

## THE VISUAL ARTIST AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

This paper critically examines the predicament of professional Nigerian visual artists who graduate from universities without acquiring essential entrepreneurial competencies. Drawing on recent reports, scholarly literature, and sectoral case studies, the study finds that a significant proportion of Nigerian university graduates have limited knowledge of entrepreneurship. Consequently, visual artists who are not inclined toward academic careers often face difficulties integrating into the labour market. Many are relegated to low-paying positions within the media and textile industries, with minimal prospects for professional growth. The paper interrogates the knowledge base and adaptive capacity of visual artists as they engage with the entrepreneurial demands of contemporary society. Furthermore, it explores the challenges and opportunities of entrepreneurship in the visual arts sector, aiming to sensitise stakeholders, including policymakers, the National Universities Commission, and prospective graduates, to the urgency of embedding entrepreneurial education in art curricula. The paper concludes with policy and practical recommendations to enhance artist-led entrepreneurship, contending that coordinated public-private interventions and capacity-building initiatives can generate significant cultural and economic dividends.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurship, creative economy, funding, Nigeria, visual arts, intellectual property, market access

## Introduction

This paper, *The Visual Artist and Entrepreneurship: Challenges and Prospects in Nigeria*, examines the primary barriers to entrepreneurship among Nigerian visual artists and lays out practical opportunities and interventions to promote a more resilient artist-entrepreneur ecosystem. Over the past 20 years, Nigeria's creative and cultural industries have garnered attention as engines of employment, identity formation, and foreign exchange earnings. Visual artists contribute to cultural narratives and can generate livelihoods and businesses through galleries, commercial commissions, residencies, workshops, publishing, and digital sales. In Nigeria, the creative industry, which includes music, movies, visual arts, crafts, publishing, fashion, design, heritage, and digital content, has become a significant force behind both cultural expression and economic progress. At the heart of this economy are artists in particular, who support Nigeria's global cultural presence, create jobs, and increase national income. The visual arts are crucial to cultural identity and innovation, and the creative economy has become a major driver of global economic growth (UNCTAD, 2021). Over 4 million people are employed in Nigeria's creative economy, which accounts for around 2.5% of the nation's GDP (Vanguard, 2024). In contrast to other creative subsectors like music and film, visual artists continue to face marginalisation despite these advancements. Building long-lasting companies that can compete in both domestic and international art markets is a struggle for many Nigerian visual artists. Creative and performing arts schools at higher education institutions are under growing pressure to develop curricula that improve graduates' employability. The specific job kinds that graduates in the creative and performing arts typically encounter must be reflected in such a curriculum. Short-term projects and contracts with a high degree of self-employment are the norm for employment in the arts (Bridgstock, 2011; Ball, Pollard, Stanley, and Oakley, 2010; Throsby & Zednik, 2010; Brown, 2005). A relatively new field in higher education for the creative and performing arts, arts entrepreneurship is rapidly gaining popularity for the opportunities it offers to address graduates' employability concerns. However, since this is a new field, further research is required to define arts entrepreneurship and examine its existing practices. According to

Beckman (2011), a paradigm shift is required to ensure that arts entrepreneurship is recognised as a legitimate and essential component of creative and performing arts education. This article aims to aid this paradigm shift by analysing a new and crucial aspect of the arts.

According to Booth and Hachiya (2004), the term "visual art" encompasses a wide variety of forms, genres, and techniques across the classical arts of architecture, printmaking, sculpture, painting, and drawing, as well as commercial art. One could argue that visual artists are visually literate, skilled, and knowledgeable about images, media, and artworks, and able to interpret the complex modern world, even though this definition may be viewed as essentialist for attempting to impose a certain hermeneutic closure on unstable subjects. According to Achebe (1975), visual art is also an essential part of daily living. According to Achebe, artists are those who produce works that benefit humanity. He adds that: ...art is and was always, in the service of man. Our ancestors created their myths and legends and told their stories for humankind...they made their sculptures in wood and terracotta, stone and bronze to serve the needs of their times. The artists of that time lived and moved and had their beings (Achebe, 1975, p. 29).

