

Full Length Research

Visual Arts as Restorative Therapy Using Waste Materials for Sustainable Development

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Accepted 6th January, 2020

Visual arts is an important phenomenon in the history and development of mankind. Apart from aestheticism, visual arts perform social, religious, economic, entrepreneurial and therapeutic functions among others. It is the view of the study that waste items or substances may be converted to usefulness through creative explorations and didactic functionalism, thereby, paving way for sustainable development. Different studies may have been carried out in different areas of Visual Arts like painting, graphics, textile designs, sculpture, architecture and others, however, there is no comprehensive study in this direction hence the study. To achieve the objectives of the study, participant observation method, fieldtrips, including primary and secondary sources of data collation as well as informal and unstructured interviews are used. The objectives are further achieved against the backdrop of frameworks of some visual arts theories like art formalism, structural functionalism and iconography. The study further underscores the relevance of waste materials or substances for sustainable development. These are followed by conclusion and possible recommendations.

Keywords: Visual Arts, Restorative Therapy, Waste Materials, Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

Waste or waste items are such a huge phenomena that may disorganize or disrupt a healthy environment. Most times, it constitutes massive menace to the entire society, to the extent that the dangers it constitutes to the environment are so alarming that government, non-governmental organizations, corporate bodies, and institutions are craving for a lasting solution to these environmental menace called waste items or waste substances. Based on health hazards and social implications of these waste items littered at every nook and cranny of the communities, government and private individuals have devised a huge means of waste disposal to protect the environment and the contents therein. Examples include Abia State Environmental Protection Agency (ASEPA) and nationwide monthly environmental sanitation exercise in Nigeria. However, while these measures are taken to sanitize the

environment by significantly, disposing the waste, the study shares the view that these waste items/substances may be converted to usefulness in several ways. Examples, the waste may be reclaimed and converted to manure for Agriculture and Agro-Allied needs, they could be converted for aesthetics and utilitarian values through artistic creation.

Many studies may have been carried out in visual arts, particularly; painting, graphics, textile designs and few others without significant and comprehensive study in this direction, hence the study. However, to achieve the objectives of the study primary and secondary sources of data collation which include the use of interviews, observations, sketches and photographs while the secondary data is drawn from library research, journals, exhibition catalogues, conference and seminar papers. This makes the

method diachronic and thus helps in achieving balance in the analysis.

Visual Arts as Restorative Metaphor

Sculpture is an aspect of visual arts, which emphasizes three dimensionality. It could be in relief or in the round. Sculpture works could be created in different media, ranging from stone, clay, metal, fibre, cement, bronze, waste materials (like junk), and found objects.



Figure 1: Chukwunonye, Overcomer
“Culture” 2019, Pen and Ink, ABSU 60X45cm
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They are predominantly creative works, with aesthetic and entrepreneurial implications. Creating art works with waste materials also goes a long way in relieving the society of the menace posed by lack of proper waste management that is rampant in most states in Nigeria and other parts of the world generally. Aniakor (2012) states that visual arts should serve as a counter strategy for redefining new global sites that could anchor individual and national identities and place the society within the global space. Figures 1 – 2 are good examples.

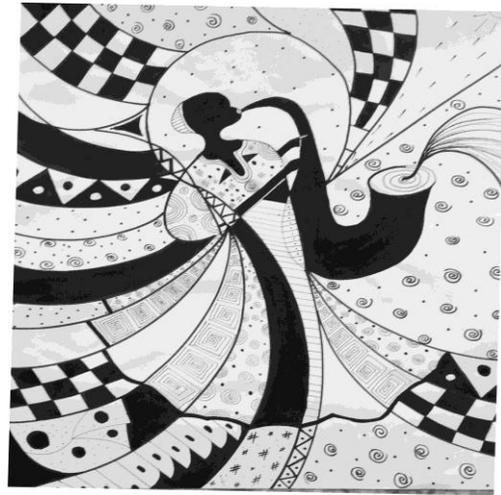


Figure 2:: Obioma Precious
“Rhythm” 2019, Pen and Ink, ABSU
60X45cm © Osita, Williams A. 2019

The Influence of Visual Arts on the Society

Sculpture as a form of visual arts involves working on hard or plastic materials into three-dimensional art objects. The designs may be embodied in freestanding objects, in relief on surfaces, or in environments ranging from tableaux to contexts that envelop the spectator. An enormous variety of media may be used, including clay, wax, stone, metal, fabric, glass, wood, plaster, rubber, and random “found” objects. Leonard, (2019).

