

Reimagining Creativity: How AI is igniting a New Era for Nigeria's Visual Artists

By

Ejim, Nkiruka Joy

Department of Fine and Applied Arts Education, Enugu State College of
Education Technical, Enugu, Nigeria. 07036533540,
nkirukajoy@escet.edu.ng

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Olor-Chujor, O. Anita

Visual Arts Department, Rivers State Council for Arts and Culture,
anitaollo2016@gmail.com

Abstract

The intersection of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and creative expression is ushering in a transformative era for Nigeria's visual artists. This paper explores how AI, defined as the simulation of human intelligence by machines, is reimagining creativity, offering artists new tools, media, and opportunities for expression that were previously unimaginable. Reimagining creativity refers to the process of redefining traditional notions of artistic inspiration, production, and engagement through technological innovation. In Nigeria, a country rich in cultural heritage and artistic diversity, AI technologies such as machine learning, generative algorithms, and neural networks are empowering visual artists to experiment beyond conventional techniques, merging traditional art forms with cutting-edge digital processes. This fusion not only expands aesthetic possibilities but also redefines the economic dimensions of the visual arts, enabling artists to tap into global markets through digital platforms and Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs). The "new era" symbolises a renaissance of innovation, where Nigerian artists can use AI to preserve indigenous art forms, personalise user experiences, and contribute to the nation's growing creative economy. However, alongside these opportunities come challenges, including ethical considerations, questions of originality, and accessibility issues related to technological literacy and infrastructure. Through critical analysis and case studies, this paper argues that AI, when thoughtfully integrated, can serve as a catalyst for inclusive growth, cultural preservation, and global competitiveness for Nigeria's visual artists. The findings encourage a strategic embrace of Artificial Intelligence (AI), with policies and educational initiatives that empower artists while safeguarding Nigeria's unique cultural identity in the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, reimagining creativity, Nigerian visual artists, digital transformation, creative economy, new era.

Introduction

As technology continues to evolve, artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming a pivotal force shaping the future of various industries, including the visual arts. In Nigeria, a country known for its rich cultural heritage and vibrant artistic community, AI is opening new pathways for creativity and innovation. The visual arts in Nigeria have long been defined by tradition, culture, and the talents of its artists. However, in recent years, artists have begun to embrace emerging technologies, particularly AI, as tools for reimagining creativity. AI can analyse vast amounts of data, simulate cognitive processes, and generate new ideas, making it an invaluable asset for visual artists. The introduction of AI into the Nigerian art scene is not just a technological shift but also a cultural transformation. It presents an opportunity for artists to experiment with novel techniques, create new forms of art, and engage with audiences in innovative ways. As Nigerian artists increasingly incorporate AI into their practices, the boundaries of art are being pushed, and the notion of creativity itself is being redefined. This paper explores how AI is ushering in a new era for Nigeria's visual artists. It examines how AI is influencing creativity in Nigerian visual arts, the challenges and opportunities it presents, and its potential impact on the future of the creative economy. Through case studies of Nigerian artists using AI, the paper highlights how these technologies are being integrated into artistic practice, reshaping not only the art world but also the broader cultural landscape. Additionally, the paper addresses the ethical considerations of AI in the arts, offering insights into the complexities of authorship, cultural representation, and authenticity in AI-generated artworks.

Definition of Key Concepts

To fully understand how artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the visual arts in Nigeria, it is essential to define the key concepts involved. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the ability of machines, particularly computer systems, to perform tasks that would normally require human intelligence. These tasks can include problem-solving, learning from data, recognising patterns, understanding natural language, and generating new ideas. In the context of visual arts, AI involves the use of algorithms

and machine-learning models to create, analyse, and interpret art. These technologies can produce new artistic works, simulate artistic styles, or even assist in the creative process by generating ideas based on specific input criteria.

AI technologies in the arts are diverse, ranging from generative adversarial networks (GANs) that create images or paintings to machine learning tools that assist in design and sculpture. Artists often employ these tools to push the boundaries of their craft, enabling them to experiment with novel techniques and create artworks that may not have been possible using traditional methods.