Mazrui in World Views (1997) posits that:

The work produced by visual artists is personal objects that fulfil notions of practicality in human societies and satisfy the human desire to embellish one's environment...the personal and utilitarian objects like bead jewellery, textile designs and products, carpentry, paintings, ceramic designs and products form part of the environment that creates a person's feelings of being at home (Mazrui, 1997). For visual artists, entrepreneurship is about fusing their commercial sense with their artistic vision to create a genuine, long-lasting career. This entails having a growth mindset, being aware of branding and marketing, managing finances, and using strategies to monetise their art without sacrificing their artistic vision. Artists can contribute to the creative economy and achieve personal and professional empowerment by embracing entrepreneurial tendencies and turning their passion into sustainable revenue streams.

This paper examines the primary barriers to entrepreneurship among Nigerian visual artists. It highlights the obstacles preventing them from

expanding their operations into profitable businesses and making a greater economic contribution. According to academics, robust markets, cultural policies, and institutional infrastructure are necessary for the creative economy to flourish (Howkins, 2013; Flew, 2019). Visual arts entrepreneurship depends on networks, galleries, collectors, and financial resources in addition to artistic ability (Throsby, 2010). Research on Nigeria's creative industry places more emphasis on the country's music and Nollywood industries than on the visual art markets (Oni, 2020). Systemic obstacles in Nigeria's art sector, including inadequate infrastructure, lax intellectual property protection, and subpar policy implementation, are highlighted in empirical reports (Legit.ng, 2024; TBI Africa, 2024). By focusing on the entrepreneurial barriers Nigerian visual artists face, this paper addresses a research gap in African cultural economics and contributes to the existing body of work.

### **Methodology**

To identify recurrent themes and evidence-based recommendations, this research employs a qualitative synthesis of secondary sources, including sectoral studies, peer-reviewed publications, policy papers, and credible journalism. Given its focus on mapping potential and obstacles rather than conducting primary research, the study triangulates findings from multiple reliable sources to summarise the current situation and suggest practical solutions.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Our study focuses on the difficulties faced by visual artists who pursue entrepreneurship.

Since we see our work as an entrepreneurial initiative within an otherwise art-focused environment, policymakers, other institutions, artists, and researchers will find our findings interesting. Rather than viewing it as a negative term, more artists should be taught about the need for commerce to sustain themselves. Having money on hand, for example, enables one to take more and occasionally larger risks, which aids artists in growing their enterprises and consistently refining their work. Profit can also be viewed as audiences voting for valuable messaging with their credit cards. Profit is the only requirement for a long-lasting and prosperous firm (Davidsson, 2004). Artists with arts-entrepreneurship skills have a higher chance of

success, according to their own definitions of success. In a way, these "up the odds" skills are teaching artists how to make plans. These skills also teach artists how to differentiate themselves from other competitors in the market and how to budget, make money, and sell their work. They are very adaptable, know how to protect their intellectual property, have a loyal fan base, find their unique voice, and use research to mitigate the risks of a career in the arts.

Artists often use entrepreneurial talent to identify and develop niches, which can lead to market dominance and, in turn, income within a speciality. For artists working in this industry, entrepreneurship extends far beyond the ideas of a for-profit company. The broader definition of entrepreneurship, according to Essig (2013), is "seeing the potential for something to exist in the future that does not exist in the present." This phrase is significant because it illustrates that the core of commercial endeavours lies in the spirit of creativity and vision. According to Ogunmola (2006), art is often considered the highest form of human expression and is important for social integration and education. Art improves society when resources are considered. In the most commercial sense, art may be used to market and sell a variety of products as well as to promote religious activities. Art has a significant impact on a dynamic child's growth and development, as well as on his increasing self-consciousness and awareness of his environment (Ajayi, 1985). It is important to keep in mind that there are numerous sustainable artistic practices worldwide, and that these have shaped our behaviour for the good of all people. Because people understand how these behaviours relate to various societal concerns and how they contribute to raising awareness of issues that must be addressed to effect change, these behaviours have persisted.

