

Art as an Inevitable Medium for Social Change: An Examination of Its Role and Impact in Contemporary Society

By

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Abstract

Art, in its myriad forms has always been a reflection of humanity's deepest desires, anxieties, and aspirations. In contemporary society, its role has evolved, becoming more multifaceted and impactful than ever before. This essay explores the multifaceted role of art in our modern world, examining its impact on Art and Wellbeing, Public Art and Tourism Development, Art and Cultural Tourism, Art for Social Change, social discourse and the very fabric of our collective consciousness.

Introduction

Art as a universal language has the ability to transcend linguistic, cultural, and geographical barriers. It can provoke a range of emotions, from joy and happiness to sadness and anger, while conveying powerful messages that can inspire change. Art has the power to move us, challenge our perceptions, and help us connect with one another on a deeper level. It can serve as a platform for marginalized voices to be heard, to advocate for social justice, and to bring about positive change: In essence, art is a powerful means of communication that can touch the hearts and minds of people around the world, regardless of their backgrounds, beliefs, or experiences. Social change experiences can arise from the appreciation of human artefacts, such as poetry, sculpture, music, painting, cartoons, performance art, etc. Empirical studies suggest that art improves health and well-being among individuals. Art experiences are offered by multiple contexts, as museums, galleries, churches, art exhibitions, art expos, etc.

A deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between bottom-up stimulus properties and top-down cognitive appraisal of emotional experience during the aesthetic appreciation of an artwork is useful for the effective use of art-based tools for promoting individual health and well-being. No wonder Berlyne, (1974); Leder et al., (2004) and Silvia, (2005). Enthuses that recent several psychological perspectives consider aesthetic experience as a rewarding process and suggest a link between aesthetic experience and pleasure studies suggest the arts can promote health and psychological well-being and offer a therapeutic tool for many, e.g., adolescents, the elderly, and vulnerable individuals (Daykin et al., 2008; Todd et al., 2017; Thomson et al., 2018). Thus, for instance, images rated as beautiful, as Kawabata and Zeki (2004) posit, elicit activity in reward-related areas, such as the medial orbitofrontal cortex, and are associated with higher reward value than those rated as ugly. Mitterschifthalder et al, (2007) reveals that the activation of in emotion processing network comprising the ventral and the dorsal striatum, the anterior cingulate and medial temporal areas has been associated with the transient mood changes in response to happy and sad classical music A portrait, a sculpture, or a piece of music conveying feelings of sadness may be rated as beautiful and produce a modulation onto OFC regions and the centers of reward-related responses similar to artworks conveying positive feelings, such as joy and pleasure. These results support the claim that adopting a psychological distance in an art context allows the perceiver to engage with the negative content of the work of art and, through empathetic responses to the content of the artworks, provoke aesthetic pleasure (Menninghaus et al., 2017). According to Marković (2012), the aesthetic experience is an exceptional state of mind, which opposes everyday, pragmatic experience and "protects" the individual from the effects of oppressive reality (Marković, 2012). Given these considerations, it may be thought that the aesthetic motion is distinctive of aesthetic appreciation, denoting an art-specific emotional response that involves basic biological emotions (Leder et al., 2004).

As such, the self-rewarding nature of aesthetic experience may account for the promotion of health and well-being through aesthetic appreciation. Alternatively, it may be that experiencing positive aesthetic emotions is not only the outcome of a special empathetic state provoked by the artwork, but also depends on the level of perceived ambiguity in the artwork itself.

Art beyond the role of beautification, art for healthcare must be therapeutic to impart on an individual's wellbeing. That is, such artworks should be images that convey the appropriate messages of hope, dignity, joy, and concern, and enhance the healing process. They convey a subliminal message to the patient that their well-being is the caregiver's top priority. It is the therapeutic value of art that gives it its marketing and public relations value. The artwork, which elicits visual stimuli in a psychiatric environment, is often placed in all areas within which patients stay, including corridors, lounges, dayrooms, activity areas, group rooms, examination rooms, and consult rooms. Not only does art-making help to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression that are commonly experienced by those suffering from chronic illness, but it can also be quite beneficial to older adults, particularly those suffering from Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease. This is because creating art can improve cognitive functions by strengthening or even forming new neural pathways in the brain, helping the brain to adapt and remain healthier. In fact, the earlier we can start using our creative brain regularly. The longer we continue to do so, the more it can help the brain stay fit and healthy as we age.

