

The Role of Museums and Gallery in Nigeria Heritage and Management: the Artist Experience

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Abstract: The functions of art galleries and museums are such that is vital in the preservation of social, cultural and political heritage of a nation. They have continued to build bridges across time boundaries and artists have found them very useful as historical pivot and a source of references in their creative enquiries. This paper probes into the origination and progressions of these art institutions and how they have metamorphosed into a digital space. It has also appraised the role of the museum and art galleries in the preservation of national heritage as it concerns the administration and management of the art industry, then, identify how much it has benefitted the Nigerian artist.

I. INTRODUCTION

Museums are such establishment, saddled with the responsibilities as nurturing, preserving and judiciously protecting artefacts, art heritage and historical events and transmit them from one generation to another. These artifacts are the pride of the people in relation to their cultural heritage and way of life. On this premise, Oladumiye, Bolajoko, & Tolulope,(2014) agree that the nation or its people cannot exist without the preservation of the cultural posterity of its territorial integrity.

Museums and galleries are beyond the building structures, the content of museums is the heritage and wealth of the people, while the art gallery displays visual art for aesthetic consumption, cultural enrichment and for purpose of marketing. The gallery is also a platform where the potentials of the artists are showcased to the society. The duo however, work hand in hand since they both are institutions for the study, preservation and restoration of art.

The role of the museums and art galleries in Nigeria in the preservation of national heritage as it concerns the administration and management of the art industry is worthwhile, to appraise the value it has added to nation building and how much it has foster national integration. Then to identify how much it has benefited the Nigerian artist. These and more are the points this paper is poised to delineate through this discuss.

The Advent of Museums in Nigeria

According to Momin,K. and Okpoko, A., (2010), the practice of museums in Nigeria can be traced to pre-Arab and European times. During these periods, various cultural materials of ritual, religious and political importance were fashioned, conserved and preserved in temples or traditional shrines and in the palaces of kings and chiefs. Kings and other influential members of the society would commission artists who made important pieces of art works that symbolized the way of life of the people as a means to boost their religious and socio – political statue. Apart from housing such cultural materials like ivory, bronze and carved wooden objects, these institutions like the temples, shrines and palaces were regarded as museums. In these precolonial museums, objects were preserved because of their utilitarian or symbolic value. An observation on this practice shows that originally there had been a system where art objects that project cultural existence in a creative artifact were preserved and presented both for the posterity of culture and visual satisfaction.

Fagg, (1982) observed that a major influence that instigated the preservation of cultural heritage fashioned towards protecting the rich Nigerian arts was accelerated by the invasion of the British, which gave the opportunity for Nigerians to further developed the institution that protects their rich artefacts and cultural heritage. This interest shown by the colonists in the works of art in Nigeria, as Fagg further revealed, gave the reasons to place better value on them. Colonization therefore, gave the opportunity for Nigerians to travel to the western world, where they got enlightened on the need to establish the museum where works of art in Nigeria can be stored and protected. The operational responsibility of the institution responsible for the preservation of the art of the people increased from ordinary safe-keeping purpose, to income earning, and providing job opportunities.

The first conventional museum in Nigeria was established by The British colonial art teacher, Kenneth C. Murray for the conservation of Nigerian artefacts in Jos in 1943, This was followed by the Esie Museum in 1944 and Ife in 1955. The National Museum of Antiquities at Onikan, Lagos was established in 1957 as a cross-cultural museum. (Oladumiye, et al, 2014). It houses various examples of artefacts from different parts of the country. These include Ife bronze and terracotta heads, Nok terracotta, Ugbo-Ukwu Bronze, Benin Brass Plaques and Ivories, Oron Stone Monoliths, Ibibio Marks and Costumes. The Esie Museum once housed over one hundred tombstone figures or images representing human beings. (figures 1 &2).