Visual Arts influences society by changing opinions, instilling values and translating experiences across space and time and sculpture as part of it are often considered to be repository of a society’s collective memory. Researchers have long been interested in the relationship between art and the human brain. For example, in 2003, researchers from Newcastle University found that viewing contemporary visual arts has positive effects on the personal lives of nursing home-bound elders and as such should be

recognized and properly placed in the society as a means of restoration. Reference (2019)

Aniakor (2012) in “Africa and the Politics of Postcoloniality”, supports visual arts as a viable means of restorative therapy. Ayakoroma and Ojewuyi, (2011), Ekpo (2008), Azeez (2001) all situate visual arts as a restorative therapy that may heal psychological and emotional discomfort. Eco-artists are, nowadays, transforming old, recycled and reused object into amazing pieces of contemporary art. The trend started gaining prominence in 1980s when museums and galleries in the Western world opened their doors for such innovation and creativity. Fatima (2019). Also, in recent years, many artists in the Middle East have started expressing their support for recycling and sustainability through artworks where they merge traditional tone with contemporary themes, creating attractive installation arts that express local cultural heritage in the larger public interests. Artists are expressing their emotions and ideas through a wide

range of recyclables glass, cans, plastics, CDs, PET bottles, junk and others.

According to Eric (2019), if one considers the artistic history of man as a whole, one may realize, it is only very recently that profound changes have taken place. From the days of the caveman to the 17th – 18th centuries, Art was closely linked either to beliefs and religions, or to political authorities. He went on to assert that ‘the artist, his imagination and his talent, were their servants. The artist enjoyed a certain creative freedom but within limits, restricted at different times by dictated themes and by aesthetics of the day. The study shares the view of Eric (2019), that the French Revolution and the advent of the industrial age changed the firmest foundations of Art. During that period, there was shift from an art based on a socio-religious creator to an art of a mere individual inspiration. This revolution led to different art movements that led to the “modern” art of today. The so called “modern” art was both a break and continuation in the sense that it was an answer to well-defined creative problems. The use of debris or waste in Art today is not by chance, but rather a long evolution of artistic and social history. But this evolution only explains the possible appearance of waste in Art, and not, the reason for its use in the 20th century.

Gillian (2011) addresses current problem with obsolescence and suggests that waste is “an adjunct of luxury. Junk, trash, garbage, rubbish, refuse – whatever you call it – is dependent on economic wealth and excess production. Industrialized hi-tech, urban cultures produce and thrive on the market for new and disposable goods,” and that the society is currently facing how to deal with the overwhelming immensity of space taken up by domestic and industrial production of rubbish. The reason space for landfills and dumping grounds continues to expand with waste has to do with human perception of what makes garbage. From a consumerist view of shelf life once and inanimate object no longer fills its original purpose for the perceived needs – or if something more efficient, prettier, newer, shinier comes along – the object is named trash in comparison to its previous useful life.

Furthermore, Mears (2018) noted that ‘our everyday experience with the specific functions of manufactured objects creates a lens through which we conceive and react to salvaged objects. A disconnect occurs during contextual shifts when the object seen ruptures preconceived assumptions of that object’s utility’. When an object becomes art, the usefulness of the final form not only has a monetary value as a cultural item, but also an aesthetic value as a transformative item. In other words, a creation of recycled art maintains value as a tool for participating in critical engagement and having an aesthetic experience.

Aristotle is of the view, according to Adams (1996) that visual arts could improve on environment or nature by various means such as idealization and stylization. In the contemporary world, waste materials could be converted to usefulness or resourcefulness, thereby, improving on nature or environment. In the view of Adams (1996) Aristotle believes that truth and beauty are contained in the forms, and structures of visual arts.

