

Youth and unemployment: An insight into the entrepreneur sculpture practices of the Nsukka Art School

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Abstract

Background: Scholars have observed that Nigeria as a Third World nation is bedevilled with economic challenges. As a result, many youths have been lunched into poverty and unemployment. Some have lost interest in engaging in apprenticeship which is capable of institutionalizing entrepreneurship. While some in a bid to generate fast income are engaged in illicit means of livelihood. This is worsened as Nigeria's educational institution graduates' youths who join the labour market annually; with a slim chance of been employed. This situation is attributed to ill-equipped Nigerian students in innovative and entrepreneurial endeavours, owing to the underdeveloped theory in entrepreneurship and arts academic field.

Objectives: Are to show how art is used as an entrepreneurial tool in contemporary Nigerian society, deriving insight from the context of artistic practice in pre-colonial African societies. To examine the confluence between the production and marketing of artworks.

Methodology: After a critical and qualitative analysis of data gathered from field situations, participant observation, structured interviews, and published literary materials on the subject matter; the researcher focus on the utilitarian sculptures of the Nsukka Art School, formally trained wood sculptors from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Southeast Nigeria. To describe the history, materials, and styles associated with their studio production of household furniture which includes, side stools, mirror stands, reclining chairs, wine bars, dining table/chairs, coffee tables, and television stands using processed and unprocessed timber.

Results: Results reconciled art and entrepreneurship.

Unique contribution: The researcher argues that the adoption of the Nsukka School studio practice shows how a return to pre-colonial African art practices and processes (apprenticeship system) can be reconfigured into a veritable entrepreneurial channel for our unemployed youth today.

Definite conclusion: The entrepreneurial training which art offers, has the propensity to alleviate the plight of unemployment lavishing our youths today.

key recommendation: While the study calls for further explorations to be initiated in different directions to extend what has been done so far, the government should initiate and implement entrepreneurial education starting from junior secondary school up to the tertiary institutions.

Keywords: African arts; Entrepreneurship; Utility sculpture; Nsukka art school; unemployed youths.

Introduction

Nigeria as a Third World nation is bedevilled with economic challenges (Kinnan et al., 2011). Many youths have been lunched into abject poverty and gross unemployment (Ngwu & Akabuike, 2019). Some have lost interest in engaging in apprenticeship enterprise which is capable of institutionalizing entrepreneurship. Whereas, some in a bid to generate fast income are engaged in illicit means of livelihood (Ellis, 2017). This is worsened as over one hundred Nigeria's educational institution graduate youths who join the labour market annually; with slim chance of been gainfully employed (Okoli, 2004). This situation could be attributed to ill-equipped Nigerian students in innovative and entrepreneurial endeavour showing that the academic field of arts entrepreneurship and its theory are still emerging and underdeveloped in Africa (White, 2019). On the other hand, the sculpture section of the Nsukka Art School has grown into a vibrant innovative, and entrepreneur field at the University of Nigeria. A great range of artists have emerged from this art domain and have etched a significant mark in the annals of the countries' and continental contemporary art records. Works ranging from aesthetic wall panel embellishments to utilitarian wood sculptures have emerged from their works which serve as a focus of this paper. The production of these works has become their major strategy for supporting themselves while carrying out their main-line creative productions. Notable among these artists include but not limited to: El Anatsui, Uche Okeke, Chijoke Onurah, Okey Ikenegbu, Gerald Chukwuma, Gbubemi Amas Amanoritsewor, Ndidi Dike, Odo Sunday, Ekene Anikpe, Sabastine Ugwoke, Eva Obodo, Kenechukwu Ngwu, Nnenna Okorie, Chibuiké Onyirioha, Amarachi Okafor, Izundu Nwankwo, Iyke Okenyi, Chikelue Akabuike, and Uche Onyishi among others.

