

## EXPLORING INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO THE ANALYSIS OF ANCIENT AND CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN ART HISTORY IN NIGERIAN ART SCHOOLS

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### Abstract

*This paper examined and discussed the ignorance of many art history scholars about the proper and adequate key components of the course contents for the analysis of ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history in Nigerian art schools. The aim of the study is to establish comprehensive key components of the course with the view of providing a modified course contents as the sequence of studying the course. The findings are largely based on other researchers view about similar subject matter, and their relevance to this study including research questions which test the objective of the study. It was ascertained that ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history has significant academic prospects for Nigerian academic artists, albeit art history students are sacred of the course – a reason for which students' enrollment into art history specialization is poor. So also does the application of obsolete course contents and lack of research to improve the course contents have being affecting the inculcation of the history into the learners. Therefore concluded that Nigerian educational system needs to make deliberate effort at providing an improved and harmonized course contents of ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history such as this paper, to enable the teachers inculcate the history properly and adequately in the learners than ever, so that they can cope with the challenges of discussing the history and or writing any harmonized examination on the course in Nigeria for sustainable development.*

**Keywords:** Exploration, Innovative Approach, Analysis, Art History, Nigerian Art Schools.

### Introduction

The challenge of the art history teachers improving on the analysis of ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history in Nigeria art schools is a very significant subject matter in biographical study of Nigerian artists, and swayed the interest of this research. No doubt, the availability of the key components of course contents of ancient and contemporary Nigeria art history, would have guided the course teachers and students on the sequence of analyzing the history. It would have also shown the better course contents of ancient and contemporary Nigeria art history for Nigerian art schools. So also it would have projected the course teachers and students as competent art history Scholars. This challenge evokes the feelings of the use of obsolete course contents of ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history for the training of the 6<sup>th</sup> decade artists of the Post Nigerian independence. The

problem becomes more compounding when Nigerian art historians and post graduate art history students of Nigeria at sixty two (62) cannot embark on evolving an improved, and harmonized course contents on ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history for Nigerian art schools.

The researcher therefore was inspired by the quest for improving on the analysis of the ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history to enhance its learning in Nigeria arts schools. Ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history is a six merged words that convey the meaning of the concept. Those words are discussed separately in conceptual clarification, and as a leading concept, it is described as the study of art of the pre-colonial Nigerian civilization and their reformations that align with western art principles and practices in favour of modernism.

The paper therefore establishes the suggested comprehensive key components of the ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history to include; the chronology of history of ancient and contemporary Nigerian art development from the Palaeolithic era to the post colonial civilization of the 21st century, the consolation of western art in modern Nigeria, the recognition and establishment of western art in Nigerian schools, and Onabolu's contribution to the life and Art of Contemporary Nigerian artists. The paper further made an over-view of the establishment of experimental art workshop centres and art tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the essence of studying ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history in Nigerian art schools, the general value of the history to Nigerian artists, the implication of the history on Nigerian academic artists and their works, and an overview of the precursors of Nigerian art. However, the paper discusses a few of the key components of the course contents as part of the sequence of the study. All this enabled the researcher to achieve the aim of the study.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

Exploring innovative approach to the analysis of ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history is a word of six merged words and conveys the meaning of a concept. Hornby (2010) describes exploring as searching for something. Exploring could also be described as discovering. Innovative in BBC English Dictionary refers to something that is new and original. While approach in the same dictionary means a way of thinking about a situation or dealing with it. Analysis in Hornby (2010) refers to the detailed study or examination of something in order to understand more about it. In this study, it refers to the detailed and thorough explanation of a subject matter to the students understanding. Ancient and contemporary here refer to the events of the past and present generation in the history human existence, while Art Schools means institutions where people are trained in art. These keywords put together is described as the discovery of a new and original way of explaining a subject matter properly and adequately to the level of the students understanding.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This research study of exploring innovative approach to the analysis of ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history in Nigerian art schools is guided by two theories, psychoanalysis and deconstruction. The theory of psychoanalysis proposes that creativity wells up from unconscious drives, and that there are differing opinions about how it occurs, but the various psychoanalytic schools of thought generally suggest that creativity is a by-product of primary processes. Samuels and Samuels (1976 citing Greenacre 1957) in addressing the source and motive of the creative act in psychoanalytic theory of creativity notes that, the future artists should learn to disassociate with real objects and fall in love with the world as a whole.

