

FINE AND APPLIED ARTS: LUBRICANT TO THE WHEEL OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Adeniyi Adediran

Abstract

This paper examines from historical perspectives the significantly contribution of fine and applied art to national development, most especially in the various areas of social interactions, economy, intellectualism, political evolution, cultural integration and technological innovations. It suffices for clarity to define Fine and Applied Arts in this context as being synonymous and inter changeable with visual arts which are paintings, textiles, graphics, sculpture, ceramics, jewelry etc. it is employed as lubricant that facilitates the day-to-day functions of the wheel of the society that is always in motion. It appreciates the fact that national development encompasses a larger phenomenon. Meanwhile, it consequently establishes that the two-dimensional arts and the three dimensional arts have with time and space provided palliative and succour to the oppressed and has alleviated the poverty of a larger Nigerian community.

Introduction

The development of a nation is basically attributed to certain factors that include the level of her economy, culture, intellectualism, politics, technology and social welfare especially management of human suffering (poverty) in comparison with others worldwide. Nigeria is classified as the 13th poorest nation in the world and according to the Washington-based Population Crises Commission, she is the 37th country in the world with the largest level of human suffering. This was measured on the basis often indicators of human well being, access to clean water, infant immunization, secondary school enrolment, per capita income, rate of inflation, communication technology, political freedom and civil right (Oranu, 2001:3). Before advancing discourse on the contribution of Fine and Applied Arts to national development, it suffices to mention at this juncture that Fine and Applied arts is synonymous and interchangeable in this context as Visual Arts which encompass paintings, textiles, graphics, sculpture, ceramics, jewelry, metal designs etc. All these bodies of knowledge have been utilized from the ancient times to the present to boost and facilitate the daily activities of the society and as means of providing comfort and alleviating the human suffering. It is the visual artist that aids development of appropriate technology and culture considering Dun's (1979) opinion that appropriate technology is the attempt to recognize the potentials of a particular community and tries to help it to develop in a gradual way without restriction to material artifacts but span through all aspects of community development.

Meanwhile community development globally as an instrument for achieving national development through effective use of local initiative and energies to achieve increased production and better living standard (Agagu, 2003), sculptors, painters, historians, architects were the men of genius who assisted Pericles to make Athens the mistress of Greece and the most attractive city in the world during the Age of Pericles (460-429 B. C.). Phidias was the greatest of the sculptors that built a new Parthenon within four years to replace the one destroyed by the Persians (Guest, 1957:51). Bronze and marble statues, scenes depicting various aspects of Greek life appeared on perfectly designed pottery (Guest, 1957:52)

Nok terra cotta figurines, produced 500B. C. to 300 B.C. Ife ancient terra cotta and bronze heads of kings 1000 A. D. to 1400 A.D. Igbo Ukwu bronze pots, pendants of 900 A.D. to 1400 A.D and Benin bronze heads of the kings and plaques are sufficient evidences of the visual artists' contributions to the cultural development of Nigeria. The Nigerian artistic traditions of cire Perdue (Lost wax) and bronze casting techniques of Ife and Benin had been long established before the advent of colonial powers in this country. They had locally sourced materials like wood, clay, metals, cotton, silk, stone, calabash, leather, cone to produce various art works for utilitarian and aesthetic functions.

Furthermore, the dimensions of national development where Fine and Applied Arts have contributed significantly are categorised into social, economic, intellectual/philosophical, political cultural and technological developments

Social Development

The Nigerian community has developed drastically in terms of the mode of dressing of her ethnic grouping and its technology broadly viewed includes garments, hairstyle, headwear, body decoration, cosmetics and accessories of all kinds. Cloths are made from leather, or raffia bark appears to predate the Nok era in various arts of the country. However cotton cloth wove wide vertical looms probably dates back to Nok times certainly by medieval times, Ife, Igbo-Ukwu Benin, the cloth tradition had become very popular in cotton growing areas. Weaving had reached a highly technical stage by at least the 14th Century. While cotton was the yarn most frequently used, the Igbo, Efik, Ibibio and Ekoi also wove grass and leaf fibers into cloth (Andah, 1992:89 -90). The Efik make Ekpe costumes with materials from the bark of a local tree or from plantain and banana trees. The costume is then dyed in various colours like black obtained from a mixture of mbisaka (*Combretum* spp) and 'eben' (*Percolobus edulis*) leaves, yellow dye from the onion rhizome (*Curcuma domestic*) and red from dye from the bark of the Ukpa' tree or camwood (*Raphia nitida*) using a carved animal bone, wire hair pin or bicycle spoke for sewing (Andah, 1992:90)

