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CREATIVE ARTS: A VISUAL LANGUAGE FOR NATION BUILDING

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Abstract

Nigeria being a nation has recorded some level of development right from the time of independence. But in spite of this, nation building is continuous hence there is a vision to achieve higher rate of development. To make this a reality, different sectors of human and natural resources and other possible areas are being explored. To address this issue, creative arts being a common cultural aspect and an integral part of the people has to be examined. This paper therefore, discusses creative arts as a visual language for Nation building. The paper opined that if creative arts are encouraged, it will no doubt enhance the nation's aesthetic and economic rate of growth and development, thus enhancing nation building. The paper concluded by recommending amongst others that at least two creative art centres should be established in all local government areas in Nigeria where people can be trained to acquire practical skills that will make them productive. This will improve the nation's economy, reduce youth restiveness, enhance peace and security and consequently make nation building a reality.

Key Words: Creative arts, Visual language and Nation building.

Introduction

Nation building is a conscious and deliberate exploration, harnessing of human and natural resources to put in place things or strategies of improving on the different aspect of the nation. Such aspects includes economy, peace and security, employment, unity, education and other areas that affect the standard of living of citizens and nation's physical and financial development. It is a collaborative effort of both government

and the citizens of a nation to do and put in place things that will positively influence the standard of living and the overall development of the nation. Beside the above, nation building is also regarded as the process whereby a group of people from different origins, histories, languages, cultures and religions come together for a common goal of striving to improve the society. Therefore, in considering the issue of nation building, language which is a predominant aspect

of humans and the nation should be considered.

Language is a system of interaction either in speech, writing or sign used by a group of people or society. Etim (2013:21) opined that every human society has a need for a system of communication and interaction which help members of such society to share their thoughts and ideas as well as exert control over a wide range of phenomena and human actions. O'Grady, Dobrovolsky and Arnof in Etim (2013:21) defined language as a means of communication, a medium of thought, a vehicle form literary expression, a social institution and a factor in nation building. Language is also regarded as a system of arbitrary vocal symbol by means through which human beings make meaning and communicate with each other in a given community (Essien, 2004:12). He further noted that language is used to teach, direct, inform, explain, argue, praise, preserve and others. From the above, it is important to note that communication cannot take place without language.

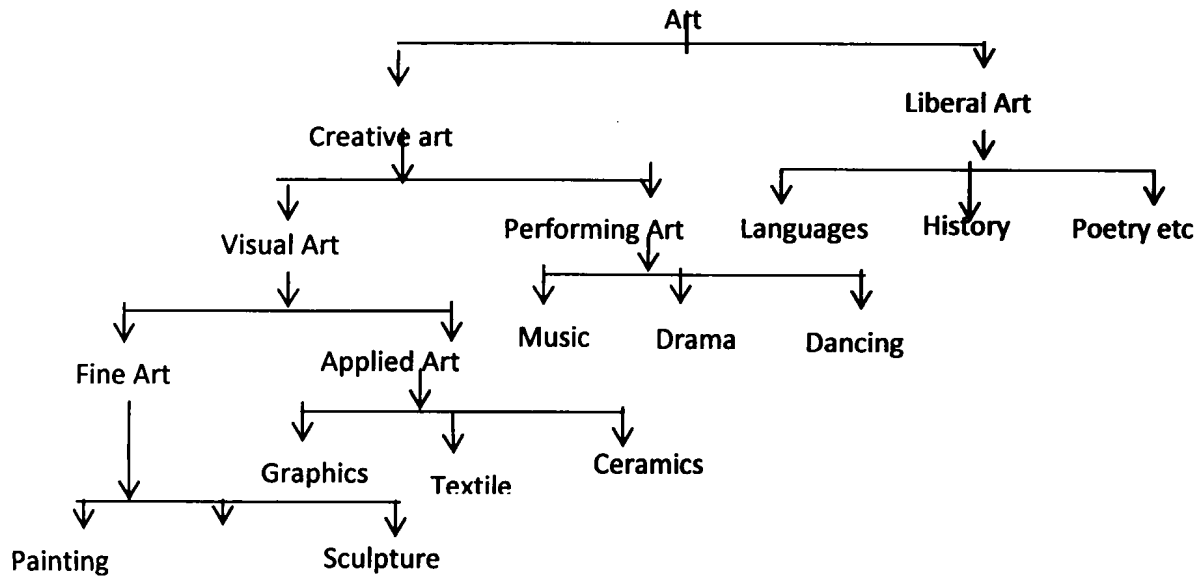
Nigeria as a nation has two hundred and fifty ethnic (250) groups with more than five hundred and twenty (520) languages. The languages are playing some roles in nation building such as bond of unity, mark of identity, an instrument of national