In this study, this theory enabled the researcher to make psychological enquiry about the teaching and learning of Ancient and contemporary Nigerian Art History in Nigerian art schools, and established the history of the art development from the ancient Nigeria to the contemporary Nigerian art of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The theory concurs with the postulation of the theory of deconstruction in Ohuaba (2013) that seeks to explore the deep seated contradictions in a work of art by opening up new meanings through questioning of assumption. This research study was to determine the possibility of the art history teachers in Nigerian art schools to improve on the analysis of Ancient and contemporary Nigerian Art History to Nigerian art students. The theories of psychoanalysis and deconstruction enabled the researcher to suggest that a modified course contents that contains the key components of the analysis of ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history would be appropriate in confronting the issue of non sequential analysis of the history to the students.

## **Chronology of History of Ancient and Contemporary Nigerian Art Development from the Palaeolithic Era to the Post Colonial Civilization of the Twenty first (21<sup>st</sup>) Century**

Ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history refers to the study of art of the pre-colonial Nigerian civilization and their reformations that align with western art principles and practices in favour of modernism. Those earliest ancient Nigerian artists and their works are referred to as the Palaeolithic art and include the Nok Terracotta Art, (900BC-200AD), Igbo-Ukwu Bronze Art (800 AD), Ife Bronze and Terracotta Art (1100AD-1400AD), Owo Terracotta Art (1435 AD), Benin court art (1300AD-1600AD), Tsoede Bronze Art (1100AD-1400AD), Esie, and Ekoi soap stone figures respectively. These periods date back to the beginning of life in Nigeria and gradually phased out in about the 15th century, when Nigerians could relate a little with the Europeans. At that time, artist's creative expressions were similar, and different from one another in terms of form, subject matters, creative processes and meaning. Those artists were trained through informal apprenticeship system but contributed immensely to the development and understanding of art through aesthetic language. Mangiri, (2014) describes aesthetics as the study of knowing and having information about art works and using such knowledge for making careful observations, thoughtful interpretation

and judgments. Aesthetics can succinctly be defined as the study of beauty with the consideration of its nature of pleasurable and non pleasurable qualities.

Elenwo, (2019) views aesthetic language as visual language and describes it as the ability of an artist or group of artists to evolve a special way of expressing art for which their works can be identified in the midst of others. Those artists who went through apprenticeship system prior to the advent of European art in Nigeria had produced a wide variety of artistic works that function in the context of leadership, cultural, economic, and aesthetic needs, (Okronkwo, 2012). These artists tap into African folklore, myths, symbols, and signs in order to evolve their visual language.

According to history, Nigerian art concepts were tied to many aspects of life as the works were used in varied ways including spiritual or religious matters. Their styles of work show the diversity in Nigerian ethnic groups but appear to have been made and used for a particular cultural ceremony. Those styles of art production were influenced by another art civilization that Fosu (1986) cited in Chukueggu (1998) referred to as the *Neo-Traditionalist also addressed as the Post Ancient Artists or the Traditionally Inspired Modern Artists*. The Neo-Traditionalists emerged in 1472 of the 15th century when the Portuguese had their earliest mix-up with Nigerians in Nigeria, and tactically practiced art with them. This interaction made Nigerian works to begin to adduce evidence of western ideas and Nigerian Cultural Life - a style of art referred in this study to as "*Trado Modern Expression*" which stuck as an art form and practice in contemporary Nigerian art scene.

Between 1842 and 1922 of the 19th and 20th centuries, another set of artists referred to as "*The Modernist of Contemporary Nigerian Artists*" of the pre-Nigeria independence, emerged. Some of those artists associated themselves with western Christianity and Islamic religions. Egonwa (2011) categorized them into four groups referred to as "*The True or Advant Gard Modern African Artists, the College Trained Artists, the Schools of Artists, and The highly individualistic experimentalists.*" These artists were interested in founding schools of their own, which implies that the modernists strived to discover new things for themselves. They experimented with new forms, media and idioms using indigenous concepts to create African artworks that could have global appeal. They could do this because of their proficiency in the use of western art materials and techniques.