### **The Mindset of the Visual Artist as an Entrepreneur**

"Arts entrepreneurial mindset" and entrepreneurship education (Essig, 2013; Beckman, 2007, 2011; Carey & Naudin, 2006; Gustafson, 2011). Through the analysis of emerging themes, we explore the idea of an arts entrepreneurial mindset in relation to teaching in arts higher education in the sections that follow. According to these interviews, there are five key components of an arts entrepreneurial mindset, all of which are inextricably linked to creative practice through a strong emphasis on the

sharing of creative output. These include 1) the ability to think strategically, artistically, analytically, and reflectively; 2) self-assurance; 3) teamwork; 4) effective communication skills; and 5) knowledge of the contemporary artistic milieu. We contend that [154.120.81.8] Project MUSE (September 27, 2025, 12:49 GMT). These abilities are crucial for visual artists, and our explanation of them in terms of arts entrepreneurship demonstrates how such education can significantly boost creativity in general, according to Pollard and Wilson's "Entrepreneurial Mindset" in *Creative and Performing Arts Education Artivate 3* (1) 4. According to our findings, the goal of arts entrepreneurship is to cultivate the skills, attitudes, and talents that not only help visual artists build long-lasting creative careers but also enhance and advance art in general by producing generic visual artists. A significant step towards the required paradigm shift is our discovery that cultivating an arts entrepreneurial mindset also contributes in distinctive and worthwhile ways to broader educational outcomes in the performing and creative arts. The reason is that it presents arts entrepreneurship education as a means to improve the performing and creative arts education system as it is currently practised in Nigeria. To further advance understanding of arts entrepreneurship and the visual artist, more extensive study with a larger number of participants is required.

### **Limited Access to Capital**

Nigerian banks and investors rarely fund art projects because they are seen as high-risk and with little potential for profit. This makes it more difficult for artists to open studios, host shows, or enter online markets (NewsSpec, 2024). Inadequate institutional support, unequal market infrastructure (poor auction markets, few galleries), and ongoing financing deficits for the visual arts are all documented in research conducted throughout West Africa. These problems hinder artists' capacity to grow or become professionals. New market channels are enabled by digitalisation, yet artists frequently lack the skills to monetise their online presence effectively. Artists frequently lack access to traditional financing, such as bank loans, because they lack collateral and steady financial flows. In contrast to the music and film industries, private investment in the visual arts remains in its infancy, and grant funding is limited and highly competitive. Systemic financial gaps unique to the production and

dissemination of visual arts are also highlighted by comparative studies conducted in West Africa.

Budgeting, diversifying revenue sources (such as commissions, sales, and grants), managing debt, investing for the future, safeguarding assets, seeking support from advisory boards, and possibly working with agents or galleries to handle business-related tasks are all part of financial management for visual artists who are also entrepreneurs. In the end, this balances creativity with commercial viability for a long-lasting career.

### **Weak market Structures**

With a small collector base centred on Lagos, the Nigerian art market is still fragmented. Artists find it difficult to market their work in the absence of large patrons and auction houses (Legit.ng, 2024). Initiatives such as artist residencies, foundation-supported programs, and private patronage show how artists can access markets, networks, and capacity-building despite limitations. When paired with financial and legislative assistance, these instances offer models for expanding artist entrepreneurship. Geographically concentrated visual art markets exist in Nigeria (such as Lagos and Abuja). In contrast, institutional infrastructure (auction houses, art fairs, dependable shipping and logistics, and conservation services) is scarce outside of flagship galleries. International sales, price discovery, and the growth of secondary markets that gradually compensate artists are all hampered by this. To succeed as a visual artist entrepreneur, you must first identify your target market and distinctive artistic voice, then develop a unified visual identity for your portfolio and social media accounts. Create an engaging brand narrative, keep your branding materials consistent, and actively interact with your audience by providing exceptional customer service and storytelling. Seek visibility by working with others, utilising visual-focused sites, and carefully using hashtags to expand your network and notoriety. The unified identity surrounding your artistic creations that enables others to recognise your distinctiveness is known as artist branding. It stands for your individuality, ideals, and creative style.