The term "visual arts" encompasses a broad range of artistic disciplines that focus on visual elements as the primary means of expression. This includes traditional art forms such as painting, sculpture, drawing, and photography, as well as contemporary art practices that integrate new media technologies like digital art, video art, and interactive installations. The visual arts in Nigeria have a long history, characterised by a blend of indigenous artistic traditions and contemporary influences.

In the current context, the visual arts also encompass the emerging domain of digital and AI-driven art, which expands the traditional boundaries of what constitutes art. This category includes works created using digital tools, algorithms, and AI technologies, which are increasingly integral to Nigeria's modern art scene. The integration of AI into the visual arts has opened new avenues for artistic expression, enabling artists to engage with technology and culture in innovative ways.

Creativity is the ability to produce original and valuable ideas or works. In the arts, it refers to the generation of new and meaningful expressions that resonate with audiences. Traditionally, creativity has been viewed as a human trait, associated with the artist's imagination, intuition, and emotional depth. However, with the advent of AI, the definition of creativity is expanding. AI-driven art challenges conventional notions of creativity, as machines can now produce artworks that evoke emotion and provoke thought. In the context of Nigerian visual arts, creativity is shaped by cultural influences, individual expression, and social commentary. The integration of AI into the creative process raises questions about the role

of the artist in generating ideas and the authenticity of AI-generated works. The collaboration between human artists and AI technologies offers new forms of creativity, in which the artist becomes a curator of the machine's capabilities rather than the sole creator of the artwork.

Historical Context of Nigerian Visual Arts

Nigerian visual arts have evolved over centuries, deeply rooted in the diverse cultural traditions and practices of the country's various ethnic groups. The art forms of Nigeria have long been characterised by their intricate designs, symbolic meanings, and social relevance. From traditional practices to contemporary movements, Nigerian visual arts reflect the complexities of Nigeria's history, cultural diversity, and societal changes.

Before the advent of Western colonialism, Nigerian visual arts were deeply intertwined with religion, social structures, and daily life. Traditional art forms, such as beadwork, textile design, mask-making, and sculpture, were integral to various ethnic groups. These forms often served ceremonial, spiritual, or functional purposes, reflecting the values, beliefs, and social hierarchies of the communities. They were highly symbolic, often conveying messages about identity, power, and cultural heritage. Art also served to preserve oral histories, with many works embodying stories passed down through generations. The colonial period in Nigeria brought significant changes to the visual arts. During this time, Western art styles, particularly European academic art, were introduced by colonial powers. The introduction of oil painting, academic drawing techniques, and European artistic traditions created a new direction for Nigerian artists. However, this new form of art was not without tension. While some Nigerian artists embraced European styles, others sought to merge these influences with indigenous traditions, giving rise to modernism in Nigerian art.

One of the most prominent movements in this period was the founding of the Nigerian School of Art in the 1950s, which encouraged a blend of European techniques with African themes. Nigerian artists such as Ben Enwonwu, Uche Okeke, and Bruce Onobrakpeya were at the forefront of this movement. Their works sought to represent Nigeria's cultural identity through a combination of traditional symbols and modernist techniques.

This period marked the beginning of Nigerian modern art, with artists drawing on indigenous aesthetics while experimenting with new media and approaches to artistic expression.

Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, the visual arts began to transform as artists sought to address the political, social, and cultural issues facing the newly independent nation. The 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of Nigerian contemporary art, with artists exploring themes of Nationalism, identity, and the complexities of post-colonialism. These artists used their work to reflect on Nigeria's political and social realities, often critiquing corruption, inequality, and the impact of colonialism.

The emergence of modernist movements such as the Zaria Art Society and the National Art Theatre in Lagos played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of Nigerian contemporary art. Artists such as Yusuf Grillo, Adebisi Akanji, and David Dale explored the intersections of traditional African art and Western artistic forms, producing innovative works that highlighted both the unique qualities of Nigerian culture and the global influence of modern art.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Nigerian contemporary art expanded further, with artists experimenting with mixed media, installation art, and video art. The influence of Western art movements, such as abstract expressionism and conceptual art, became increasingly apparent in the works of Nigerian artists, who continued to engage with global conversations about art and culture while maintaining a strong connection to their roots.