By this period, Christianity and Islamic religions have been introduced in Nigeria. Their Nigerian converts were persuaded to jettison indigenous Nigerian art immediately either because they desired to spread British culture, and maintain stronghold on control and exploitation of Nigeria or for other reasons. Initially the Nigerians resisted the persuasion as they persisted in their creative works that they say were important to their social life. Much later, those religions and other European activities flourished in Nigeria and Nigerian artworks reflected more of indigenous and foreign concepts as evidence of the interplay of different cultural groups. This development gave birth to the artist of another

civilization (1923 to date) referred to as the *Post Modernists of Contemporary Nigerian Artist*. Those artists are also of the Pre-Nigeria independence era, and had better European art training and skill. Among them was Chief Aina Onabolu (1882-1963) often referred to as the father of contemporary Nigerian art, because he was the first Nigerian that received western education through art overseas between 1920 and 1922, and he introduced art in Nigerian schools through the permission and mandate of the then Nigerian government.

Those artists adapted western techniques and styles or idioms in expressing Nigerian cultural heritage of their respective tribes. They produced classic traditional designs and patterns with symbolic meaning needed by European patrons of the period. Their artworks reflected the combination of unique African (Nigeria) and western cultural concepts as shown in plates 1 to 4.

Fortunately, the unique art works made by these artists serve as a platform for the education of new generations artists in Nigeria. The exhibitions and publications made by these artists bear eloquent testimony to the advent of modern art in Nigeria. They have transmitted their ideas of art expressions to the artists of *the Post Nigeria Independence* through formal education. Interestingly a brief documentation of some of them can be found in Nigerian art books and journals. Those artists are exposed to better art resources than ever and have had varieties of ideas, styles, and techniques of producing art which also contributes to the present creative forms in Nigeria. They have also evolved new and peculiar creative styles that are worthy of recognition in Nigeria and elsewhere. Those artists seem to be individualistic, innovative and inventive in art Productions, and compete favourably with any other artist on the globe. They have contributed so much to the growth and development of modern Nigerian art nationally and internationally. Axiomatically, the period of post independence in Nigeria gave birth to creative activities by other Nigerian artists such as C.C Aniakor (b. 1939), Chuka Amaefuna (1940-1994), Jimoh Buraimoh (b. 1943), and Obiora Udechukwu (b. 1946), among others. These artists were interested in adapting to the dynamic forces of change.

They produced conceptual works that reflect modern art idioms reinvented on traditional art styles as shown in plates; 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. The styles and qualities of these works were influenced by the works of their European masters, African philosophy and Spirituality. Experience from these works by both the indigenous and foreign patrons of the art reveal that, the products are quite purposeful therefore should be produced in larger quantity because of their aesthetic value. The above history and example provide a good insight into the rise of creative art in modern Nigeria.

*Works showing the combination of unique African (Nigerian) and western cultural concepts, plates 1 to 4*



*Plate 1: Uche Okeke, Moma/ Nza the smart  
Source: Chukueggu C.C. (1998)*



*Plate 2: Uche Okeke, March of the Masquerades (1982)  
Source: internet*



*Plate 3: Ben Enwonwu Bonhams  
Source: internet*



*Plate 4: Ben Enwonwu Sotheby's  
Source: internet*

*Works showing modern art idioms reinvented on Nigerian traditional art styles, plate 5 to 9*



*Plate 5: Aniakor C.C. Archive Interventions  
Source: internet*



*Plate 6: Jimoh Buraimoh Turbare  
Source: Internet*



*Plate 7: Obiora Udechukwu KO  
Source: internet*



*Plate 8: Obiora Udechukwu Nsofor Anthony's Blog  
Source: internet*



*Plate 9: Bruce Onobrakpeya Bride and Maid II  
Source: internet*

### **THE CONSOLIDATION OF WESTERN ART IN MODERN NIGERIA**

As noted earlier, when Christianity and Islamic religions were introduced to Nigerians in a about 1842 of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Europeans, their Nigerian converts were persuaded to jettison indigenous Nigerian art immediately, either because they desired to spread British culture, and maintain strong hold on control and exploitation of Nigeria or other reasons.