Public Art Tourism Development

Some forms of arts are designed to promote tourism, encourage job and wealth creation, and Environmental aesthetics are targeted towards the economic growth of the society or state. Important Examples of public sculptures and monuments which have achieved these goals include the Eiffel Tower in France (Paris), the Statue of Liberty in New York City in the United States of America, the Trafalgar square in London and the pyramid of Giza in F Egypt. By its presence alone, public art can heighten people's awareness, question assumptions, Transform the landscape Or express community values, and for these reasons it can, over Time Have the power over time to transform a city's image, Public art helps to define an entire Community's identity and capture the unique character of a specific neighborhood. It is a Unifying force. Underestimated, the society cannot value the vitality of public art for Public art's impact on a community is priceless and immeasurable, and once experienced, it has the power to energize public spaces where we live in, work, and play into more welcoming and Beautiful environments that invite socio – cultural interaction (OKACHI, W. E and PHILIP O.G, 2010). Art is a time symbol of a city's maturity. Beyond its enriching personal benefits, public investment

enhances a city's or state's assets and fosters a positive sense of values and identity. It equally helps Green spaces thrive, enhances roadsides, pedestrian corridors and state gateways.

In addition, Public art demonstrates a questionable civic and corporate pride in citizenship, and affirms an Educational environment. Essentially, a city with public art is a city that thinks, feels, and enjoys its natural environment. The economic impacts of tourism are therefore an essential Consideration in local, regional and national community planning and economic development. Financial returns are _also crucial factors in marketing and management decisions. Communities, therefore, need to understand the relative importance of tourism to their region, including its contribution to the local economy. Tourism has a variety of economic impacts. For instance, tourists contribute to sales, profits, Jobs, tax revenues and income in an area. The most direct effects occur within the primary Tourism sectors – lodging, restaurants, transportation, amusement, and retail trade. Through Secondary effects, tourism affects most sectors of the economy. An economic impact analysis of Tourism activity typically focuses on changes in sales, income, and employment in a region resulting from tourism activities. Despite the uncertainties in the global economy, public art and monuments, parks and architecture if properly managed will to a large extent, impact positively on tourism development Ind the environment, generate employment in the service industries associated with tourism, such as, transportation, airlines, taxis, accommodation, hospitality, amusement parks, shopping Nalls and entertainment venues, thereby creating wealth and employment for the citizens in areas Where they are sited or located.

Art and Cultural Tourism

Africans have kept their cultural traditions alive through their festivals, art, myth, and legends. Folklores, rituals, prayers, proverbs and songs, This has been achieved through masquerade festivals or celebrations that are staged at particular times of the year, This assertion is supported By O'Toole (2006) in Okachi (2015) when she enthuses that

In African cultures, masquerades are used to assist adolescents t become responsible adults, to foster good health and wellbeing, to assist the elderly in Preparation for death, to spiritually link the living with the dead, to sustain

food supply, and to teach interdependence between the environment and the community. These teachings are passed from the elderly to the young.

Some of these masquerades are used in dances and ceremonies to teach lessons to initiates, serve as symbols of the spiritual force or authority that validates the basic beliefs of the society, and reinforce acceptable social modes of conduct, symbolising the spiritual authority that eradicates social evils (O'Toole, 2006). The traditional African mask is, therefore, worn during celebrations, dances, and festivities, as well as ritual ceremonies to commemorate social and religious events. It plays a very significant spiritual and functional role in the community. Some examples of these masquerades include: the Dandai Masquerade of the Toma. Also known as the Loma people of Bande and Kissi, Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone (Sieber and Walker, 2000), in Okachi (2015), the Chi Wara masquerade of the Bamana people, in the Segou region of Mali, and the Zo ge masquerade of the Dan people of Liberia.

Art for Social Change

Another example of art's impact on society is its role as a vehicle for social change. It can give voice to the politically or socially disenfranchised. A song, film or novel can rouse emotions in those who encounter it, inspiring them to rally for change. The impact that art has on society is Threefold: it comes from the individual's reaction to the Work, the power inherent in the Work and the environmental factors surrounding the work. Art serves as a powerful lens through which we can examine the complexities of our Contemporary world. From the gritty realism of street art to the abstract expressions of Contemporary painting, art reflects the social, political, and economic realities of our time. It gives voice to marginalised communities, challenges societal norms, and sparks critical dialogue on pressing issues. For instance, the rise of social realism in the 20th century mirrored the struggles of working-class Communities. At the same time, contemporary art often tackles themes of globalization, climate change, and Technological advancements, By reflecting these realities, art encourages us to confront Uncomfortable truths and engage in critical self-reflection Inspire, Beyond provoke, and reflecting mobilize society, art individuals can also to act action.

