

ART AS A CREATIVE ENTERPRISE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA AND NIGERIANS

By
Tirimisiyu A. G. Cad. (nell)

Abstract

the Nigerian traditional society has a major role to play in the development of the society. Today, the story is far from such. There are several misconceptions about the values of the Nigerian society, and the traditional culture is being eroded. The Nigerian society is facing a lot of challenges in the area of human development and eventually given little challenges to the state. The value of man and its involvement as a creative enterprise in the development of nations in Nigeria. This is highlighted in the areas of human development, health and gender, technological developments, technology, and development of culture for tourism. The study offers alternative solutions that should adequately play out in its right place in the development of Nigeria.

Introduction

Artists in traditional African societies including Nigeria, for instance, were used to sustain the socio-economic and religious existence of the societies. Art then was essentially by the society and for the society. Artists were then only responding to the immediate pressures of their living conditions. The environment determined the forms and qualities of the artists and essentially must have graduated from an apprenticeship system. Artists were neither producing art for art sake nor for mere aesthetic expression. The then social and religious systems in particular made the materials, techniques, aesthetics and the essence of the artist in that society very functionally significant.

Since European contact with the natives, all these had been gradually eroded away by the missionaries and the colonialists. Artists today no longer occupy such traditional significant socio-economic positions and each artist in contemporary Nigerian society has to struggle for patronage to survive. Most of their creative works pursue aesthetic qualities at the neglect of their social purposes of the traditional days. Art in developed nations of the world is beyond mere aesthetics. It is not just used as a vocational training to prepare its professionals to have on skills, abilities and understandings that enable them handle their professional affairs competently and efficiently. Skill is not only in all affairs.

ART AS A CREATIVE ENTERPRISE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA AND NIGER'ANS

By
Tirimisiyu A. G. O'ladimeji

Abstract

Art in the Nigerian traditional society was a major enterprise in the maintenance and development of the society. Today the story is far from such. Art is no longer what it used to be. There are several major problems with the values of art to the development of individuals and the development of the nation. The paper discusses the role of art in the development of the Nigerian development and eventually given little chance for the development of the art to men and its involvement as a creative enterprise in the development of Nigeria. This is highlighted in the areas of human development, health care delivery, educational development, economic development and development of culture for tourism. The paper also discusses the role of art in the development of the nation and its role in the development of Nigeria.

Introduction

Artists in traditional African societies including Nigerian communities were used to sustain the socio-economic and religious existence of their societies. Art then was essentially by the society and for the society. Artists were then only responding to the immediate pressures of their living conditions. The environment determined the forms and qualities of the artists who essentially must have graduated from an apprenticeship system. Artists were neither producing art for art sake nor for mere aesthetic expressions. The then social and religious systems in particular made the materials, techniques, aesthetics and the essence of the artist in that society very functionally significant.

Since European contact with the natives, all these had been gradually eroded away by the missionaries and the colonialists. Artists today no longer enjoy such traditional significant socio-economic positions and each artist in the contemporary Nigerian society has to struggle for patronage to survive. Invariably, most of their creative works pursue aesthetic qualities at the neglect of functional essences of the traditional days. Art in developed nations of the world is beyond mere aesthetics. It is not just used as a vocational training to prepare its professionals to develop skills, abilities and understandings that enable them handle their professional affairs competently, but rather used actively in all affairs.

BACK PARA AFRIQUE *

Zohra Opoku

The ubiquitous, ever-present colours *red, yellow, green*, the rich colour combination which represents Pan-Africanism**, inspired Zohra to deal with the Back to Africa movement on which she drew to develop her project in Dakar. Because Pan-Africanism is seen as a product of the European slave trade, rather than something which rose from the African continent itself, Zohra concentrates on movements which evolved beyond Africa, from the unity of enslaved Africans of diverse origins. These movements have a major historical standing and powerful contemporary presence all over the world:

1. The Rastafarians, a religion from Jamaica, founded by runaway slaves in the mountains.
2. Capoeira, a fight dance from Brazil, developed by runaway slaves in the forest.

1. Zohra sewed up oversized dreadlocks, because Rastafarians wear locks as an expression of inner spirituality and freedom, and to emphasize their African identity. She chose the colours *RedYellowGreen* because from the beginning the Rastas decided that their personal loyalty lay with Africa's only black monarch Haile Selassie, and that they themselves were in effect free citizens of Ethiopia, loyal to its emperor and devoted to its flag, which bears the Pan-African colours. Today, the colours are frequently seen on clothing or paraphernalia. The Rastafari worldview proclaims Africa as the original place, where the body of the first human was found, which established independence among blacks. This is why Zohra used the locks as figurative on African ground and photographed them.

Listen to Song 3 & 4: Artist unknown.