### **Infrastructural Deficits**

Production and market visibility are hampered by unreliable electricity, inadequate logistics, and a lack of art institutions (museums, galleries) (TBI Africa, 2024). The lack of adequate infrastructure, including poor roads, unreliable water and electricity supplies, and limited access to financial

institutions, is a significant obstacle to the success of visual artists as entrepreneurs. This is especially true in Nigeria, where it limits the expansion and sustainability of art-based enterprises. To get around this, artists need to combine their artistic abilities with business savvy, embrace cutting-edge strategies such as digital platforms, use crowdsourcing, develop sustainable funding models, and pursue entrepreneurship education to turn their work into profitable businesses. Artists do have to deal with issues such as poor roads, inadequate logistics, and limited access to capital to expand their businesses. By using digital technology to innovate and overcome physical infrastructure constraints, artists may expand their creative possibilities. Strong local communities and translocal connections can be established by him.

### **Troubles with Intellectual Property**

The growth of digital platforms brings both threats and opportunities: Visual artworks have reduced economic potential due to piracy and lax copyright enforcement. Unauthorised replicas cost artists money, which deters people from investing in their work (TheCable, 2023). Artists frequently lack the legal assistance they need to negotiate contracts or defend their rights. The internet's capacity to swiftly and widely disseminate images is a serious problem, as it can lead to the theft and unauthorised use of artwork for marketing, podcasts, and entertainment. It can be challenging for artists to monitor violations and enforce their rights in the digital sphere, as there is often a lack of clarity regarding the use and ownership of an artwork. Most of the time, it is very difficult to trace ownership because there is no documentation, disputes can arise over who owns the copyright to an artwork, and it can be difficult to prove ownership without clear records or a certificate. Additionally, pursuing legal action will take time and money that individual artists may not be able to afford, making it difficult for them to protect their works.

### **Gaps in Entrepreneurial Skills**

While studio practice and art history are prioritised in many Nigerian schools' art curricula, business skills, intellectual property literacy, and internet marketing are often left out. Many graduates are forced into low-paying or informal jobs due to this educational gap, which reduces their readiness to function as entrepreneurial practitioners. Nigerian art schools prioritise technique over business education. As a result, many artists lack

the branding, marketing, and negotiation skills necessary for entrepreneurship (Oni, 2020). Additionally, the visual artist must be able to diversify their income sources, balance creative integrity with commercial viability, and manage their time effectively to meet the demands of their work and the industry's expectations. Balancing creative processes with the demands of running a business, particularly meeting deadlines, may be tough. Artists require resiliency and coping mechanisms to handle the rejection and criticism that are common in the art field. Without sacrificing their artistic integrity, artists must learn how to convey the financial possibilities of their work.

### **Digital Divide**

The digital divide refers to the disparity between individuals with access to modern information and communication technology (ICT) and those without. As the global art market increasingly relies on online platforms and emerging technologies such as NFTs, Nigerian artists face significant challenges that hinder their participation in these digital economies. Limited internet access, high costs of digital tools, and insufficient digital literacy are key factors that exclude many Nigerian artists from the international market (Powers of Africa, 2023). While digital tools offer unprecedented opportunities for artists, enabling intricate editing and limitless experimentation without the constraints of physical media, they also pose challenges to the preservation of authenticity and originality.

The integration of digital technologies enables artists to push creative boundaries and explore new concepts that were previously unfeasible. By merging traditional techniques with digital advancements, artists are no longer confined by limitations related to time, material costs, or the permanence of their work. However, unequal access to these platforms is becoming an increasingly significant issue, as digital connectivity has become essential for reaching global audiences. This divide is particularly evident in the disparity between artists who can leverage digital tools to engage with international markets and those who cannot (Wilson, 2017). Roadside artist-entrepreneurs, often found in rural and semi-urban areas, are particularly vulnerable to this divide. These artists, who combine creative talent with entrepreneurial skills to produce, market, and sell art in public spaces, often lack the formal education or financial resources to acquire the necessary tools and training for digital engagement. As noted

by Okonkwo and Ude (2019), many face barriers such as poor internet access, limited digital literacy, and financial constraints that hinder their participation in the growing digital art economy. This digital divide not only restricts their economic opportunities but also marginalises their representation within the broader global art community (Regneda & Muschert, 2013).