Nigeria people used a wide variety of textiles for social functions besides cotton and raffia, oldest indigo-dyed cloth (edire) among the Yoruba was hand-woven with patterns tied or sewn in raffia. The Urhobo clans of Udu and Ujerewe living south of Warri in Delta State are famous to this day for their strong beautifully patterned masts made in simple training technique. The Ibibio are usually famous for basketry, raffia fibre and cane products (Andah, 1992:91). Beautiful embroidery designs are produced for fabric materials like lace, guinea brocade, velvet, polyethylene, nylon, aso oke etc. The really expensive robe 'riga' made for Hausa princes and nobles is still embroidered with handspun local skills till this day (Andah, 1992:92). It is the textile artists designers that produce materials for social functions such as naming ceremonies, traditional festivals and funeral ceremonies. The artist has contributed to body ornamentations as evidenced in Nok terra cotta figurines. Those included the weaving of collars of stone and glass beads of various colours among the Igbo-Ukwu, Ife and Nupe, quartz cylinders in the ears, nose and lips and use of body markings and ornaments headwear especially for men and hairdo's (Andah, 1992:90);

In the modern times the fabric materials for interior decor of halls that are often used as venues for social functions are products of arts. Artists design the sportswear' for sport men and women while the arenas are embellished with bill boards designed to advertise different products to spectators.

Economic Development

The visual artists have contributed immensely to the economic development of this country. The establishment of about 36 museums all over the country has proved that Nigeria is endowed with a large number of artifacts and antiquities which prompted the establishment and constitution of National Commission for Museums and Monuments to oversee the artworks that are custodied in these museums. The economic viability of those museums is thrusted on the fact that people from all walks of life will have privileges of visiting by paying stipends to appreciate the works of art such as paintings, sculptures, monoliths, textiles monuments, jewelries etc. The increase in the turn-out of contemporary Nigerian artists from tertiary institutions of learning has spurred private initiatives to establishing more galleries in metropolitan areas of Lagos, Ibadan, Port Harcourt, Abuja and Kano. These are the resource personnel for the production of artworks for the promotion of connoisseurship, patronage and brokerage.

It is the Fine and Applied artists that provide the pedestal for the continuous existence of these government parastatals namely:- National Gallery of Art (NGA) National Council for Art and Culture (NCAC) and the aforementioned National Commission for Museums and Monuments. They serve as channels through which Nigerian artworks have been procured in the world market through organized local and international exhibitions, promotion of the arts and the artists and recognition of professionalism in the Society of Nigerian Artistes (SNA).

Intellectual Development

Fine and Applied Arts has contributed to the intellectual development of this country by its inclusion as a discipline or subject in all the tiers of education primary to tertiary levels. It is taught with different nomenclatures at different levels. It is taught as a core subject in the primary schools as Art and Craft, Visual Art a core subject of junior secondary and an elective at the senior secondary school level. It is designated Creative Arts, Fine and Applied Arts, Fine Arts, Industrial Art, Industrial Design,

Art and Design in the Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education. In the tertiary institutions, a department is established for its smooth and unimpaired administration through teaching and research. It is note worthy that the various art departments have significantly produced great men and woman, erudite scholars-intellectuals, professional artists, designers for the service of industries, private studios, the police, military, Navy, the Air Force. Seasoned administrators, captains of industry, officials of government parastatals, ministries and agencies are trained in these art schools. Your indulgence is craved to mention some epitomes of this intellectual development in the world of visual arts: Late Professor Solomon Irein Wangboje, Deputy Vice Chancellor University of Benin City; Professor Cornelius Oyeleke Adepegba, Director Institute of African Studies, (University of Ibadan, Ibadan); Late Professor Ben Enwonwu (University of Nigeria, Nsukka); Prof. Admu Baikie (former V.C. Uniben) Professor Yusuf Grille (Yaba College of Tech); Professor Shamsudeen Adetoro H. O.D. Department of Creative Arts (University of Lagos); Prof . C.S. O. Okeke (Imo State University); Prof. R. O. R. Kalilu (Dean, Fac of Env. Sc. LAUTECH Ogbomoso); Prof Osa. D. Egonwa, (Dean, Fac of Hum. Dev,) Covenant University Otta); Prof. R. Ogundujide (FUTA, Akure) Prof. O. Ololdi (UNN, Nsukka); Dr. Funke C. Ifeta (former H. O D. Polytechnic Ibadan); Prof Toyin Oguntona (ABU, Zaria); Dr Kunle Filani, (FCE Tech, Akoka), Dr I. Pogoson (Unibadan) these are some of the Nigerian artists intellectuals who have trained other generations of artists- intellectuals professionals, technologists, art -technicians, policy-makers and administrators in varied areas of Fine and Applied Arts.

