Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.4 No.2 June, 2021; p.g. 98 – 105; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

EXPLORING THE PROSPECTS FOR ART HISTORIANS: THE PANACEA TO STUDENTS PROBLEM OF CHOOSING ART HISTORY AS SCHOOL CAREER IN NIGERIA AND OTHER PARTS OF AFRICA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

In Nigeria, observation shows that a good number of Nigerians are ignorant of the benefits of art history to students. Similar situation applies to most art history students that are confused about the appropriate area of public or private sector to seek for employment after graduation, a reason for which Nigerian art schools often experience a few number of students enrolment into the art history option. Axiomatically, understanding the chances one has of being successful by studying art history would have aroused interest in the tertiary and secondary schools students to choose art history as school career. It would have exposed the students to the benefits of art history to them and others. So also it would have shown the position and function of an art historian in the society. This no doubt has created research gap and dearth of literature on the research study. The study focuses on showing the masses that art history is one of the disciplines that provides for a successful life of its graduates. The specific objective of this study is to examine the prospects for art historians in Nigeria. The aim of the study is to establish the prospects for art historians with the view of encouraging the upcoming students to choose art history as a school career. The findings are largely based on secondary data of related qualitative research study. It was ascertained that art history has significant academic prospects for art Historians in Nigeria. Therefore those prospects have been established as the confident, motivator, guide-line and base that will enable the students to choose art history as school career in Nigeria and elsewhere.

Keywords: Exploring Prospects, Art Historians, Panacea, Sustainable Development, Art History, School Career.

Introduction

The success and survival of any discipline of specialization depends on the level of attention that is paid to the upliftment of the discipline. The said attention usually anchors on the motivational factors provided by a discipline to attract students to belong to the subject area. The lack of knowledge of the potentials of art history for its graduates swayed the thought of revealing it to students particularly the fine and applied arts students as the base upon which art history can be chosen as a school career. The challenge of understanding the chances of art history making its graduates successful in life evokes the feelings of wrong choice of course by the art history students. The problem becomes more compounding when students cannot

choose art history as school career. The researcher therefore was inspired by the quest for unveiling the prospects for art historians to students.

Exploring the prospects for art historians is a very significant aspect of studying in art historical research. It consists of the merging of words to convey the meaning of the concept. These words are discussed separately in conceptual clarification, and as a leading concept, it is described as the act of discovering the potentials of art history that subjects art historians to a successful life. Other researchers' views about similar subject matter and their relevance to this study were equally treated. This enabled the researcher to achieve the aim of the study.

Conceptual Clarification

Hornby (2010) describes exploring as searching for something. He describes prospects as the chances of being successful. In this study, exploring prospects means discovering potentialities. In the furtherance, Hornby defines art as the skill of creating objects, and expressing ideas or feelings particularly in paintings, drawing, or sculpture. He views a historian as a person who studies or writes about history. Therefore art historians are those who study and write about the art and cultural events of the people of the world. Panacea as contained in Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language is a remedy for all diseases. It describes art history as the study of the history of art, including painting, sculpture, and architecture.

Career in BBC English Dictionary is a type of job or profession that someone does for a long period of his life and in which he hopes to gain advancement. School career therefore is a student's subject area of specialization.

Sustainable refers to something that can be continued at the same level of activity or pace without harming its efficiency and the people affected by it. While development is said to mean the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advances or stronger. (Hornby). Sustainable development therefore refers to the careful use of something that can support life for a long period of time irrespective of its future influence on the masses.