### **Policy and Institutional Neglect**

Unlike the global prominence of Nollywood and Afrobeat, Nigeria's visual arts sector suffers from limited government support and promotion. The absence of robust cultural policies and investment incentives severely hinders entrepreneurial growth in this field (Vanguard, 2024). The marginalisation of visual artists within policy and institutional frameworks is evident in insufficient funding allocations, inadequate infrastructural support in educational institutions, and educational policies that fail to prioritise the development of artistic careers. Furthermore, there is a pervasive neglect of artists' intellectual property rights and market access, leading to the devaluation of visual arts, constrained career growth for artists, and limited avenues for recognition and professional success.

This neglect also manifests in systemic obstacles to exhibitions and sales, in which commercial art often takes precedence over artistic value, and in the significant role of the visual arts in fostering economic growth and national development being overlooked. In educational systems, arts education is frequently deprioritised in favour of science-based subjects, stymying the development of psychomotor skills and a foundational understanding of artistic practices. National educational policies, even those promoting technological advancement, have often failed to adequately incorporate or fund the arts, fostering a sense of "apathy" towards the sector's development.

Moreover, even when policies exist, such as those targeting the creative industries, their execution is often ineffective due to insufficient resources, funding, and strategic direction. Intellectual property laws, which are essential for safeguarding artists' rights and preventing infringement, remain underdeveloped. Government policies aimed at supporting the arts are frequently neglectful or inadequately prioritised, undermining trust

and confidence within the sector. This broader institutional neglect contributes to societal indifference toward the visual arts, further exacerbating the failure to recognise their pivotal role in national development and technological progress.

### **Socioeconomic Pressures**

High levels of unemployment and inflation force many artists to seek secondary employment, thereby limiting their ability to fully engage in entrepreneurial activities (Legit.ng, 2024). Visual artist-entrepreneurs are further burdened by socioeconomic pressures, including reduced public funding, societal expectations that art should be inexpensive or freely accessible, and the growing demand for artists to generate their own income through entrepreneurship and direct sales. These challenges create tension between the need for financial stability and the preservation of creative integrity, compelling artists to balance business demands with the pursuit of artistic vision in an increasingly competitive market.

With diminishing public support and rising expectations to self-finance, achieving financial stability becomes a significant obstacle for many artists. Society often expects art to be affordable and widely accessible, which conflicts with the need for artists to monetise their work to sustain their livelihoods and develop sustainable businesses. As a result, artists are increasingly required to merge their creative abilities with business strategies. This process can lead to internal conflict when economic pressures begin to overshadow artistic values. The tension between the demands of business and artistic integrity, coupled with a lack of business acumen among some artists, creates what is often termed the "art vs business" dilemma. These factors push artists to adopt entrepreneurial strategies, becoming "artpreneurs" who must blend creativity with business acumen to survive. However, this dual role often generates stress and, in some cases, may compromise the quality and authenticity of their artistic work.

### **Prospects and Enabling Factors**

Opportunities to update cultural policy, enhance data collection, and create specialised support tools for creatives are presented by recent policy engagements and technical cooperation (e.g., with UNESCO and regional programs). When implemented, this kind of policy action can spur

regulatory reform and infrastructure investment. Nigerian artists are in demand due to the growing global interest in modern African art, fuelled by institutions, collectors, and online markets. Digital platforms facilitate direct-to-buyer sales, licensing, and print-on-demand methods for repeatable works while lowering geographical barriers. Artists can access new revenue streams by receiving training in digital rights management and e-commerce.

### **Artist-Led Spaces**

Initiatives like the Guest Artists Space concept demonstrate how artist residencies, foundations, and private collectors can accelerate the entrepreneurial trajectories of participating artists by providing visibility, networks, and incubation. By integrating exhibitions, residencies, and farm-to-studio sustainable methods, these places also serve as models for value capture. Artists can diversify their revenue streams by connecting the visual arts with tourism, hospitality, and public art initiatives (such as commissions, public murals, and site-specific works). Longer-term demand can be increased by these collaborations, which can help boost local markets and increase appreciation for cultural assets. (UNCTAD)

### **Conclusion**

Traditional craftsmanship and contemporary innovation are vibrantly coming together in Nigeria's visual arts revolution (Kashim, 2013; Okoro, 2023). It embraces modern concepts and methods while grounding itself in the traditional methods and traditions of indigenous peoples, technologies igniting a fresh creative surge. This study investigates the financial, social, and environmental factors affecting the economic sustainability of visual arts entrepreneurship in Nigeria, building on developments in the country's creative economy. Nigeria's economy depends on the creative sector, which is fuelled by innovation, creativity, and intellectual property. The goal of creative entrepreneurship in this sector is to incorporate artistic ideals and cultural expressions into commercial endeavours, particularly in the visual arts.