They engage in this practice despite the absence of textual sources that stimulate the perspective of art as an entrepreneurial endeavour in African discourses, and theories guiding entrepreneurship research, education, and practices which have been lacking in literature (Baumol 1993; Bull & Willard 1993; Bygrave & Hofer 1991; Chandler & Lyon 2001; Cooper 1993). However, scholars like Shane and Venkataraman (2000), think that entrepreneurship theory is only underdeveloped. Whereas, Chang and Wyszomirski (2015), thinks that the lack of definitional consensus in art entrepreneurship education may have affected the educators' impact and the effect in the decline of youth's interest in engaging with the pre-colonial African art practice (apprenticeship system of learning) which has the capability of promoting entrepreneurship (Kasfir, 1992); (Perrill, 2019). The lack of qualitative documentation of entrepreneur approaches among the academically trained artist and their perspectives in the creative industries may also have affected the awareness required for youth empowerment in the history of Africa. These gaps may have constituted the gross unemployment the youths are facing today in Africa which has necessitated the prevalent acts of internet fraud among the youths (Ellis, 2017).

However, the artists of the Nsukka School have found a way to face these challenges through the creative essence availed to them in art entrepreneurship. Arts entrepreneurship though a developing and growing discipline (Shoshanah, et al., 2018), in the early 2000s attracted the attention of arts administrators, cultural managers, and gatekeepers in the entrepreneurship fields, (Caves, 2000; Rentschler, 2003; Mulcahy, 2003). McNicholas, (2004) referred to it as "cultural entrepreneurship." While definitional consensus tarries, Beckman (2014) advises on the importance to define 'arts entrepreneurship' since it is crucial for the fields'

development and will help to determine what is and what is not art entrepreneurship. As an emerging field, scholars have called for a firmly defined and widely acceptable concept, however, as the discipline grows it is hoped that a consensus will eventually emerge.

While some recognized the term 'arts entrepreneur' as business-related in the same context and principles that governs success in a standard entrepreneurship lexicon (Beckman, 2007; Wyszomirski & Goldberg-Miller, 2015), others theorize that it is a new kind of discipline with its magnitudes spanning beyond that of the business management, with a possibility of a more socially relevant and public value standard (Essig, 2015). This lack of consensus has resulted, in 'arts entrepreneurship' scholars borrowing theories from other literature outside the art field to provide rationales for their conceptual frameworks, models, hypotheses, and research conclusions (Preece 2013; Essig 2015; White 2017). Perhaps this is why the various fields that incorporate arts entrepreneurship, including arts administration and policy, non-profit management, and the business world define the term differently according to the framework of their disciplines. However, one significant factor in the arts entrepreneurship context is the consensus that arts add value. This is a concept that includes both monetary benefit and the broader totality of benefits that cultural and intellectual production brings to the table as value (Frey, 2005). To avoid the embarrassments and inconsistencies in definitional and theoretical consensus and limit the extent of untested assumptions that arise as a result of individual subjectivity, discipline-based bias in the theory of 'what arts entrepreneurship 'is' (White, 2019. p.47), suggests the need to anchor such theories on tested and observable situations.

Beckman and Essig (2012) initial understanding of arts entrepreneurship, posit that it could be defined as 'individual artist self-management and self-actualization.' Chang and Wyszomirski (2015), amplified Beckman and Essig's (2012) definition by postulating on the commonly used connotations of arts entrepreneurship which are hinged on three factors, developing 'new ventures'; 'locating new financial capital'; and 'developing new markets. They conclude that 'arts entrepreneurship' is a means through which cultural workers create art as well as economic and social value' to support their creativity, manage their autonomy, and develop the ability for flexibility (Chang & Wyszomirski, 2015). This definition captures to an extent the reality of the nexus between the Nsukka Art School and their underlying ideology of entrepreneurial art which Essig (2015), augmented by highlighting 'arts entrepreneurship' as a creative process instead of a management process, as suggested by Chang and Wyszomirski (2015). He further points out that the managerial process only mediates the conversion from means to an end; and suggests further, that arts entrepreneur is using ingenuity for accomplishment notwithstanding scarce resources.

Art Entrepreneurship Defined within its Theoretical Framework

Irrespective of bias that might ensue in the attempt to define entrepreneurs, attempts have been made by scholars to define who an entrepreneur is. For example, an entrepreneur is someone who saw a market gap and creates a linkage by creatively providing a means to assuage the situation while making money in the field or beyond (Schumpeter 1934; Gartner 1985; Kuratko 2014). Worthy of note in the above definition is the economic centeredness of entrepreneurship which even though has helped to advance study in the entrepreneurship arena, has delimited the scope and power inherent in entrepreneurship only to the economic value the practitioners enjoy as individuals.