information and communicating national rules and regulations. Language is a social institution among people of different ethnic groups, a channel or instrument of transferring traditional beliefs and culture to upcoming generations. In appreciating these roles played by spoken languages, it is worthy to note that creative arts which is a visual lingua-franca that is commonly practiced or spoken in all the ethnic groups in our nation Nigeria appears not been fully recognized as a language. Therefore, this paper discusses creative arts as visual language and tool for nation building.

Creative Arts: A Visual Language

The daily existence of man and any society, group or nation is predicated on creativity. Hence creative art is an integral part of our culture and a mark of a society, group or nation's identity. Man is a creative animal and a product of creative art. No wonder Al-Hurtwitz and Michael (2007:1) noted that one of the most striking features of human societies throughout history and across the globe is a prodigious involvement with the arts. Creative art is one of the major branches of art which covers all aspects of visual and performing art. This is shown in the structure of art below.

The Structure of Art



Esosuakpo (2015:147) define creative art as a branch of art that is concerned with the organisation of materials to make useful designs of good aesthetic value that could serve for domestic, entertainment, educational, play objects for children and others that appeals to one's emotion. Wales and Sanger (2009) regarded creative art as one of the oldest craft, technology and language evolved by man. Creative art is a visual language through which ideas, emotions, stories are communicated or expressed through the skillful manipulation of mediums together. It is a language through which man communicates with man, spirit beings or gods. It is not just a non-verbal spoken or written language rather, it is a visual one that is practically seen and interpreted through perception or sight.

Egonwa (2011:1) said that visual art which is a branch under creative art is a stimulation of an experience in forms and images with materials that can be seen. He further expressed that it is a language and the alphabets of that language are formal elements popularly called elements of design. They are dot, line, shape, colour, texture and form. He further opined that all artistic statements in visual form come into being through the organized manipulation of these elements either singly or a combination. Sharing the same opinion with Egonwa are Lazzari and Schiesier (2008:25) who stated that we communicate ideas through languages oral and written; numbers, music and of course art and for the language of art, the grammar consist of the formal elements

and principles by which those elements are composed or structured.

In our nation, Nigeria, there are notable creative artistic practices that visually communicate and document our beliefs and traditions. This is evident in the sculptural figures of Ife where lines are

used on the faces of human figures which communicates their value for tribal marks. In addition, the beaded nature of Benin figures especially their kings demonstrate the high regard, level of adornment and glorification they have for them. These are shown in Figure 1 and 2 below.