Systemic obstacles such as financial exclusion, weak markets, limited infrastructure, insufficient governmental support, and digital divides limit Nigerian visual artists' ability to pursue entrepreneurship. Despite the abundance of creative potential, artists' capacity to run their businesses

sustainably is hampered by institutional and structural neglect. Establishing creative industry subsidies and awards, integrating entrepreneurship into the art curriculum, developing art infrastructure (museums, galleries, studios), enforcing copyright more strictly, and promoting digital inclusion are all necessary to strengthen visual art entrepreneurship.

In addition to empowering Nigerian visual artists, addressing these difficulties would increase the creative economy's contribution to GDP and employment. To fully realise the sector's potential, funders, governments, artists, and business partners must work together.

### **Recommendations**

Additionally, the results of this study can assist stakeholders, politicians, and business professionals in formulating plans to enhance the financial viability of Nigeria's creative sector. Addressing challenges and encouraging sustainable entrepreneurship in Nigeria's creative economy requires an understanding of how visual art entrepreneurs see economic sustainability (Silajdžić et al., 2015). Consequently, the following suggestions are made by this study:

Incorporate grant writing, internet marketing, entrepreneurship, intellectual property law, and financial literacy into professional development courses and art school curricula. Practising artists will be able to grow their companies through brief, recognised CPD courses developed in collaboration with industry professionals.

**Enhanced Financial Support:** More funding for visual arts companies is necessary to promote sustainability in the arts industry. Governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and private businesses should aggressively offer funding opportunities that are tailored to the needs of visual artists. These financial resources might include scholarships, fellowships, and subsidies designed to support creative pursuits and career advancement. Similarly, it is essential to offer affordable gallery spaces so that artists may showcase their work and interact with a wider audience without worrying about paying outrageous leasing prices. Artists' financial burden may be significantly reduced by access to low-interest loans with favourable terms, enabling them to pursue long-term

business growth and career advancement. These organisations may help create a more resilient and vibrant cultural ecology by offering such substantial financial support. In collaboration with development finance organisations, design customised financial products (microcredit, revenue-advance instruments, blended financing with grant components) and artist guarantee funds to overcome collateral constraints. Create accessible legal-assistance clinics for artists, support collective licensing programs, and launch industry-wide digital-rights campaigns. Encourage the creation of regional e-commerce sites attuned to artists' requirements and logistical constraints.

Encourage public-private investments in transparent auction systems, biennales, decentralised art centres, and galleries. Encourage government organisations and private developers to purchase art in order to generate consistent commissions for visual artists. Encourage laws that honour artistic endeavours. To lessen precarity and facilitate long-term artistic investment, create social safety programs tailored to independent contractors in the cultural industry (contributory schemes, transferable benefits).

To better understand the diversity of entrepreneurial experiences and evaluate the effectiveness of suggested solutions, primary empirical research (surveys and interviews with working Nigerian visual artists across regions) should be conducted. This study synthesises secondary literature and sector reports. It would be beneficial to conduct longitudinal studies that monitor artists' earnings, market engagement, and business development.

The Nigerian visual arts revolution represents a vibrant convergence of traditional craftsmanship and modern innovation (Kashim, 2013; Okoro, 2023). It roots itself in the ancient practices and techniques of indigenous peoples while embracing contemporary ideas and technologies, sparking a renewed wave of creativity. Building on the context of events within the visual arts sector of Nigeria's creative industry, this research examines the financial, social, and environmental factors influencing the economic sustainability of visual arts entrepreneurship in Nigeria. The creative industry, driven by creativity, innovation, and intellectual property, is vital to Nigeria's economy. Within this industry, creative entrepreneurship focuses on integrating cultural expressions and artistic values into business

efforts, especially in the visual arts. This sector not only makes a significant contribution to Nigeria's GDP but also plays a crucial role in cultural representation and economic development, highlighting its importance in the nation's broader creative landscape.

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