Political Development

Visual Arts have been used to promote different government programmes targeted at alleviating the poverty- stricken Nigerian populace e.g. Udoji Award of 1973 to cushion effect of the Dutch Disease (Ogwuma, 1998; Oranu, 2001); Murtala/ Obasanjo regime's Operation Feed the Nation OFN (1975-79) agriculture programme, Shagari's Green Revolution 1979-83, other government programmes that have enjoyed boost of the arts are: National Directorate for Employment (NDE) Babangidu's Better Life for Rural Women, Babangida's Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) relief package. Directorate for Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure, (DFRRI), Family Economic Advancement programme (FEAT), Petroleum Trust fund (PTE); Obasanjo's 2000 National Poverty Alleviation programme (NAPAP). These programmes were brought to the masses through print and electronic media advertisements like newspapers, magazines, journals, books, periodicals, televisions, radio, satellite communication, global communication service mobile (GSM), bill boards, signboards, handbills, posters.

Meanwhile outdoor sculptures are commissioned by private initiatives, government agencies, philanthropists to immortalize political jugernauts, sages, ancient warlords, dignitaries and icons, e.g. statues of Herbert Macauley at Ebute Meta, Lagos, Iba Qluyole, at Bere, Ibadan, Oderinlo, Ibadan, Ogunmola, Total Garden Area, Ibadan, Benin Chief, Benin, bust of Murtala Muhammed Akure; Akintola's statue in LAUTECH Campus, Ogbomoso, king's statue, Ijebuode.

Many artists have occupied political positions in various governments. Late Prof. Ben Enwonwa was appointed Education Adviser to the federal government in the 60s; Prof. Admu Baikie was the Vice Chancellor of University of Benin 1981-85; Late Prof Solomon I. Wangboje, the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Unibenin 1987-89; Prof J. O. Olapade, the Deputy Vic-Chancellor 2001-2002, LAUTECH, Ogbomoso, Prof. Shamsudeen Adetoro, was the Nigerian High Commissioner in the 90s; Prof R.O, Rom Kalilu, Dean, Faculty of Environment Sciences, LAUTECH; Prof Osa D. Egonwa Dean, Faculty of Human Development, Covenant University, Otta; Prof C. S. O, Okeke, Dean of Faculty of Ails, Imo State University Dr. Kunle Filani, Deputy Provost FCE, Tech Akoka 2000- 2003. The number of artists who are administering various Art Departments in various institutions and government ministries are uncountable.

Cultural Development

The Visual Artists are the prominent projectors of cultural programmes like traditional festivals, ceremonies and musical concerts, The staging of Second World Black Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977 brought to the glare of the globe the rich endowment of culture of the

Nigerian populace. The artistic traditions were conspicuously exhibited in paintings, sculptures, textiles, metal works, jewelries, ceramic wares, ritual pots, basketry, weaves, masks, ancestral figures and figurines, carvings, door panels, bronze works, terracotta ivory, statuettes, musical instruments, miniatures, ornaments, manilla, saddles, bags, leather works, amulets etc.

The spirit of FESTAC 77 was rekindled by the biennial National, Festival of the Arts (NAFEST) designed for the promotion and exhibition of all the areas of Nigerian theatrical and visual arts. The artists are the vanguards of cultural heritage defusing religious tensions maneuvered by bigots of Islamic and Christian inclination.

Technological Development

Many scholars have expressed their opinions on the inter-relationship between visual arts and technology. Simpson and Warner (1987) Oloidi (1990); Lawal (1990); Oladimeji (2001) Hannay and McGinn (1980). The most relevant for this discourse is Andah's (1988) definition of technology from cultural perspective as an embodiment of man's effort at transmitting his knowledge of specific scientific laws with the help of his personal skills into concrete objects or thoughts which are called artifacts. Skolimowski (1974:69) opines that technology is an inventive, new form of art and a means of ameliorating material conditions of human life.

The Nigerian visual artists have improved on the technology of weaving by designing new accessories for West African narrow horizontal loom e.g. incorporation of metal reed to replace the age-old bamboo-made beater, metal is now used to construct inkle loom, warping accessories- hank winder and skein winder. Sophisticated designs are now woven on traditional, broadlooms and vertical looms. Some of the fabrics are aso oke in Yorubaland, Akwete cloth in Akwete, Imo state, Itshekiri Cloth in Warri and environs, Delta state, Bornu cloth, Borno state, Okene Kogi state, Ilorin cloth Ilorin Kwara state and Bida cloth from Niger state-each with distinctive characteristics in terms of structure, materials, colour and taste. New embroidery designs are created by textile designers for various social classes.

The ceramic artists employ the appropriate technology to produce household utensils-teacups, serving plates, water closet, toilets seats, floor tiles electrical resistors. Textile technologists and designers collaborate in developing concepts and designs for artificial plastic limbs for accident victims, plastic heart, engine and parts for automobiles.

Conclusion

It has been established that the fine and applied artists have contributed immensely to national development in various forms be it culturally, technologically, socially, intellectually and economically. These actually facilitate reduction in human suffering and most especially poverty alleviation. Diverse contributions of visual arts have generated means of sustenance and job opportunities for practitioners.

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