Initially those plans of discouraging the Nigerians from practicing their native art however were fruitless because Nigerians insisted on continuing with the creative works that were important to their social life. Much later, those religions and other European activities flourished in Nigeria. Nigerian's artworks began to adduce evidence of indigenous and foreign concepts-a style of art referred in this study to as trado modern expression. Those artists are also of the pre-Nigeria independence era and had better European art training and skill. Among them was Late Chief Aina Onabolu (1882-1963) often referred to as; the father of

contemporary Nigerian Art. The origin and practice of formal art in Nigeria is traced to the formal training of Late Chief Aina Onabolu.

Between 1898 and 1919 of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Chief Aina Onabolu who hailed from Ijebu-ode-Lagos, and was born in 1882, and attended Caxton house school, Lagos, and had worked as a clerical officer in custom department, Lagos, emerged as a freelance artist. His drawings and paintings resembled the western art expressions when he had no formal art training; only perhaps, taking inspiration from available western book illustrations and other educating sources. One of his popular works was the naturalistic painting of Mrs. Spencer savage in (1906). With those works, the colonial masters noticed the mastering of the methods and principles of western art expressions in his skill, and gave him the opportunity to gain art professional training overseas.

The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries brought immense changes to traditional Nigerian life resulting from its exposure to various foreign ideas through the Christian and Islamic missionary activities, (Adejumo, 2007). These cultural changes have led to the decline of much of traditional Nigerian art to the extent that they lead to new creative ideas in the materials, techniques and function, (Adio 2015). Therefore modern African artists have made efforts at all levels of African educational system to revive and sustain new art ideas in creative productions in order to reflect their creative identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This they began by appreciating artistic forms and styles of other cultures in addition to their own in order to broaden their creative horizons. However the search for independent vision instead of imitating the modes of artistic expressions of other cultures became overwhelming. In the light of this, experimental art workshop centres were established to enable the indigenous Nigerian artists to be trained in the western styles of art productions. Chukuegga (1998) identifies the surviving experimental workshop centres as follows; the Oye-Ekiti Experimental Art Workshop Centre, the Lasekan Correspondence Art School, the Abuja and Jos Pottery Experiments, the Mbaise Art School, the Oshogbo Art Centre, the Asele Institute-Nimo, and the Development of Formal Art Schools. Others include; Mbari Schools-Ibadan, and Ori Olokun cultural Centre

Richards (1967:292) cited in Adejumo (2007) advises that the artists in Africa need to unlive European aesthetic influence and work back to their own aesthetic roots, in order to find a spring-board for present day expression. This history provides a good insight into the consolidation of western art in modern Nigeria.

## **THE RECOGNITION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF WESTERN ART IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS**

Between 1920 and 1922 Late Chief Aina Onabolu was trained as a painter and as an art educationist in St John's wood art school, London, and Julien academy Paris, where he obtained a diploma in art. Ogunmor (1993) notes, that Onabolu returned to Nigeria and voluntarily taught art in several secondary schools for many years in Lagos. He also made several portraits for people. Among those portraits was the portrait of Rt. Rev. O. Oluwale in (1925) which showed a benevolent patriarch of the church seated in his dark-blue, red and white vestments with the bible in his right hand. Onabolu believed in the importance of the acquisition of technique through severe academic training and intellectual visual effort. He



therefore fought for the Nigerian government recognition of art, stressing the advantages of art as a part of school curriculum. His request was granted, but there were no indigenous art teachers to start the programme.