The 21st century has ushered in a new era for Nigerian visual arts, with digital technologies and new media increasingly shaping the artistic landscape. Nigerian artists are experimenting with digital platforms, interactive installations, virtual reality, and, more recently, artificial intelligence. As global access to technology expands, Nigerian artists have the opportunity to engage with cutting-edge tools that were once inaccessible or unknown.

The adoption of digital tools has enabled Nigerian artists to reach wider audiences and push the boundaries of their creative expression. Digital and AI-generated art are transforming traditional notions of art-making

and challenging the idea of the artist as the sole creator. In Nigeria, where there is a strong tradition of art being passed down through generations

The blending of traditional practices with technology represents a dynamic shift in the country's artistic trajectory. The use of AI in Nigerian art is the latest chapter in this ongoing evolution, offering new possibilities for creative expression and expanding the notion of what constitutes Nigerian visual art.

Emerging Technologies in Visual Arts

The world of visual arts is continually evolving, and technological advancements have significantly reshaped how art is created, experienced, and shared. In recent years, several emerging technologies have started to influence the creative processes of visual artists globally. These technologies include digital tools, 3D printing, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and, more recently, artificial intelligence (AI). Each of these innovations offers unique possibilities for artists to expand their creative practices, reach broader audiences, and engage in new forms of artistic expression.

Digital tools, such as graphic design software, digital painting platforms, and photo-editing programs, have revolutionised how artists create and manipulate images, including Adobe Photoshop and the Figma App. Illustrator, CorelDRAW, and Procreate have enabled artists to move away from traditional media such as oils and watercolours, embracing the convenience and versatility of digital creation. These tools would allow artists to experiment with textures, layers, and colours without the constraints of physical materials.

For Nigerian artists, the advent of digital tools has created opportunities to integrate indigenous art forms with contemporary techniques. Many artists are now using digital platforms to create art that blends traditional African motifs with modern design elements. This fusion not only preserves cultural heritage while also pushing the boundaries of creative expression through endless experimentation and refinement.

3D printing has emerged as a powerful tool in sculpture, enabling artists to produce intricate and precise designs that would be difficult or impossible to achieve through traditional sculpting methods. This

technology allows artists to create three-dimensional models of their works, which can be printed in a variety of materials, including plastics, metals, and even ceramics. 3D printing has opened up new possibilities for Nigerian artists, especially those working in sculpture and installation art. By using 3D printing, Nigerian artists can create complex sculptures and installations that challenge conventional notions of materiality and form. Artists can also experiment with interactive sculptures that respond to environmental stimuli or audience interaction, adding a new layer of engagement to their works. This technology has the potential to transform the production and consumption of art, offering a new dimension of creativity and exploration. Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) technologies have begun to influence the art world by creating immersive experiences that blend the digital and physical realms. AR overlays digital elements onto the real world, while VR creates entirely virtual environments for users to explore. Visual artists have adopted both technologies to enhance their work and engage audiences in novel ways.

In Nigeria, AR and VR are beginning to make their mark in contemporary art, with artists exploring new methods for presenting and experiencing art. For instance, Nigerian artists have used AR to create interactive exhibitions in which viewers can use their smartphones or AR glasses to view digital art elements embedded in physical spaces. Similarly, VR has been used to create fully immersive art installations in which visitors can step into entirely digital worlds, exploring and interacting with art in ways that were previously unimaginable.

These technologies enable Nigerian artists to engage with global art trends and create experiences that resonate with a younger, tech-savvy audience. The ability to combine physical art with digital layers opens new doors for creative expression, offering artists the opportunity to push the limits of what art can be.

Among the most exciting and transformative technologies in the visual arts is artificial intelligence. AI refers to the development of algorithms and systems that can mimic human cognitive functions, such as learning, pattern recognition, and decision-making. In the context of visual arts, AI is used to generate new works of art, assist in the creative process, and analyse existing artwork.



For Nigerian artists, AI presents an opportunity to engage with global technological trends and incorporate new forms of creativity into their practices. Some Nigerian artists are using AI to explore themes of identity, history, and culture, generating artworks that reflect the complexities of Nigerian society in a rapidly changing world. AI-driven art raises questions about authorship and the artist's role, as these machines become collaborators in the artistic process rather than mere tools.