

**VISUAL ARTS EXHIBITION:
AN AGENT FOR ECONOMIC STABILITY TO ARTISTS.**

By

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Abstract

Visual arts exhibitions are displays of artist products for networking and economic gains. Some schools of thought sees it as a seed sewing venture with delayed gratification while others juxtapose aesthetics with functionality as a means of targeting patronage. The paper seek answers on the following questions; is visual arts exhibition an agent for economic stability to the artist? Are there issues intrinsically impeding the process of stabilizing the artist economy through visual arts exhibition? How can collaborative effort with art institutions enhance economic stability for the artist? What is the way forward? The method used was historical, interviews, unstructured questionnaire and participant observation method. Findings reveal that visual arts exhibition is a seed sowing, personal networking venture that will eventually mature for harvesting. The use visual arts exhibition to solve aesthetics and utilitarian purpose expands patronage beyond art collectors. The necessity for arts institutions to play their role of protecting the material interest of the artist was also established.

Keywords: *Visual Arts, Exhibitions, Economic Stability, Artist.*

Introduction: Background

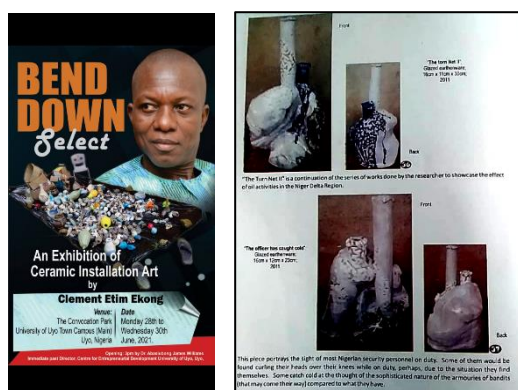
Visual arts exhibition are economic driven display of arts works for public consumption. The exposition are contextually focused and may be solo, joint, and group display. Artist exhibits could be temporary, permanent, itinerant, online and retrospective in nature. Their significance includes creating public awareness, expansion of artist network, fund raising and future development. Collations and selection of arts works are expertly carried out by curators before exhibition. The works are of the fine arts which include painting, sculpture

and architecture. They may also be the applied arts of ceramics, graphics and textiles. Their display often involves installations as well as hybrid exposition of works. They are usually curated and exhibited within the contextual framework of the title of exhibition as well as the target audience.

Ideally, amongst other variables, the focal context, participating artist, choice of venue, recording account, publicity, time, duration, sponsorship and the approach to mounting of works are significant indices to the success and economic value of any visual arts exhibition. However, in developing countries like Nigeria the reality, given the above setting, always falls far below financial expectations and expenses incurred. Artist who takes part in the exhibition are always forth and back with the same load of works. They are constantly creating awareness, correcting societal ills and in search for sympathetic buyers. Perhaps, even more sobering are unfulfilled promissory notes from sponsors and arts connoisseurs. These arts enthusiasts sometimes creates a sense of hope by placing tags on works without any financial commitment. By implication they expects artist to follow up with tagged works persuading for payment. This trend raises the question of economic stability within the process of visual arts exhibition. Is visual arts exhibition an agent of economic stability to the artist? The methodology adopted for this paper was historical, interviews, unstructured questionnaire and participant observation method. These purposive approach for data gathering was necessary to collect first-hand information from regular participants in visual art exhibition. The respondents' opinion was based on the unstructured questionnaire (See Appendix I).

Regular Participants in Visual Arts Exhibition: Respondents' Opinion

Ekong (2021), a veteran solo and group participant in visual arts exhibition posits that “unarguably, most seasoned artist enjoy patronage”. He also sees visual arts exhibition as a long-term seed sowing venture that requires germination, blossoming and harvesting. For instance, Ekong’s most attended solo exhibition, *My Hands in Clay* (2005) was one of a kind, but did not attract expected financial gains from the target audience. Another solo exhibition *Bodies for Bricks* (2012) was more of personal networking for the artist. However, the Ghana solo exhibition titled *Start Somewhere* (2015) was a bumper harvest. The ceramist artist is currently looking forward to yet another solo titled *Bend down Select*, featuring on the 28th June, 2021. The inference therefore, as an agent of economic stability to the artist is that of delayed gratification and future fulfilment as the case with his recent exhibitions.