Nwombu, (2019) citing Brundtland Commission Report (2008) describes sustainable development as "the development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Furthermore, sustainable development refers to "the judicious and planned use of available natural resources to equitable development to meet the needs of the present generation without jeopardizing that of the future generation," (Nwombu, 2019). It is also viewed as the practice of protecting the environment while improving living standards for all; a holistic approach to improving the quality of life which postulates that there are intrinsic links among economic, social and environmental well-being. Changes in one area will impact upon the other two domains. For instance, from a social perspective in particular, human well-being cannot be sustained without a healthy environment and is equally unlikely in the absence of a vibrant economy. Sustainable development is a pattern of resources use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also generations to come. (Anyakoha, 2012)

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this paper is premised on the assumption that art and cultural historic accounts are not made in a vacuum but are the analysis of creative expressions of naturalistic and representational forms loaded with narrative content, symbol, emotion and politics. Exploring the prospects for art historians in Nigeria anchors on the theory of psychoanalysis which deals with history, significant imagery, and creative process. The theory enables a researcher to make psychological enquiry about art events from their stages of formation to utilization, and possibly reveals the professionalism in the work. It also enables an art historian to document his research findings as a historic record for further academic work. All information about creative expressions usually comes from oral history, memoranda and other materials. The aim is to produce rich descriptions of persons or conceptualize structural types of action which means to understand the action logics or how persons and structures are interlinked.

Samuel and Samuels (1976 citing Greenacre 1957) concur with the ideas above that the future artists should learn to disassociate with real object and fall in love with the worlds as a whole. Art historians use biographical narrative approach which takes the idea of story to examine creative works, and provide information on the benefits of the art to mankind. This theory is used in this study because it enabled the researcher to explore the prospects for art historians in Nigeria. The theory of development and modernization that proposes that undeveloped countries can be developed if the social variables of development such as economic, social-cultural and political forces are adopted as modern practices (Max Webber, 1864-1920) has been employed in the study as it suggests that art historians can be successful in life if they are linked to the opportunities.

These theories therefore enabled the researcher to explore the prospects for art historians in Nigeria, and established that lack of knowledge of the prospects for art historians is the students' major challenge of choosing art history as a school career. As such, the researcher proffered solution to this problem of art history.

Meaning of Art History

Hornby (2010) defined art history as the study of the history of paintings, sculpture etc. Art History is also described as the historical study of the visual arts, being concerned with identifying, classifying, describing, evaluating, interpreting, and understanding the art products and historic development of art fields of painting, sculpture, architecture, the decorative arts, drawing, printmaking, photography, interior design, etc. (Britannica). It is also viewed as the study of objects of art considered within their time period. So also, it is described as the study of a piece of art by looking at the artist's use of lines, shape, texture, approach, and even composition. (IESA Arts and Culture)

In affirmation, Wikipedia defines Art History as the study of aesthetic objects and visual expression in historical and stylistic context. Traditionally, the discipline of art history emphasized painting, drawing, sculpture, architecture, ceramics and decorative arts, yet today, art history examines broader aspects of visual culture, including the various visual and conceptual outcomes related to an ever-evolving definition of art. Art history encompasses the study of objects created by different cultures around the world and throughout history that convey meaning, importance or serve usefulness primarily through visual means.

Okpara (2004), notes that Art History is a discipline that highlights the past and present role of the artists. Omuaru (2002) views art history as the subject that deals with recording of art events- their examination, classification, and interpretations. He further defines it as the subject that has to do with the writing and recording of art events- as it affects people, culture, country, geographical locations, stylistic changes and differences. The researcher explores the ideas above and defines art history as an area of knowledge of art that solves the problem of studying the past and present art activities of mankind in their individual and or corporate identities in the various communities in the world. The study involves the use of simple illustrations, photographs, prints, films, texts, artifacts, maps, charts, symbols, and signs (iconography) for explicit explanations.

Shown below are some photographs of activities that constitute art historical studies.



Plate 1: (Ben) "Ogbugbu Ishiehni"
Elele Alimini Manhood Ritual (Sept.1991) B. 1990
Source: Elenwo M. (2021)



Plate 2: (Fecund) "Ogbugbu Ishiehni"
Elele Alimini Manhood Ritual (11th Sept.2017) B. 2010
Source: Elenwo M. (2021)



Plate 3: (Sagacious) "Ogbugbu Ishiehni"
Elele Alimini Manhood Ritual (11th Sept.2017) B. 2012
Source: Elenwo M. (2021)



Plate 4: Elele Alimini traditional ritual art " Ishiehni" and the producer
Source: Elenwo, M. (2006)