Figure 1. Ife Bronze head showing lines as tribal marks. Source: Egonwa (2011:25)

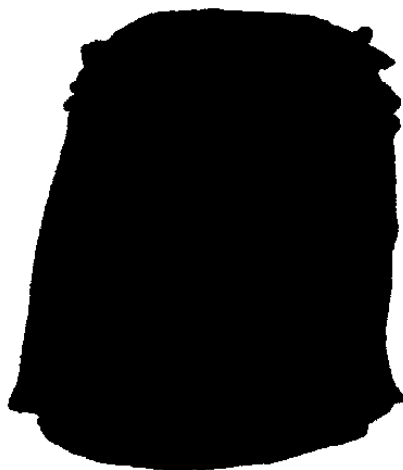


Figure 2. Benin Bronze head heavily beaded. Source: Egonwa (2011:33)

Beside the above, it is worthy to note that all the branches of creative arts serve as languages of communication. Although, this aspect is undermined because of the aesthetic, decorative and utilitarian purposes which overshadow its communicative function or role. For example, pottery or ceramic forms according to Okunna and Umunna (2009:12) have effectively serve as canvas which potters used to record historical events, express ideas and observations from their environments. In doing this, they make intelligible inscriptions, symbols and figurative representations that communicate ideas, tell stories, or provoke thoughts and stir emotions. Also in our country today, pottery, paintings, sculptures, graphic illustrations and other creative arts are commonly found in villages, towns and cities with one message or the other. The messages or ideas they convey in them are easily understood by the general public.

Creative Arts as Language for Nation Building

Nigeria is a nation whose creative arts has gained world-wide attention and has made her proud in the comity of nations. This is so because the concepts in the creative arts were so unique and executed in our own style which make visual meanings to people within and outside

our nation. Therefore, if our nation's creative arts can make such remarkable impact, it can also make impact in nation's building. The following are the aspects creative arts as a language can contribute toward nation building.

(A) National Unity

It is a truism that the growth and development of any nation is based on the level of unity of the citizens irrespective of tribe, ethnic group, religion, cultural differences, social status, educational standard and political group. Our country as a nation in spite of the diverse nature, has one form of creative art or the other which is highly valued and appreciated by all nationally. This inter-value of creative practices can synergize social relationship thus fostering national unity. Therefore, a conscious effort to unite the ethnic groups through creative arts will yield artistic identity, eradicate ethnic differences, develop our common creative language to a more recognizable visual language, enhance peaceful co-existence, sustain our cultural and creative heritage, enhance our common purpose as one people and one nation.

(b) Economic Development

One of the major factors that also determine all round growth of a nation is her level of economy and this is

predicated on the creative and productive prowess of the citizens. Abiodun (2012:89) noted that the different forms of creative arts range from painting, drawing, decoration, acting, music, product designing, creative writing and performing art. These areas of vocation have thus greatly helped to provide means of livelihood. Other areas of creative arts that have contributed immensely to human development are sculpture, ceramics and textile. Besides, they have also provided income for the daily existence of man. In addition, it also develop man's creative skill which facilitate productivity and enhance economic empowerment. Therefore, if these areas of creative art can play these roles, very rapid economic development of the nation is achievable when serious attention is paid to it since it will serve as additional source of revenue to the nation.

(c) Job Creation

It is obvious that any nation that cannot create job opportunities opens her citizens to abject poverty. Such nation cannot achieve meaningful development. This is because her resources will be spent on the up keep of the citizens without replacement. In job creation, all aspects of creative arts provide job opportunities for the educated, uneducated, skilled and unskilled. Investing through them are not

capital intensive. For our nation building especially at this time in Nigeria where a good percentage of able bodied young men and women cannot gain employment, focus on creative arts becomes necessary. This is imperative because some of the basic raw materials required for production in areas such as pottery are abundant and commonly found in almost every village and city in Nigeria. Again, an enabling environment for productivity should also be provided for individuals that have created employment for themselves as they could expound to the level of employing others.