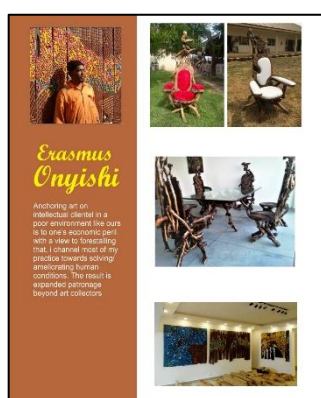
Source: Ekong, C. E. (2012). *Bodies for Bricks. A Solo Exhibition of Modern Ceramics. DELSU, Abraka: Department of Fine & Applied Arts*

Udosen (2021) another experienced artist in temporary and permanent visual arts exhibition argues favorably for visual arts exhibition as an agent of economic stability but juxtaposed reality versus ideal situation. This position was observed in his entries, *Sun Shine Sisi* and *Two Good Heads* in ***Unearthing Geniuses' Exhibition*** (2019). Both painting are explosive interplay with colours aimed at meeting the contemporary expectations. Thus, under a perfect circumstance, there is always financial reward for the artist labour.



Source: ***Unearthing Geniuses*** (2019).

Erasmus, (2021) an expert on itinerant and online visual arts exhibition observes differently. According to this artist, anchoring arts and display on intellectual clientele in a poor environment like ours is to one's economic peril. Consequently, the artist gears his visual arts practice and exhibition towards aesthetics and solving as well as ameliorating human conditions. A quintessential example is his solo exhibition in honour of El Anatsui, titled ***Icing on Burnt Cakes*** (2019) at Thought Pyramid Art Centre, Ikoyi - Lagos. And perhaps, even more economic driven are his outstanding collections of mangrove (waste wood) executive furniture. The result according to Erasmus (2021) has been an expanded patronage beyond art collectors. Consequently, his research question raised are; Are there issues intrinsically impeding the process of stabilizing the artist economy through visual arts exhibition. How can collaborative effort with arts institutions enhance economic stability for the artist? What is the way forward?



*"Icing on Bunt Cake (2019)." Solo Exhibition.
Thought Pyramid Art Centre, Ikoyi, Lagos.*

Visual Arts in a Developing Nigeria

Economy like

Nigerian artist and their works are robustly endowed with the tourism capacity for the development of our economy. Joshua, (2015) equates comparatively the visual arts contribution to the boost in oil sector. The author is hopeful although the awareness on visual arts economic growth indices are slim in the face of current economic challenges in the country. He asserts on the appreciable progress of visual arts in other developed countries beyond African countries and argues that this sector requires urgent attention within the Nigerian setting to maximize its potential. Recently, Richard Florida of *The Atlantic* 's City Lab of an extensive study, linked arts clustering to widespread economic development in nearly every metropolitan region across the country.

Two principal implications of their research are a localized, place-specific approach to arts initiatives and broad measures of innovation and development of interacting with industry clusters. These can help to foster the arts community, and therefore the regional economy. The need for policy-makers, arts institutions and stakeholders at all levels to recognize the arts cluster in their neighborhood cannot be overemphasized. Frequently, professionals working in technology, visual arts exhibition as well as life sciences recognize the need to meet each other and discuss projects and problems. Enamhe (2013) in the same direction reiterates on the need for frequent visual arts exhibitions, conferences, seminars and workshops for exchange of ideas and awareness. The author maintains that through art activities and associations, artists as well as target audiences' responsive power are stimulated. And by this inference, visual arts exhibition may enhance economic stability of the artists. There's a much faster spread of information and a collaborative effort that improves output significantly. Similarly, the arts can be linked to broad measures of innovation and development. The study suggests that the arts can play a role than is expected in economic development regardless of metro size or geographic boundaries. This likely presents itself an improved user interface and user experience design, as well as a new approach to solving old problems.

Current State of Visual Arts in the Development of Artists in Nigeria

In Nigeria, visual arts exhibition has grown in the last two decades. There has been a direct result from promotions through artist, arts critics, arts connoisseurs, arts galleries, visual arts exhibition, conferences, workshops, seminars and symposia. Currently, Nigeria has witnessed an upsurge of contemporary arts prices, promotions, consumption and appreciation. And by implication have attracted global attention in the lasts two decades. Arts work which hitherto sold for hundred thousand naira (100,000.00) are quoted by a fresh graduate today for as high as two hundred thousand naira (200,000.00). A sustainable economy is guaranteed if

the current trend is stabilized. Jegede, (1984) in Joshua, (2015) asserts that patronage has become an essential factor that determines artists being in the limelight and oblivion, between inventiveness and stagnation. Joshua (2015) also affirms a focus of creative consciousness amongst practicing artists and radical tendencies as well as experimentation. Then again there is the global attention attracted due to the recent auction in London and other exhibitions held outside Nigeria. All of these gives credence to a robust economy through visual arts exhibition.