This is Nyabingi music and is among the first recordings of the Rastafarians. This music shares parallels with choir singing and the use of home-made drums with Capoeira and Quilombo music. You can also recognise the influence of wind instruments from the church.

2. With Capoeira lessons to the other participants of the workshop, Zohra tried to show the unmistakable affinity with African dance, rhythm, and verbal expression in word and song. She also used instruments which gave more proof of African origin. During the session of bringing Capoeira out to the locals, Phillip Metz (photographer) photographed each participant performing in public Capoeira move he or she had learned. Zohra then did a tribal motif face painting on the face of the photographed person as a statement about the aggravating circumstances of enslavement, when slaves from different tribes and clans were mixed or separated to make communication between them impossible. Phillip suggested the technique of time exposure, which means that the photographed person appears as a sculpture on the picture, to give the impression of being frozen for eternity.

Listen to

Song 1: Words from Mestre Pastinha, the father of Capoeira Angola, music by Mestre Caicara.

Song 2: Original Music from a Quilombo, which are places in Brazil where slave descendants live almost exclusively.

* Title: Back to Africa

Marcus Garvey was a Caribbean-born Pan-Africanist and stern advocate for the Back-to-Africa movement. The Back-to-Africa movement encouraged those of African descent to return to the African homelands of their ancestors. Zohra's title is written in three different languages which belong to the three biggest colonial powers: England (Back), Portugal (para), France (Afrique).

** Pan-Africanism as political movement, sociopolitical world view and philosophy seeking to unify both native Africans and those of the African diaspora. Originally Marcus Garvey proposed the colours red, black and green for the Pan-African flag. Red, yellow and green were first used by Ethiopia. Aside from a brief occupation by fascist Italy, Ethiopia is the only black African country never to have been colonised, which signifies power and strength. This is why its national colours can be seen in the flags of many African nations, a symbol of unity among the nations. Garvey designed the colours for the following reasons: red out of sympathy for the "Reds of the world", green to express sympathy for the Irish in their fight for freedom, and black for the skin colour of the people of Africa. Today, the colours' meanings have shifted: red signifies the blood spilled, yellow the gold stolen, green the rich land of Africa, and black the skin colour of the people of Africa.

idea of having ads at all worthwhile, and that advertise companies or institutions that I believe in!

I also wondered if you knew of any blogs in the UK (and beyond) that have received public funding...) Not that I think that that should be the only viable way of income. Or is the quality and joy of it also that it's NOT a paid-for project?

I can't think of any blogs that get public funding, though of course I can think of some organisations that have blogs, which might use some of their public funding to fuel that type of activity. I believe it's important for organisations to think about different ways to engage with their audiences, and blogs might be one good way for them to do that.

On one hand, it would be fabulous if I could live comfortably off the blog, and I think there are other bloggers that do, but I would want to re-think the whole thing to do so. I'd have to consider what would attract solid, consistent advertisers, or a steady stream of donations. I feel I'm part-way through an experiment I've started and so it remains ideal to keep it as a side project, and save major re-thinking for later. I can tinker with Google AdWords and if it makes me a few quid, great, but if not, I also don't depend on it.

Would you describe your blog as belonging to a certain 'scene' and if so, how would you describe it? You have quite a few links on your blog leading to other blogs. Are there any you would specifically recommend regarding other voices of cultural blogging in Europe?

That's an interesting comment, regarding the 'scene'. I think that the delivery of information from the internet via RSS feeds is so personalised for everyone, it's hard to know what a scene is! Your point about the links I have is a good one... it may be the only indication of a scene, to see what others link to!

I understand that the notion of a 'scene' is a difficult one. Was one of the main reasons for you to start your blog also because there was a lack – in your case a lack of pooled online knowledge and resources regarding curating?

The thing about the web is that there is always a 'lack' if you are willing to get drawn into ultra-specific niches. Blogging styles are also so radically different. I think I provide a certain perspective, and also differentiate between news and announcements, while also presenting my personal views, opinions, etc. So for example, some European bloggers, like [Francis McKee](#), a Glasgow-based curator create blogs that are relatively unannotated lists of links. Others, like [Regine Debatty](#), a Berlin-based writer are more editorial. Francis and Regine are very different, and I'm different again, and yet perhaps we all merrily co-exist in someone's RSS reader!

Geert Lovink in his book [Zero Comments](#) (2007) states that blogging is practically non-existent in the visual arts and new media arts sector, as opposed to, for example, (popular) music. What's your take on that?

