment and application of creative intellect. The available elements in our locality contain abundant design motifs for two and three dimensional art and design.

Exhibition has had a long and complex history, evolving with the ever changing demands of society while at the same time challenging those very demands. Art exhibitions act as the catalyst of art and ideas to the public; they represent a way of displaying and contextualizing art that makes it relevant and accessible to contemporary audiences. Arts exhibition, by its nature, holds a mirror up to society, reflecting its interests and concerns while at the same time challenging its ideologies and preconceptions. Keeping art relevant to society and to a diverse audience at any given point in history is one of the main goals of art exhibition and this is one of the reasons it is so important to the promotion of the people's culture.

As society grows and advances from one state to the other, there seems to be some form of instability as a result of the policies and activities of both the government of the day and the masses. Most of the activities that stir up political

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instability are religious manipulation to gain economic advantage, unfulfilled promises, lopsided appointment, victimization, corruption, greed, violence, tribalism and intimidation. An average Nigerian may testify to the fact that in the midst of factors militating against political stability of Nigeria, religious manipulation to gain economic advantage that paves the way for massive corruption with impunity has been the major factor. The desire by political leaders and public servants in Nigeria to accumulate wealth while in public service, has not only affected national development but also heighten political instability. This is often noticeable in youth restiveness, conflicts, communal uprisings, social insecurity, civil wars and even coup de tats, to mention a few. As a result, inequality in religious manipulation that leads to corruption and ethnic cleansing have become the major ills affecting the stability of Nigeria as a nation. This calls for immediate and critical attention to rescue Nigeria from the colossal collapse.

Various media had been employed by various governmental and non-governmental agencies to bring an end or curtail its practice in order to maintain relative peace and stability, and their efforts may not have been productive. Visual art exhibition is one of the agents that encourages political stability in Nigeria but has not been given attention by the government and other relevant bodies. This paper is aimed at highlighting the role of Visual art exhibition as an agent of political stability in Nigeria.

2 The Concept of Visual Art

Visual arts are creative activities on which the human and national development stands. They are human activities aimed at helping man face the challenges in his environment. The key term in the definition of visual arts according to (Katz, 2011) is "perception" which convey in us, the ability to recognize and understand things we experience in our environment through sensory awareness, especially of sight and touch". John & Ekwere (2021) holds that perception is a process by which organisms interpret and organise sensation to produce a meaningful experience of the world. Ecoma (2011) while emphasizing the view of Folarin said that, Art is an awesomely versatile site of human creative engagements. These creative activities according to Ecoma (2011) "are indeed capable of inculcating values, skills, abilities and competencies that will promote the physical wellbeing and psychological health of an individual as well as resulting in creating gainful employment and opportunities for financial rewards for the artists". Within the context of all human endeavours, art expresses the way people reveal and share their most important values, beliefs, concerns, profound thought and emotions, (Ecoma, 2011).

- Peters further observes that

it is established that the exchange of feelings and ideas from one person or group of people to another makes communication a reality, but in arts and design such feelings and ideas are expressed in Visual forms. The areas of visual expression which are both two dimensional and three dimensional include; graphics, painting, textiles, sculpture and ceramics. These areas of concern have the capacity to express ideas and feelings capable of some unique expression through other means of communication such as writing, gestures, words, telephones, modern telecommunication and others.

3 Political Stability

Political stability is a situation in a country in which the environment generally and the political environment in particular becomes foreseeable so much that there are no longer issues that causes breakdown of the norm or becoming a threat to peace, where the occurrence of disorder, violence, chaos and other changes that are detrimental to development are deliberately replaced by helpful changes where the main concern of everyone including the leaders is on the development of a sense of belonging by all citizens and investment stimulating and promoting behaviours become norms.

Nwaokugha and Anagwo (2018), opined that concerning the issue of having political stability in a nation, it centers around the behaviour of the people within that nation and there is a need to understand that the behaviour is not restricted to any particular group of people but to some extent it cuts across people who rule, those they rule and the behaviours of multinational corporations and other classes of businessmen and women in a state.

4 Visual Art Exhibition as an Agent of Political Stability in Nigeria

Visual art exhibition and politics follow the same direction and both have decided and determined to arrive at the same destination, which is positively changing the life and well-being of citizens to become productive members of the society through their own efforts. One of the basic roles and function of visual art exhibition is creating awareness and mobilizing the citizens and this mobilization and awareness are the foundations upon which political processes and

political participation are based in a democratized nation. It can be summed up that all the characteristics of democracy in any nation are built mechanism for self correction, freedom of expression; association and focus on man and the restoration of those values that make man unique are pointers to the fact that democracy and visual art exhibition are good fellows and that democracy can strive through Visual art exhibition. Below are some of the impact of Visual art exhibition on political stability in Nigeria.

4.1 Healing and Rehabilitation of Communities

The idea of Visual art exhibition as helpful for healing and rehabilitation of communities has its origin in the notion of 'moral art' (Tolstoy), or art that is socially responsible. According to Christiana (2010), in aesthetics and the philosophy of art, there are two broad schools of thought regarding how art can be socially valuable. The first, represented in this paper by Tolstoy, takes the position that art can only be moral if it is based on an existing morality, and that art practise therefore should be aligned with personal ethics. This idea has roots in Platonism¹ (Murdoch, 1977), and the idea that art should reinforce morality rather than distract from it. Folakunle Oshun, one of the organisers of Nigerians biannual art exhibition with the theme, "Living on the Edge", saw the need to use art in rehabilitating squatters in carriages and buildings of a disused railway shed, and their counterparts across Lagos, where housing is in short supply, and vast wealth and abject poverty exist side by side. Artists were invited "to investigate the realities of the losers in societies around the world – the unseen majority who are pushed to the brink of their existence"(The Guardian, 2021). The families living in the old railway shed were surprised that anyone would want to host an exhibition in their run-down, leaky home, but got involved, digging trenches so it would not flood, sawing wood for the installations and helping to clean up.