He further persuaded the government to recruit expatriate art teachers. This request also was granted, and gave him another opportunity to invite some of his European art school mates who actually were recruited and served as art teachers in Nigerian schools. Among them were Kenneth C. Murray (1903-1972), H.E Duckworth (1915-2008), Dennis Duerden (1939-1999), and J. Desmond Clarke (1951-2002). Onabolu and those foreign art teachers actually worked with the philosophy, principles, and techniques of western art in Nigeria, and gradually introduced the art forms and practices to Nigerians through studio work and teaching many selected Nigerian government schools in Lagos and Omuohia respectively. Notable among their early breed of Nigerian artists are; D.L.K Nnachi (b. 1909), Justus Akeredolu (1915-1984), C.C Ibeto Umana (1915–1996), Akinola Lasekan (1916-1972), J.O Ugoji (1917–1981), Uthman Ibrahim (b. 1917), Albert Odunsi (b. 1918), Benedick Chuka Enwonwu (1921-1994), A.P Umana (b. 1922), Uche Okeke (1933-2016), Udo Emma, Simon O.Okeke (1937 1969), Bruce Onobrakpeya (b.1932), Yusuf Grillo (b.1934), Jimoh B. Akolo (b.1935), and Demas Nwoko (b.1935) among others. Onabolu the great pioneer contemporary Nigerian artist died in 1963.

However, in agreement with the submission of Richards (1967:292) above, the Nigerian Government in September (1988) launched the “National Cultural Policy”. This policy document defined culture as “the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenges in their environment which give order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization, thus distinguishing a people from their neighbour”. As a further step, the Federal Government in June (1999) created the Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism. By mid 2006, the ministry was renamed Federal Ministry of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation with the mandate to promote the nation’s rich culture.

El Anatsui in Oloidi (2004) also advices that the art historians or art schools in Nigeria should re-focus their research interest in order to rectify the situation of studying Nigerian artists as well as meet up with the level of quality and quantity of creative art output. He asserts that no nation can survive socio-culturally without the proper documentation of her various historical experiences. No art tradition can thrive dynamically if it is not art historically preserved, and no professional artist can find himself on focus of history if his entire creative professionalism is not looked at art historically. Nigeria is overwhelmingly rich in art professionals and teeming with modern artistic or creative events. As such modern art traditions need full academic and intellectual attention of not only the art historians but also art scholars as regards proper and serious documentation and study.

Okpara (2004) concurs with the ideas above that “some text books are obsolete while others are not available in Nigeria, therefore, scholars should strive to be writing indigenous textbooks, and project the efforts of some Nigerian scholars”.

Studying Nigerian arts and artists in recent times confront Nigerian intellectuals with considerable overlap in such issues as who they are, what they do, how they do it, and what quality of works is produced.

Castellote (2012) also notes that in 2007, Yemisi Shyllon who is widely believed to be the biggest patron of Nigerian art works established “Omooba Yemisi Adedoyin Shyllon Foundation (OYASF) in order to promote the appreciation, study, and documentation of Nigerian arts and artists. The foundation also supports art departments, galleries, organizations, and societies in their art programme and activities. Many artists have enjoyed and continued to enjoy the patronage and support of the foundation. This development transformed the artists into producing works with indigenous themes, materials, and techniques to promoting good insight into modern art. From the above, one can deduce that African artists with particular reference to Nigeria have made effort to re-image art which perhaps led to the establishment of many art schools in Nigeria.

Premised on the ideas above, Elenwo Morrison - an art historian of the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation of the Nigerian college trained artists of the post Nigerian independence encourages Nigerian scholars particularly the art historians to project the effort of the hardworking Nigerian intellectual artists to the reservoir of world artists via biographical studies. Morrison's effort and perhaps the efforts of other scholars in projecting Tobenna Okwuosa as a renowned Nigerian painter to the world, is an eloquent testimony of such an encouragement, and will enhance the growth of contemporary Nigerian art for sustainable development. This history therefore provides a good insight into the inclusion and continuation of western art scheme in Nigerian school curriculum.