Not knowing the popular music field particularly intimately, it's hard for me to compare the two but I can speculate on a relative lack of visual arts blogs. I think it could have to do with a certain timidity in open criticism, though the few bloggers who are openly critical are praised for it. And there is also the 'what do I get out of it?' factor, as the rewards are not always apparent. For example, Edward Winkleman is widely admired for his very informative blog that is a good source of news and also helps artists and dealers understand each other, but perhaps no other art dealer has done it before him because they didn't understand what they'd get in return for that time investment. What he gets, of course, is street cred and respect... not money, but of course you can't buy respect. However, that said, it's not as cynical as that – I don't know him, but I'd be willing to bet he also simply enjoys it!

Have you had any job opportunities, offers or similar as a result of your blogging?

No job offers have come my way, but interview opportunities like this are nice! Recently I went to an artist/curator mixer event in London, and met a woman who got a job because she saw it first on my blog... which made me feel really proud and happy for her!

Another point that came up in a previous interview was that existing mailing lists were perceived as difficult to engage with (rather closed) – and blogging was a nicer (maybe safer) way of building up your own environment for opinion?

Yes, I agree. Where mailing lists can get taken over by a few inconsiderate voices, or seem really 'dead' if no one is posting any more, you can maintain a blog and have complete control – and also freshen it up with incomplete thoughts, questions, polls, even images, whereas on discursive mailing lists a new argument, thought, or act of moderation needs to happen. They're different animals.

On a more general level: What would you consider as the role of blogging in the cultural sector?

I think it's an excellent way of establishing several streams of discourse. It's not just about the art critic in the newspaper anymore – though of course that's obvious. As Clay Shirky has said: "the question today is not 'why publish' but 'why not publish?'" – and people are publishing more than ever before. Blogging becomes part of personal branding, establishing an audience, establishing something that will be an interface to a public without an intermediary – which is what makes it slightly dangerous, and is why people have lost their jobs over what they blog about. Our lives are still organised very hierarchically and yet blogging allows us to jump over these hierarchies, which can make people nervous. I'm lucky to have great employers and friends!

A bit 'Wild West' at times? It seems that it takes people quite a while until they grasp the full extent of the 'publicness'?

Yes, it's still Wild West in a number of ways. People are still figuring out where the 'gold' in it is and asking themselves why they are settling there! But I think it's the immediacy, the you-push-the-button of it, and the lack of intermediary that makes it attractive. It's you, typos and all.

...which is why it must be quite liberating to regard it as a non-income generating activity at times, I guess?

Yes, if I really had to try to generate money from my blog, it might not be as difficult as I imagine, but at the same time I am happy (for the moment) not to have to find out.

So going back to the beginnings of your blog... is there anything you would do differently if you could?

I think the only thing I might have done differently would be to find a way to encourage more dialogue and comments between readers. I didn't try to cultivate that, and my blog layout doesn't encourage it, either. However, that said, people seem to get value out of what I do anyway. It is fulfilling a mission and perhaps heavy user interaction is not necessary at this stage.

Are there any other culture blogs that you would recommend that I should not miss on my viral journey?

Check out the Relevant Links section on Curating.info for a few key ones!

My focus is definitely on contemporary visual art. I wanted to expand beyond my own personal expertise in media arts, to cover the widest possible range of topics in the contemporary art world. I choose not to cover many aspects that have to do with curators, for example, their roles in natural history museums and the like. Though curators have an even wider role in society, I prefer to keep the focus on the contemporary art world.

From what I've seen, it's rather international and not too UK focused – that probably also reflects your scope of work?

I try to keep it international, although I'm increasingly aware of the limits of this as I post only in English. As a simple consequence of where I live, and where I have lived, I also can't help but be more plugged into what's happening in the UK and Canada.

How do you think people (your future audience) find out about your blog? I guess there are rather subtle 'marketing' techniques that you employ? What tools do you use – such as lists etc.?

I probably owe a lot to Google! The strict focus of the blog has meant that it ranks pretty highly in Google results for searches about curating. Also I started a Facebook fan page, which I think has really helped bring in new readers. On Facebook, Curating.info has over 1,000 fans now!

Wow!!

Facebook

It's unbelievable! So I think that has encouraged traffic to the blog. I also experimented very recently with a Facebook ad, just to see what it was like. I was able to get \$100 free advertising on Facebook, and I have to say not many people have clicked on the link yet, but I will wait and see how it performs.

How would you describe the status that blogging has in your daily life? You finance yourself by your regular job(s) and blogging is a 'spare time activity' (though spare time is probably not a very suitable term)?

Yes, for now blogging is definitely my evening and weekend activity. I have not fully explored ways I could 'live' off the blog – I am not sure it's even possible.

How would you describe the economic model behind it? For example, your blog is currently ad free, isn't it?

I have conducted a few very small, very un-scientific experiments. I ran Google AdWords for a short time, and was part of a more focused ad network for a short time as well. Neither approach generated any money for the blog. I still occasionally contemplate what might be the ideal arrangement. Perhaps that would be one or two aesthetically pleasing ads on my blog that generate enough money to make the whole