As a catalyst throughout history, change art has been a powerful force to challenge oppressive regimes, advocate for social justice, and promote awareness of critical Issues. The iconic murals of Diego Rivera, for example, served as powerful tools for social commentary Nd political activism. Similarly, contemporary artists like Banksy utilise their work to raise awareness about issues such as war, poverty, and environmental degradation. By engaging with these issues, art can empower individuals to become agents of change and contribute to a more Just and equitable society. Nigerian art, a vibrant tapestry woven from diverse cultural threads, has long served as a mirror reflecting the nation's social, political, and economic landscape. From the evocative sculptures of ancient civilisations to the bold strokes of contemporary artists, Nigerian art has consistently captured the pulse of the nation, chronicling its triumphs, struggles, and aspirations. This essay explores the profound impact of Nigerian art in reflecting social change, analysing specific Artworks across cartoons, paintings, and sculptures that illuminate the complexities of Contemporary Nigerian society. Cartoons, with their playful yet incisive nature, have proven to be a potent tool for social Commentary in Nigeria. Artists like Tayo Fatunla, known for his iconic "The Guardian" cartoons, have used their wit and visual storytelling to expose societal ills, satirize political corruption, and highlight the struggles of ordinary Nigerians. Fatunla's "The Price of Power" (1993) is a prime Example. This cartoon depicts a politician, his pockets bulging with money, standing atop a pile of skulls, representing the victims of corruption and political Violence. The stark contrast between the politician's wealth and the suffering of the people underscores the devastating Impact of power abuse. Akindele "Dele" Ogunleye, another prominent cartoonist, uses his art to address issues of Poverty, inequality, and the impact of globalization on Nigerian society. His cartoon "The Global Village" (2005) portrays a scene of stark disparity, with a wealthy, technologically advanced Figure towering over a group of impoverished Nigerians struggling to survive. This cartoon poignantly captures the widening gap between the haves and have-nots in a globalised world. Nigerian painters have employed their canvases to explore a wide range of social issues, from the Complexities of identity and gender to the challenges of poverty and political instability. Their Works often serve as powerful visual narratives, prompting viewers to engage with the realities of Nigerian society. Sen Enwonwu, a pioneer of modern Nigerian art, is renowned for his evocative portraits that capture the

essence of African identity. His painting “Tutu” (1962) depicts a young woman, her face adorned with traditional Yoruba tribal markings, radiating strength and resilience.

This work celebrates the beauty and cultural richness of Nigerian heritage, challenging colonial perceptions of African identity. Osborne Macharia, a contemporary artist, uses his paintings to address the issue of gender Inequality and the challenges faced by women in Nigerian society. His painting “The Burden” (2015) depicts a woman carrying a heavy load on her back, symbolising the multiple burdens she carries as a woman in a patriarchal society. This work serves as a powerful reminder of the need for gender equality and the empowerment of women. Nigerian sculptors have used their art % to create tangible expressions of social change, often incorporating traditional materials and techniques to convey powerful messages. Their sculptures serve as both aesthetic objects and powerful symbols of the nation’s history, struggles, and Aspirations. El Anatsui, a renowned sculptor, uses discarded materials like bottle caps and aluminium foil to create intricate tapestries that reflect the complexities of contemporary African society. His work “Broken Bridge” (2008) is a poignant commentary on the fragility of human relationships and the impact of conflict on society. The fragmented nature of the sculpture symbolises the Brokenness and division that can result from social unrest. Victor Ehikhamenor, a contemporary sculptor, uses his art to explore themes of identity, Memory, and the impact of colonialism on Nigerian society. His sculpture “The Lost City” (2016) is a haunting reminder of the destruction and displacement caused by colonialism. The Fragmented and decaying nature of the sculpture symbolises the loss of cultural heritage and the Enduring impact of colonial legacies.

Okachi's (2014) painting, commissioned by IMAGO MUNDI PROJECT, titled ‘ Bring Back Our Girls’, is a wakeup call to Governments at all levels in Nigeria to reflect on their leadership style, to bring to an end the ongoing wanton destruction of lives and properties of innocent Nigerians. While pleading with the Abductors of over 200 Chibok Girls to set them free to bring to an end the trauma being experienced by their parents, in particular, and Nigerians in General. While each artwork analysed above offers a unique perspective on social change in Nigeria, it is Important to recognise that they are part of a larger, collective narrative. Nigerian art, in

its Entirety, serves as a powerful testament to the resilience, creativity, and dynamism of the nation. Nigerian art, through its diverse forms and powerful messages, plays a crucial role in social Transformation. It serves as a platform for dialogue, a catalyst for change, and a source of Inspiration for individuals and communities. By reflecting the realities of Nigerian society, challenging societal norms, and promoting critical thinking, art empowers individuals to become agents of change and contribute to a more just and equitable society.

Conclusion

Nigerian art, from the sharp wit of cartoons to the evocative strokes of paintings and the tangible Expressions of sculptures, serves as a powerful testament to the nation's social transformation. It's a vibrant tapestry woven from diverse cultural threads, reflecting the complexities of contemporary Nigerian society and inspiring hope for a brighter future as Nigeria continues to navigate and shape the challenges of the 21st century, driving its art and social progress. Undoubtedly, while it continues to play a vital role in diversifying the economy, governments at all levels in the country should strongly consider tourism development, which will help uplift the Well-being of the citizenry and encourage art commentary that will bring about positive change for the good of the nation.

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