Fig. 1: Exterior view of Esie Museum

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Fig. 2: Interior view of Esie Museum housing human shaped stone figures

Apparently, museum services in Nigeria provides a major source of art conservation and preservation of its cultural heritage. Owing to this undoubtable fact, Africa and Nigeria to be precise is endowed with great cultural heritage, which deserves sufficient documentation. Evidence of this can be seen in the works of art such as Igbo Ukwu Art, Nok terracotta, Benin bronze casting, etc. These are proof that Nigerian art had ancient civilizations that measured up with the Greek and Roman art but was not known until the Benin invasion.

In the contemporary global society, new narrative of digitalizing works of art has emerged, where digitally recorded images, sound files, text documents, and other data of historical, scientific, or cultural interest that are accessed through electronic media. Art works are collected and stored digitally. This version of museum does not house actual objects and therefore lacks the preeminence and unique qualities of a museum. Nevertheless, through the multimedia capabilities of electronic information media, notably, the World Wide Web, a digitalized representation can be brought together from multiple sources for enjoyment and study in a manner largely determined by the individual user. The Pan - African University in Nigeria created a visual museum that would show to the wider public some of the best modern and contemporary art from Nigeria, with the web site: www.pau.edu.ng/museum, as part of the university's web site. This became needful for Nigerian artists who have produced great works to become better known..

Although, there may be problems, such as ensuring authenticity and accuracy of information, the gains of this development cannot be undermined. And although the Pan-African visual museum no longer exists today, several of such site have been created and launched to serve the need of contemporary artists.

Visual museum can be a powerful tool for comparative study and for research into a particular subject, material or locality. In more recent times, this narrative has been more refined to a more digitalized space. Apart from web sites, the social media has become a viable space for art, artists and the global consumers alike. Artists can have their works posted for views and purchase. The virtual museum does not replace the conventional museum but complements it, as today most physical museums now have an online presence, with varying degrees of online information. They offer extensive online exhibits, interactive online features, multimedia, and searchable or browsable collections.

The development of museums in Nigeria wouldn't have been possible without the growth of the Nigeria art, by the introduction of the National Gallery of Art in 1993. Its aim was for the promotion and presentation of creative visual art in Nigeria through acquiring and collecting Nigerian art works, organizing exhibitions/competitions and talent hunts in fine and applied arts; sponsoring and encouraging research into all aspect of art; and to promote excellence through the award of grants to artists. .

The Artist's view on Museums and Galleries

The galleries and museums have helped to showcase the history of a particular culture in a visual manner. This visual history provides a picture of what life was like in a particular period in time, through the works of art. For instance, we have come to study, understand and associate with certain arts like the Igbo Ukwu, Nok culture, Benin Bronze casting, (Figure 3, 4, &5) and so on. These artifacts, tell a lot of stories about the people who once lived at the geographical settings these art objects were found, although, they may not actually provide adequate information about them, such as, the artist, year of production, style, functions and process, but then, suffice it to say, these antiquities have helped to direct the contemporary artist, by providing such enabling pivot to connect history.

The art and culture of Nigeria are a perfect way to learn more about the ancient culture and fascinating life-style of our progenitors. Many of the arts and culture, and forms created today in Nigeria have their roots firmly planted in the traditions and methods of their ancestors. Art galleries and art museums now find themselves in a market place where it is important to establish an image and a reputation in order to attract people to their doors. (Digney, 1989, pp.7-8).

Casey and Wehner, (2001) write that art galleries and art museums are facing a time of enormous change, via the internet platforms such as, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Tweeter, WhatsApp, and the likes. Through these medium artists are able to connect with other artists outside their immediate environment. Artists now hold exhibitions and also create online galleries where their works are showcased even viewed by unlimited viewers. The internet has also become an easy museum where visual images of artifacts are stored more permanently. Artists have also developed a way of selling their works on the internet for prospective buyers.

Over time, art galleries and art museums have defended the values of scholarship, research and collection, it has become necessary, however, that they as well maintain their responsibility to the public (visitor) who constitute the major consumers of art products. Art galleries and art museums in contemporary society, have become establishments for learning and enjoyment. The major functions of these institutions has therefore placed them within both as a world of education, as well as a world of amusement. It is therefore needful that the galleries and museum operators should research into the quality of visitor experiences, also the need to distinguish between visitors attending art galleries and art museums specifically to attend the special events and visitors attending with the primary aim of seeing the institution's permanent exhibition.