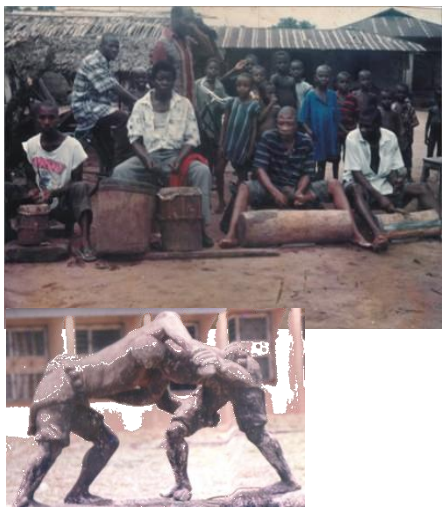


Plate 5: Uteh (Playing Traditional wrestling)
Source: Elenwo, M. (2006)

Okpnukpah- Ishi-Ngwugwuor
A style of traditional hair does in Elele Alimini. It stages of production.



Stage 1
Plate 6: Kelechi processing the "Ishi Ngwugwuor" hair-do materials.
Source: Elenwo, M. (2006)



Stage 2
Plate 7: Oneene forming the base of the "Ishi Ngwugwuor" hair-do on Eucheria
Source: Elenwo, M. (2006)



Stage 3
Plate 8: Oneene knitting the hair solidify the base of the "Ishi Ngwugwuor" hair-do on eucheria
Source: Elenwo, M. (2006)



Stage 4
Plate 9: Oneene raising the hair from the base to about 8inches high "Ngwugwuor"
Source: Elenwo, M. (2006)



Plate 10: Mgbuanyim to Omuokpirikwu Road (1993). 24 x 24 inches, oil on Board.
Source: Elenwo, M. (1993)



Plate 11: Portrait of a Royal Father
Oil on Board, 62 x 30 inches
Source: Elenwo, M. (2008)



Plate 12: Portrait of a Royal Father
Oil on Board, 24 x 30 inches
Source: Elenwo, M. (2002)

Reasons for Studying Art History

Studying the art of the past teaches us how people have seen themselves and their world, and how they want to show this to others, art history provides a means by which we can understand our human past and its relationship to our present, because the act of making art is one of humanity's most ubiquitous activities (Bristol). Art history teaches students to analyze the visual, sensual evidence to be found in diverse works of art, architecture, and design in combination with textual evidence. By honing skills of close looking, description, and the judicious use of historical sources, art history offers tools and vocabulary for interpreting the wealth of visual culture that surrounds us, as well as building a historically grounded understanding of artistic production in varied social and cultural contexts (Uchicago). Art history shows the happenings in the world of art. As an academic field of study, it proposes modalities on how the study of history of art will be made successful. It is studied for the total development of the artist.

The study inter-relates with archaeology, anthropology, history, architecture, philosophy, geography, and social studies, among other disciplines. The study incorporates imaginative thinking, creative deduction, time management, and planning. It involves developing documentations of art events in their use of materials and substances in chronological history as to confront contemporary issues in art.

The Benefits of Art History to Its Students and Others

Art history exposes its students to other humanities subjects, relating them to draw conclusions and critical evaluation of different artworks. The learning process also exposes the students to crucial times in history and knows exactly how the experience of that timeline was like. It enables the students to understand that the history behind artworks as at separate times helps to learn of different tribes and culture. (IESA Arts and Culture)

Since the discipline incorporates fields like social history, aesthetics, economics, politics, and anthropology, it enables its students to learn about the transition of time in social, political and economic stages. It also enables its students to gather knowledge and inspiration that will improve their skill of speaking and viewing the world around us as a people. With the discipline, the students gain very rich insights into various world cultures, tradition and transition in the socio-economic role. Art history allows its students to bring together the meanings and interpretation of encrypted messages in old art works.

It exposes its students to the art activities of the past, and linked them to their immediate surroundings. The course makes for visual and textual interpretations of artworks. It educates its students on how to interpret the works in galleries or edifice in museums. So also does it serve as a source of historic records and inspiration to its students. The discipline provides the students with the resources and opportunities of academic research in the event of art. It enables them to distribute accurate information in art activities, and to develop the skill of aesthetic appreciation. The subject enables the students to improve on their skill of creating, and understand the cultural heritage of their people.