On the other hand, Plato holds a contrary view and believes that visual arts is a total deviation from the truth. Osita (2017) states that this total deviation, gives impetus and direction to the rise, growth and development of major art movements in the contemporary times known as Abstraction, Constructivism, Cubism, Dadaism, Conceptualism, Assemblage, Expressionism and others which are significant lubricants that have motivated and inspired this research “Visual arts as Restorative Therapy Using Waste Materials”. However, these art movement in recent times have added to knowledge, creativity, advanced development, promoted diverse cultures and in the end have paved way for a suitable playground for the development of the environment aesthetically, culturally, intellectually, as well as creatively inspiring the individuals and communities at large.

However, these art movements ushered and embraced modernism which in the opinion of Ene-orji (2006) represent a constellation of movement, indicating the direction or paradigm shifts that have occurred in the visual arts from the mid-nineteenth century. This change in visual arts movement is characterized by a shift from naturalism of Aina Onabolu to the present phenomenon of abstraction and assemblage which the study seeks to achieve. All these new visual arts movements have expanded the horizon of knowledge and creativity and have added relevance and direction to the growth and development of contemporary art cultures in the state, indeed Nigeria and beyond.

Visual art creates a colossal environment for art therapy, which is a form of psychotherapy that needs art media as its primary mode of communication. For example, for migration victims, sculpture gardens can help such victim’s emotional behavior or mental health by reflecting or interacting with the images in these art works or the images in the sculpture gardens.



Figure 3: Uzochukwu Alagbara, “Athleticism”, 2018, ABSU, Metal, (180X195) cm
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Figure 4: Daniel Johnson, “Eagle and child”, 2017, ABSU, Metal/Found objects, (180X195) cm
© Osita, Williams A. 2019

Osita (2014) shares the view that merely viewing or seeing the art works in the gardens help bring awareness to oneself, thereby, reducing stress and other traumatic experiences. However, it must be noted that visual arts, particularly, sculpture gardens help in reactivating and calming down emotions and other physical, mental and psychological disorders in humans.

Also, it must be noted that visual art galleries or sculpture gardens serve as therapeutic centres for people with learning disabilities, behavioral or social

problems in the communities. Silently or subconsciously, these works, according to Osita, (2015) check, reduce, control or remove on the long run, such emotional or mental disorders that naturally oppress the mind. Also, there is a feeling that emanates from the works in the various studios, galleries or sculpture gardens, particularly, when such works are viewed objectively. Such feelings become very intrinsic and such intrinsic perceptual appeal results to emotional healing, psychological healing and remedies to other human disorders.



Figure 5: “An Elephant”
Courtesy: Egware-Pamela, (2019)
UNIPORT, Nigeria

CONCLUSION

Art therapy is one of the functions performed by art to humanity. It is a form of psychotherapy that needs art media as its primary mode of communication. Sculpture can help one's emotional behavior or mental health by reflecting or interacting with the art piece(s). Merely seeing art works helps bring awareness to oneself, thereby, reducing stress and other traumatic experiences hampering human existence. To a considerable extent, sculptures, indeed arts, help in reactivating and calming emotions, physical and mental disorder as well as learning disabilities in the communities.

Visual arts also provide enabling atmosphere and challenging environment for the youth, providing them with appropriate skills for effective entrepreneurship and service providing acumen that may improve the society, economically, socially, and technologically. Visual arts have economic advantage especially to the host communities, as they attract tourists and create aesthetic arenas as well as promote indigenous cultures. They provide effective pedestal for visual harmony, communication as well as recreation. The depressed can easily get some relief by beholding sculpture piece(s) that appeal to them thereby bringing back life again. Visual arts also help in redirecting and repositioning negative emotions, intent, as well as behavior, particularly, when such works arouse or attract extrinsic and intrinsic perceptual appeal.

Above all, visual arts, especially sculptures promote creativity and drive individuals, particularly youths into creative exploration and self-dependency, which may significantly galvanize and inspire innovative technology in the society.

This study explores the possibilities and restorative potentials of visual arts, especially the ones executed with waste materials; as well as, the influence it exerts on the perception and the day-to-day activities of individuals that come in contact with them.

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