This is because different types of visitors have different needs. Curators and art institution managers therefore need to recognize these differences to plan events and programmes with their target audiences in mind. With this kind of structure, the intention of these institutions and posterity of the artists as the major producer of art products would be preserved. On this premise, Sussman, (2017), submits that, art galleries and museums have multiple roles, visible and invisible to incubate and support their artists, often by going beyond the normal work of putting on shows, promoting their artists, and selling the works of art; and providing services such as financial management or book publishing, in order to help artists, focus more fully on their work.

Politics has also taken diverse forms in the museum and art galleries sectors, from effect of national government policies and funding decisions to the way in which the contents of museums are offered to the public. The diversity of political forms has led to the creation of a variety of administrative contexts within which these institutions operate.

The Art and Cultural Preservation in Nigeria

Museums and art institutions have consistently been at the vanguard of representing cultural values and morals, being used as locations of instruction. These institutions of cultural heritage in Nigeria has played a predominant role in the uplift of images among the country of nations as traditional African arts have won its place of pride among great art traditions of the world. Some of the Nigerian works kept in the museums, for the upcoming generations, were meant for defending the artefacts and people's cultural heritage. They tell stories about the pasts, describe values and the way of life of the Nigerian people and help them to relate to the supernatural forces, his social relations, and expresses emotions and enhances Nigerian's present life as an embellishment of pride and status as well as founding entertainment and learning.

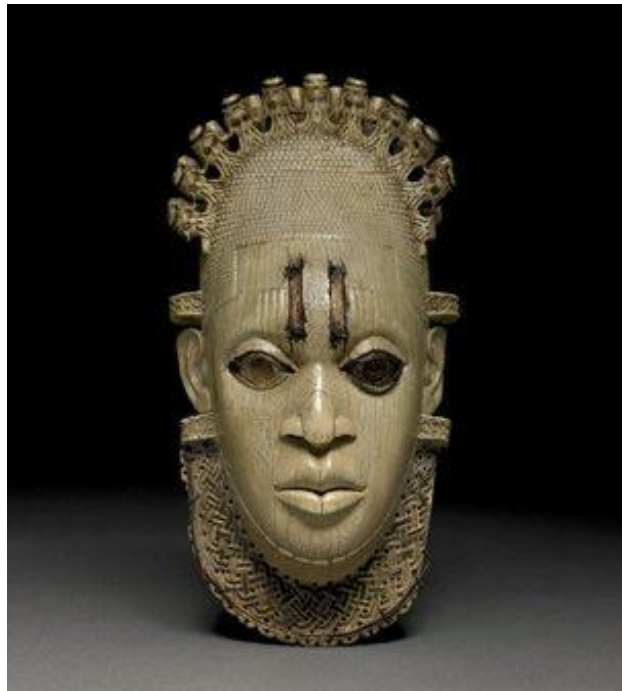


Fig. 3 Benin Ivory Mask

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Fig. 4 Nok Terracotta

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Fig. 5

Igbo Ukwu Bronze (Ceremonial Staff Head)

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II. CONCLUSION

Nigerian museums and galleries have played the role of tourist attraction as they serve as repository of the nation's cultural heritage. Visitors from all over the world always gained thorough information and learned from the objects on display in the Nigerian museums and galleries.

Art galleries have a special place today in the society. In general, fine art gallery has offered an opening, eye appealing space where visitors can view and appreciate art. Art galleries and museums have showcased history of our culture in a visual manner. As such this visual history provides a snapshot of what life was like at the time such art piece was produced. The art also provides information about the people living in a particular period and helps to explain the social, political, cultural and religious climate prevailing at such period. Finally, galleries and museums have been of great important institutions in the art industry in providing enabling ground for visual activities.

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