Collaborative Effort from Art Institutions

Festivals and related events to visual arts exhibition are among the fastest-growing segments of tourism in the world (Goeldner, Richie & McIntosh, 2000). They provide quality platform for the promotion of the arts and supports the artist community while enriching the local society (Lee, Liu, Chung & Ho, 2015). Boll (2009) in Manners, Borstlap and Saayman, (2016) acknowledges the support and promotion young artists gain through galleries and other arts institutions. They help them develop and arrange exhibitions that attract collectors and buyers. Art galleries are thus the intermediary or link to the art market. Saayman (2009) states that the most important function in ensuring the success of an event is the ability of the event managers to assess visual art exhibition vis-a-vis the indicators. The author argues that much can be achieved by defining what visitors to an art exhibition regard as critical success factors. The reasons for such decisive factors include management of change effectively, an enabling environment for sales and by offering visitor's needs, effective planning and managing visitor flow more effectively.

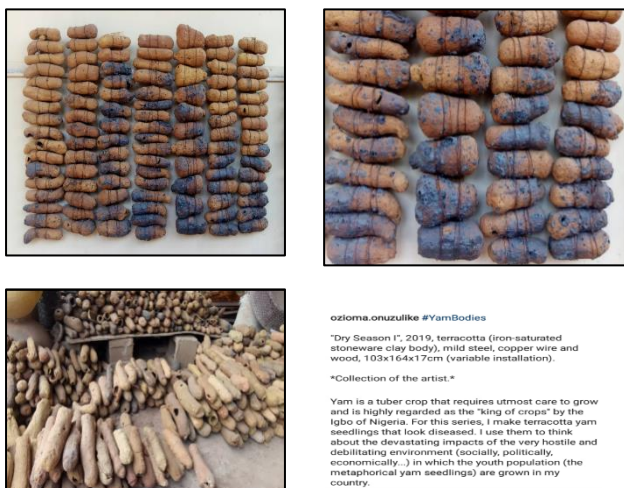
John (2021), a prolific painter and a participant in solo and group exhibition submit the following in a personal interview

Most participating artists rarely keep account of entries, visitors' comment and sales during and after visual arts exhibition." This makes it difficult for data collection on the visual art exhibition experience. However, this can be controlled when artists have a thorough disposition towards personal networking and documentation. In this, the role of the artist manager can hardly be emphasized.

Hence, managers of art exhibitions have to consider various aspects that has to be supervised in order to create a successful event and memorable experience (Manners, 2012). The visitors' experience entails an interrelationship and a mixture of the critical success factors and will vary for different individuals who visit an art exhibition (Connell & Meyer, 2010). Ferdinand and Williams (2013) observe that a memorable event is created when the distinct elements involved in the management of events are brought together into a seamless, holistic experience.

In a Cultural Value Project, the organizers encouraged a shift to individual experience into cultural value. The reason being that economic stability from visual arts exhibition often becomes the focal point of the artist as against issues such as reflectiveness, empathy and imagination. And, perhaps by extension precludes the initial goal of creating awareness as well as correcting societal ills. Thus, as observed by Crossick, G & Kaszynska, P. (2016) contributions of arts and culture to other areas are embedded in the totality of the individual experience and the capacity to be economically innovative and creative. This assertion implies an inclusive and progressive approach to visual arts exhibition as not necessarily a means to economic stability but a comprehensive involvement of not only showcasing but addressing societal ills.

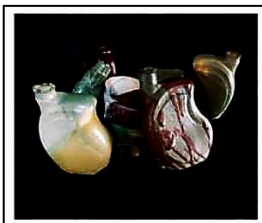
Onuzulike's solo exhibition of Terracotta ***Yam Bodies*** (2019) is an example of in this regard. The artist deployed deceased yam seedlings (youths) to address the devastating impact from the hostile environment (socially, politically and economically) within Nigerian communities. Conversely, the appraisal of visual arts exhibitions should not be thought of as being primarily undertaken for the purposes of accountability or sponsorship. Unarguably, this position is the norm in developed countries where visual art practice and exhibitions are robustly celebrated. However, in developing countries like Nigeria, visual arts exhibition is primarily displayed to enhance and sustain economic status of the artist. It is also displayed for networking as well as bring the artist to limelight (Ekong, 2021; Udosen, 2021; Onuzulike 2021, 2019; Erasmus 2021, Ogbonna, 2018, Enamhe, 2014).