Figure 1 A visitor examines Fati Abubakar's photography from north-east Nigeria, on display at the country's first biennial art exhibition. Photograph: Tom Saater/the Guardian

Also, in order for a country to maintain political stability, the health and mental wellbeing of the citizens must be considered. Nigerians have been passing through a lot of problem such as bandictry, terrorism, kidnapping and other vices of instability. These has created emotional instability that adversely affects the health of Nigerians. To salvage these, Nigerian artists such as Kunle Adewale, a visual artist, art educator and the founder of Tender Arts Nigeria, a non-profit making organization, positively impacts children and youth through his visual art exhibitions and workshops with a focus on art therapy and education, talent and community development, as well as civic engagement. Adewale has over 5,000 beneficiaries through his art programmes in three years including those in the internal displaced persons camp in Bornu state, Nigeria.



Figure 2 Kunle Adewale using visual exhibition art as therapy for children in IDP camp

4.2 Creating Awareness for peace and co-existence

In order For political stability to be a norm in Nigeria, there is the need for awareness to be made by the artist that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic state and this awareness can be made using works exhibited during the exhibition which can serve as a medium to develop, support and promote peaceful co-existence among the various groups in Nigeria. Such art exhibitions lay emphasis on the identification of the cultures that exist in various ethnic groups and at the same time teach the people how to appreciate and respect such cultures and the people are involved in its practice. The ability to respect the culture of a people is by extension respecting the people and sustaining this can promote political stability.

Etgar, the curator at of the Coexistence exhibition organized an international visual art exhibition which he hopes may help educate more people about the need to develop less violent ways to resolve human conflicts, whether they occur locally, nationally, or internationally. Below are some of the works displayed at the exhibition



Source; <http://www.coexistence.art.museum/>

Figure 3 Some of the works displayed at the art exhibition

Steve Ekpenisi, one of the most exciting contemporary sculptors in Nigeria who embraces metal and discarded objects as a primary medium (signatureafricanart.com, 2020). These words set the tone for his first solo exhibition, which takes place from March 14th to 24th at Lagos-based Signature Beyond Art Gallery.



Figure 4 Name of Artist: Steve Ekpenisi Title of work: anu nhu “Never Eat alone animal”, Year of production” 2019
Medium: steel and acrylics Size: 227 x 62 cm

The majority of the sculptures are inspired by socio-economic realities, contemporary politics and indigenous traditions from which they draw their titles. A fine example is 'ANUN NHU' (thou can't eat alone), represented by the kudu bull. Inspired by the cultural traditions of his native Abavo, Ika South of Delta State, Nigeria. The work's underlying philosophy emphasizes the importance of sharing, peaceful co-existence and communal living.

4.3 Peace and Conflict Resolution

The use of visual art exhibition as an instrument to peace and conflict resolution is an emerging area of interest to professionals, academics, and practitioners working in the area of conflict resolution and peace-building of a nation. There is the opinion by Sebastian Kim, Pauline Kollontai and Sue Yore (2015) that using this medium can provide a creative and spiritual space for the individual to express what they have experienced or witnessed which otherwise they cannot articulate through the spoken word. Continuing to keep memories of hatred, anger, fear and suspicion 'unspoken' is not only unhealthy for the individuals concerned but militates against any attempt at a dialogue of reconciliation with the perpetrators and bystanders. Art, music and film can help victims regain their own sense of worth, dignity, identity and purpose as well as repairing the breakdown of social trust within and between people.

Dialogue in Thought Pyramid Art Centre, organized a solo exhibition entitled “The art for peace” on 24th January 2019. In his speech at the opening of the event, the president of Ufuk Dialogue urged everybody to embrace art and appreciate its role in bringing about peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding, respect, love and tolerance (Ufukdialogue, 2019). He also emphasized that not all art promotes peace and that it can be used to promote violence. Hence declared that all people should strive to remove the effect of discriminatory or offensive art in our societies.



Source: <https://ufukdialogue.org/art-for-peace-solo-exhibition/>

Figure 5 Art for Peace Exhibition by Ufuk Dialogue

5 Conclusion

That visual art exhibition is distinct from other forms of art exhibition in being helpful to create and maintain political stability in Nigeria was established in this paper. The ideas of Tolstoy have been explored using contemporary examples (Tolstoy 1996). The various aim and purpose of visual art exhibitions held in Nigeria for political stability were discussed, pointing ultimately to the conclusion that intentions of the artist(s), and actual purpose of the exhibition, may determine social value and effect on Nigerian nation thereby help alleviate the traumatic experience of the citizens for political stability

Compliance with ethical standards

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No conflict of interest.

Author's contribution

Idibeke Amos John considers reflecting the events which engender political instability in the country in the artworks for art exhibition, such as banditry, terrorism, kidnapping and other vices of instability, with a view to impact on the mental state of the citizens. In his consideration, this could curb the political instability in the country.

Edem Etim Peters looks at the use of creative exploration of cultural potentials of environmental elements to create works of art and design for such exhibition to appeal to the citizens. This concept hopes to inspire and creatively articulate basic senses of sight, touch and others to positively impact on the people for peaceful co-existence.

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