### **Onabolu's Contribution to the Life and Art of the contemporary Nigerian Artists**

1. Chief Aina Onabolu was the pioneer Nigerian academic artist that contributed to Nigerian's acquisition of visual arts skill via formal training.
2. He was the first Nigerian artists that introduced the teaching of art on part time basis to Nigerians in Lagos using the practice of western education.
3. He was the first Nigerian artists that offered voluntary art teaching to Nigerians without remuneration for a number of years.
4. He personally persuaded Nigerian government to include art in Nigeria school curriculum.
5. He also persuaded Nigerian government to employ the pioneer expatriate art teachers in Nigerian schools to ensure the progress of the art programme.
6. With him several Nigerians have acquired technical proficiency in art productions including book writing. I for one.
7. With his effort Nigerian arts have been brought to lime-light in the phase of modernism.
8. Through him Nigerian academic artists have had equal government recognition with graduates of other fields of specialization in terms of being successful via government job opportunities.
9. He was the first Nigerian artists to change from African traditional abstraction to photographic realism in modern Nigerian art scene.

10. He pioneered European academic realism in his style of art.
11. He designed the first Nigerian art curriculum for secondary schools and adopted European artistic conventions and perspective.
12. He recommended, invited and ushered into Nigeria the first set of expatriate artists who taught Art in Nigerian government schools through the mandate and employment of the then government. Among those artists is Kenneth C. Murray (1903-1972), H.E. Duckworth (1915-2008), Dennis Duerden (1939-1999), and J. Desmond Clarke (1951-2002).
13. He trained the first set of Nigerian world-rated artist in varied fields of art. Notable among them are Justus Akeredolu (1915 – 1984), Akinola Lasekan (1916 – 1972), Benedict Chukka Enwonwu (1921- 1994), Bruce Onobrakpeya (b. 1932), Uche Okeka (1933- 2016), Jimoh B. Akolo (b. 1935), Simon Obi Okeka (1937 -1969), Ajayi, Jegede, T.A. Oke, Danladi and Oyedepo.
14. He initiated museum activities in Nigeria, and was the first director of antiquities for Nigeria.
15. Onabolu nurtured an endless generation to the practice of formal art in Nigeria.

#### **ESTABLISHMENT OF EXPERIMENTAL ART WORKSHOP CENTRES AND ART TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA: AN OVERVIEW**

The quest for Nigerian converts by the early European Missionaries lingered to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To enhance the programme therefore, the missionaries decide to establish experimental art workshop centres and art tertiary institutions in Nigeria. To effect their decision, in 1947, the Catholic Church founded by the missionaries established an experimental art workshop centre at Oye-Ekiti-Nigeria in the leadership of two Reverend Fathers Kevin Carol and Sean O. Mahoney. This centre according to Egonwa (2011) was perhaps established to produce instructional materials for the advancement of the missionary activities in Nigeria. In the furtherance, many other experimental art centres were established by individual efforts of the missionary Colonial teachers in various parts of Nigeria. One of such centres was owned by Mrs. Kurian Williams the wife of the first principal of Uzuakoli Methodist college of Nigeria in the mid 1930s. Other centres includes; Mbari Club at Ibadan, Artist Club at Osogbo-Osun State, Art Correspondence School by Akinola Lasekan, and Woodpeckers Grove at Mbaise-Imo State respectively. The artists of the Oye-Ekiti Centre were Carvers that were trained through apprenticeship method of art production, but were allowed by the church to use their traditional styles to make art forms that they used in their Christian worship. Sculpture pieces of bible themes were also made and used for Christian prayer procession round Oye-Ekiti town. The establishment of art experimental workshop centres enhanced the spread of western art in Nigeria. It is important to note here that many of those art experimental centres closed down after a few years of practice, while a few survived and are still training artists in small scale till date. Among the successful ones are the Mbaise Art School, the Oshogbo workshop centre, and the Asele institute, etc. However, research has shown that the cause of the decline of many of those art training centres is lack of business or managerial acumen. It also shows that those centres experimented on new materials and continued to

give formal art training to people. Some of those surviving centres are discussed in this study. From this historical analysis, one deduces that the establishment of art experimental workshop centres in Nigeria was the earliest breakthrough to the recognition and encouragement of African (Nigerian) art and its functionalism in the phase of modernism. However, this development and the introduction of art curriculum in government secondary schools made for the establishment of art tertiary institutions in Nigeria which started with the introduction of sandwich programme at Yaba Technical Institute, Lagos in 1952.