Understandably, as advanced by Enamhe (2013) practice and display of arts empowers artist with creative skills, widens their base of participation in the society and create jobs, self-reliance as well as identity. The author sees art organizations such as museums, cultural centers, art galleries and national theatres as the vehicle for positive transformation. Quoting Uzoagba (1982), Enamhe (2013) observes that in order to redeem the issues of art, arts exhibition and

the constant neglect suffered from the society, proper understanding of art education and better instructions on arts in our schools and colleges is inevitable.

Ogbonna (2019) in a group exhibition titled *Unearthing Geniuses*, curated and displayed works of students on industrial attachment. This exercise afforded students on the spot robust experience of the processes involved in a typical visual arts exhibition. The inference therefore, continued negligence within our schools and society at large. And by implication artist are constantly creating awareness or correcting societal ills at their own expense. The need therefore, to create an inclusive curriculum that acknowledges learners' and participants' literacy right can hardly be overdone. A comprehensive course content allows students to understand the intrigues in the world of work. And perhaps through arts appreciation, practice and exhibition display, patronage may be attracted beyond art collectors. (Onyishi, 2021, Ogbonna, 2018).



Title: Wasted Wealth
Medium: Ash Glaze on Stoneware
Size: 18cm each (assemblage)
Year: 2019



Title: Growing Tall
Medium: Ash Glaze on Stoneware
Size: 60cm
Year: 2019

Source: *Unearthing Geniuses* (2019).

Group Exhibition, Ogbonna Ekaete (Curator and Participating Artist),
Department of Fine and Industrial Art, University of Uyo.
Ikpi and Caleb – Ceramics Students on Industrial Attachment
Curator: Ogbonna Ekaete



Title: Family head
Medium: Glaze Stoneware
Size: 25cm
Year: 2016



Title: Contentment of Hope
Medium: Ash Glaze Stoneware
Size: 13cm
Year: 2019

Thus, a broad program allows students to develop the needed practical skills for continued personal development and professionalism (Ajibade, Enamhe and Oloidi, 2011, 2006). Such training often enhances participating artist in planning effectively for visual arts

exhibition. As a visual language arts registers man's response to a multiplicity of environmental stimuli. Such stimuli can be social, political, cultural or even religious in closed or open societies (Enamhe, 2013). From a social point of view, such incentives open new vistas and places the artist on a sustainable economic flow.

The importance of learning from visuals can hardly be overdone. Ajibade and Elemi (2012) recognized this need in their study on the importance of visuals in primary and secondary schools in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. They discovered that students performed better using visuals and illustrations to learn than those who learnt without them. Therefore, schools excursions to temporary and permanent visual arts exhibition can foster greater awareness and create enabling environment for economic growth. Conversely to be celebrated, regardless of the participant, constant awareness and collaborations with reputable sponsors is inevitable. Such synergies may also acknowledge key government officials. It is imperative that the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA) should carry out their objectives, which among others, includes "to protect and promote Nigerian artistic heritage by fostering the understanding and appreciation of arts in Nigeria. They should uphold a high standard of efficiency in art, and defend the moral and material interest of artists in Nigeria. The economic stability of the artist hinges on the fulfillment of these roles. Other Associations, like the Nigerian Society for Educations through Art (NSEA), The National Gallery of Art (NGA), and The National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) are operational channels to promote the visual arts exhibition and ensure economic stability to the artist. They can collectively consolidate regular visual arts exhibitions and conferences for artists (Ogbonna, 2018; Enamhe, 2013).

Conclusion

There is growing international interest in the potential of the cultural and creative industries to drive sustainable development and create inclusive job opportunities. An indication of this is a recent set of UNESCO guidelines on how to measure and compile statistics about the economic contribution of this sector. Undeniably, culture and creativity have been the cement that binds together not only hearts and souls, but entire societies and nation. The general value of arts and culture to society has long been assumed, while the specifics have just as long been debated. We can only imagine society without the progressive influence of the arts. Such an encounter will amount to denial of what is pleasurable in life, as well as educationally critical and socially essential.

Consequently, life without the collective resources of our libraries, museums, theatres and galleries, or without the personal expression of literature, music and art, would be static and sterile. Our visual arts exhibition are strategic national resource. Foreign records are clear indications of what is possible in Nigeria given the same attention. Appreciatively, most states

are giving financial encouragement to the artist and their visual arts display. States like Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Rivers, FCT Abuja and Kaduna are pioneers and promoters of visual arts exhibition.

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