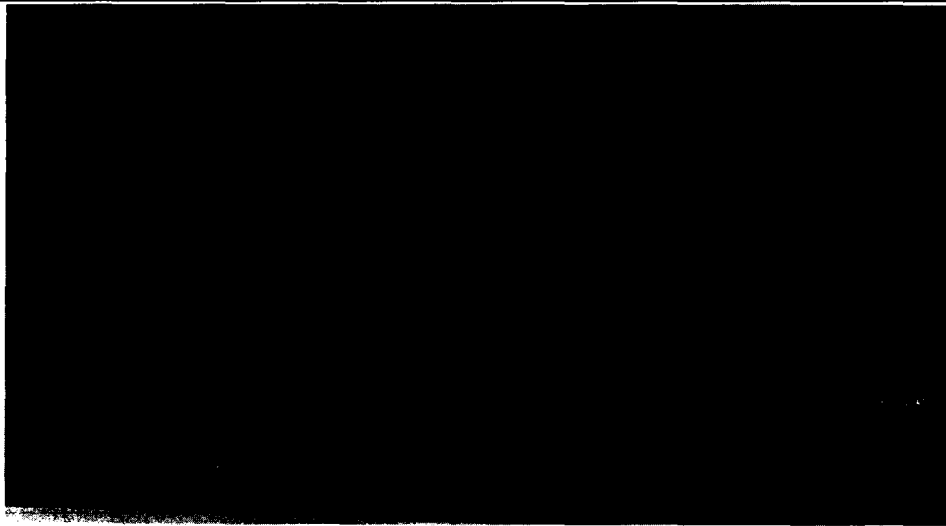


Figure 3. Self-employed woman and her children producing clay pots in Otor-Edo, Delta State

(d) Peace and Security

Right from the time of independence in Nigeria, creative arts have served as objects for propagating peace and security. Culturally and traditionally, art are used in visually communicating security issues and information to the people. In villages and cities, illustrative drawings, paintings, wood and mood sculptures are placed to restrict people from entering or collecting certain things in the community thus ensuring the security of properties. In the same vein, government can pass information on national security issues relating to kidnaping, robbery, human trafficking and other salient issues to the people through creative arts. When caution is exercised, national building becomes plausible.

(e) Checking Youth Restiveness and Crime

It is obvious that in Nigeria, crime and other societal misdemeanours appears to be perpetuated more by youths. This could be as a result of their being idle making them unproductive. Development in this kind of scenario will be marred or retarded. To check this, youths can engage in any aspect of creative art such as pottery production, painting, wood carving, drama or comedy, textile production, painting, environmental design, innovative construction and recycling of waste to useful products and others. These areas are of high economic value that can curb restiveness and crime in Nigeria.

Implication of Creative Arts In Nation building

It is evident from the above that a focus on creative art in Nigeria will have positive implications such as:

- Improved economy of citizens and the nation; thus making the nation's economic recession a thing of the past;
- Add to the varieties of Nigerian made products consequently enhancing our level of self-reliance and reducing dependency on foreign made products; creation of job opportunities for our un-employed youths and graduates will reduce, if not total stoppage of exodus of youths from the country which exposes them to risk, inhuman treatment and death;
- Reduce dependency on government by citizens of the nation;
- Reduce crime to ensure relative peace and security in the nation;
- Sustain the nations artistic and cultural heritage and
- Help in the attainment of the nation's philosophy of a united, strong and self-reliant great and dynamic economy as stated in the National Policy on Education.

Conclusion

Creative art is one of the aspects of art that contributes to the comfort of man. But in

spite of the comfort, economic and other values it possess, much attention is not paid to it. Therefore exploring it at this time becomes imperative as it will improve the economic base of citizens and that of the country. It will also open up avenues for employment, boost our nation's creative practices, help curb militancy and other societal ill and reduce un-progressive spending.

Recommendations

- Since nation building or development is imperative, it is important for our nation Nigeria to encourage creative art and organise art exhibitions and commissions will be paid for every art work sold. This will not only provide employment for her citizens rather it will be will be an additional source of revenue for the nation
- The government should embark on creative art works collection through the ministry of art and culture. It should be made part of our export products since they are highly valued in the Western world. It will enhance our creative popularity and foreign earning.
- The government, through the ministry of art and culture should establish at least two creative art centres in every local government area in the country

for the training of people to acquire creative skill.

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