### **The precursors of Nigerian art: an overview**

The precursors of Nigerian art is described in this study as those ancient Nigerian art forms and practices that led to the development and recognition of Nigerian art works in the modern and contemporary art world. Those art works are the Nok Terracotta, Igbo-Ukwu Bronze, Ife Bronze and Terracotta, Owo Terracotta, Benin court art, Tsoede Bronze, Esie and Ekoi soapstone figures among others. These art forms and practices are said to have begun from the inception of human existence in Nigeria. They are used to show the diversity in Nigeria ethnic groups, the levels of technological advancement of the early Nigerians, their ideas of maintaining peace and unity through art, and the relevance of those artefacts to learning. Studying the arts is based on biographical analysis, style analysis, formal analysis, contextual analysis, and iconological analysis. The outcome of the study is the documentation of a credible historic account of those Nigerian arts for posterity. Shown below are the pictures of some of the works in their ethnic groups of origin.



Plate 10



Plate 11



Plate 12

### **NOK TERRACOTTA HEADS**



Plate 13



Plate 14



Plate 15

## IFE TERRACOTTA HEADS



Plate 16  
Benin: Ivory mask used as  
of An Oba  
Symbol of FESTAC, 1977



Plate 17  
Benin: Bronze Plaque



Plate 18  
Benin Bronze Head



Plate 19  
Benin: Bronze Head of a  
Queen Mother Idia



Plate 20  
Benin: Symbolic Vessel,  
Representing a Leopard



Plate 21  
Igbo-Ukwu: Bronze Vessel;  
Roped pot



Plate 22  
Igbo-Ukwu Bronze Pendant



Plate 23  
Igbo-Ukwu: Bronze Snail Shell



Plate 24  
Esie Soapstone Sculpture  
A man with a sword  
(A Dignity)



Plate 25 Tsoede:  
Tada Bronze



Plate 26 Tsoede:  
Jebba Bronze Archer



Plate 27 Owo:  
A wooden ram head



Plate 28 Iko:  
Stone monolith  
(Hi-Res Stock) (Jannus)

### **Recommendations**

1. This paper provides modified and harmonized course contents of ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history for Nigerian art schools.
2. The Nigerian art school curriculum planners should consider this improved course contents of ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history for use in Nigeria art schools.
3. The art schools in Nigeria should adopt this course contents if approved, to enhance productivity in art historical studies.
4. The teachers of the course should strictly teach the students in accordance with the specification of the course contents in order to achieve the expected level of success from the art history students.
5. The teachers and students of other fields of specialization are advised to take advantage of this paper and embark on examining the quality of their courses contents for the training of their students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And
6. The students are also advised to take advantage of this paper and attend classes regularly to enable them to gain adequate knowledge of the history from their teachers for further discuss and writing of any examination on the course.

### **Conclusion**

Addressing the exploring innovative approach to the analysis of ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history in Nigerian art schools, is a strategy of making progress in the learning of the course. The study basically is not to change the existing course contents of the course for Nigerian arts schools, but to reinforce it with a few slight modifications that will improve productivity in the field of art history. The paper concludes that the benefits of modifying a course contents in any tertiary institution is enormous. So also does it prove that many students of ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history in the recent times seems to be scared of the course, which perhaps increased students' poor enrolment into the art history option, of Fine and Applied Arts. The paper also notes that in some professions, staff promotions and titles are not determined essentially on the years of experiences, but on the evaluation of individual contributions to knowledge. This paper contributes to knowledge in the sense that it provides the modified base for studying ancient and contemporary Nigeria art history in Nigerian art schools. It reveals that

studying the history is to boost the cultural heritage and post colonial studies in Nigeria. The history introduces new resource approach in ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history as additional art history technique to the ones that art historians are familiar with, for the continuity of art historical studies in Nigeria. So also does it introduce some Nigerian cultural heritage that would have been lost in the phase of colonization as study prospects in the field of art, archaeology, anthropology, history and other art related disciplines.

The paper therefore submits that the teachers of ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history should adopt this improved idea of inculcating the history in the learners to enhance learning. So also does the supply of the key components for the analysis of ancient and contemporary Nigerian art history in Nigerian arts schools is imperative to this study.

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