On the other hand, non-art historian benefit from the subject as its study incorporates people's cultural activities, and the hardworking artists whom irrespective of period of existence and education would have contributed to the growth and development of modern art. The study also inculcates art entrepreneurship to the art graduates, and to the graduates of other fields of study in terms of having alternative skills to earn a living. So also does it enable researchers to introduce new resource materials for further production of artworks for the masses.

Art Historians and their Role

Art historians are fine and applied arts graduates who specialized in studying, talking, and writing about the events of art of the past and present people in the world. In Nigeria educational setting, Art historian is an academic title for scholars that hold MA particularly PhD in art history. The art historians are research oriented. They make visual arguments. By virtue of the training of their eyes and brain they make prudent judgments about the qualities of art works. They study different types of styles of art and artists throughout history. They trace the history or story, and significance of artworks for further academic work. They catalogue, restore or fix damaged works, and preserve them in museums. Art historians advise students and other readers of their information on the business of buying and selling

of art works as investments. They assist art curators to organize exhibitions. They learn about the civilization of the part to be able to identify the visual elements of artworks and interpret their meanings in accordance with what the works represented at the time of their production. Art historians are focused on establishing authorial origins of artworks by discovering the makers of the works found within their research area, and when, and for what purpose the works were made.

It is their function to be familiar with so many artworks and appreciate them for what they are. It is also their responsibility to be familiar with artists' visual language of different ages or periods to enable them classify the works of any set of artists in correct chronological order for future use. They also play the role of discovering the extant and extinct art practices of people for proper documentation and preservation.

Prospects for Art Historians in Nigeria

Research has shown that Art historians have variety of job opportunities in both the government and private sectors. Their services are on daily demand and their position in art business cannot be overemphasized. They may become art counsels, consultants, political leaders, ambassadors, lecturers, tutors, and so on. They may also find useful or rewarding careers in ministry such as arts and culture, museum, Nigeria antiquities services, television authority, newspaper co-operation, and advertising agencies. Other available areas for job opportunities include; ceramic industries, textile industries, publishing companies, and many other private sectors. Art historians may also become art entrepreneurs by trading on art works at national and international levels.

On museums or galleries employment, art historians are often hired to procure artworks and arrange exhibits. They are made museum officers whose duties will include overseeing partly or the whole activities in the museum. They may also be placed as curator, registrars, technicians, preservationists, art restorers, archivists, antique dealers, and appraise officers (i.e, valuers of artworks for auction sales) among other personnels. Art historians like every other graduate may secure job or employment in establishments not mentioned above.

Recommendations

Based on the research, the researcher recommends that;

1. Art history students should take advantage of this paper and begin to sensitize other art students to the benefits of art history to students. This strategy will motivate the students to take-up art history as school career.
2. They should also take advantage of this paper and extend the sensitization to secondary school students through seminars, symposiums, and other public enlightenment techniques. Those programmes will expose and spur some students to specialize in art history during their university education.
3. Government should use this paper on regular basis to address the issue of choice of career and employment on social media. This will also create awareness of the importance of art history to students.
4. Government should employ the art historians in their appropriate public sectors. Other employers of labour that need the service of art historians should also employ them. This effort, if made, will stimulate students' interest to the choice of art history as career.

5. Government scholarship awarding scheme should adequately involve art historians. This plan will also motivate students to make art history their discipline of specialization.

Conclusion

This paper has examined and discussed students' problem of choosing art history as school career. It establishes that no research has been made in this aspect of study. The paper ascertains that many Nigerian students lack interest in choosing art history as school career. It is clear from this study that revealing the prospects for art historians to the art history students, and others particularly the students of secondary school will motivate student's interest in choosing art history as school career. So also would public enlightenment on the usefulness of art history to students, and employing the art historians in both government, and private organizations will stimulate interest in the study. It is therefore anticipated that students' will take advantage of this paper and begin to choose art history as school career.

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