This paper proposes the theory of 'Art Entrepreneurship as a Social Construct', for a deeper insight into art as a tool which has both social and collective activity that is

enabled and constrained by social structures as theorized by (White, 2019.p.49),he explains that it has a “pattern of social relationships which regulates social interactions and guides socio-cultural norms in a society”. Sarason, Dean, & Dillard (2006.p.287) buttressed this idea with their ‘structuration’ theory which recognized entrepreneurs as “reflexive agents engaging in purposeful action carried out in the context of social systems”.This was pushed further by Essig (2015) as he describes arts entrepreneurship as a creative process that converts the means, such as social and financial capital and applicable knowledge, to an end, which include not only profit and products, but lasting impact on society through mediating structures. While Sarason et al, (2006), thinks that if scholars must have a clearer insight on how entrepreneurs construe and impact society, then the structuration opinion of entrepreneurship is needed the core of Essig’s (2015), analysis is that the outputs of arts entrepreneurship move beyond the aspect of commerce, to provide enhanced value creation while contributing to the growth of cultural capital through fostering sustainable products and services with an inherently aesthetic quality (Shoshanah, et al, 2018). Further insight was thrown in by Hausman and Heinze (2016) whose findings show that the definition ranges from the managerial aspect which focuses on the firm, to the central figure of the individual creative producer, as well as identifying the outputs of arts entrepreneurship that results in empirical prospects or the production of creating wealth as achievements. Woronkowicz and Noonan, (2017), can be viewed as part of the study of traditional entrepreneurship that highlights the concept within the self-employment field often located in urban areas, with inherent resources from where individual artists enjoy an atmosphere that fosters innovation and experimentation, collaboration, and robust market opportunities, of which these factors also contribute to the development of the arts entrepreneur. The symbols of the creative sector and intellectual practices are centred on experimentation, innovation, and a love of unique solutions, instead of remaining within the accustomed and conventional way of doing things both in artistic practices and industry (Ahuja & Lampert, 2001). This differentiation as suggested by Oakley, (2009), must be taken into consideration if we want to understand the place of the creative sector in the entrepreneurial context.

The paper partially draws from these theories to show how the Nsukka Art School sculpture section has influenced not just the students but has the potential to affect and impact on the society at large for possible economic viability among the youths. It furthermore attempts to answer the call for a re-assessment on the context on which entrepreneurship occurs as made by (Welter 2011). At the sub-conscious is the Gartner (1995.p.70) observation that people “...have a tendency to underestimate the influence of external factors and overestimate the influence of internal or personal factors when making judgments about other individuals”. Society has constantly neglected the potentials inherent in art both as an entrepreneurial and social construct. Hence, the need to utilize the impact of both internal and external influences of arts entrepreneurs’ behaviour, to provide not just context as poised by Howard Becker’s art world(s) metaphor (2008) in support of Pierre Bourdieu’s metaphor of art field(s) (1996), but to stress even deeper into the content of art both as entrepreneurial and social construct beyond the art world as widely accepted by these theories. For instance, Bourdieu’s metaphor of art field(s), theorises on how entrepreneurship activity and art are created within a specific “social” (world) instead of in a specific “spatial” (field) context. This implies that art and entrepreneurship can only function effectively within a people of like mind, the same training, and in a given climate. This is somewhat buttressed by Becker’s World(s) metaphor which states that the

metaphor of (field), contains specific people and therefore, different from the metaphor of world, which contains all sorts of people, “who are in the middle of doing something that requires them to pay attention to each other, to take account consciously of the existence of others and to shape what they do in light of what others do” (Becker, 2008. p.375); this is a reflection of Gartner’s (1995) observation of predisposition to underrate the impact of others while overrating ourselves when evaluating others. However, even though, the crux of Becker’s art world offers an art setting and also rightly admits the creation of art, the creation is ‘a psychological product’ and not in the context of a three-dimensional creative product fashioned by a visual artist (White, 2019). White, sheds more insight on Becker’s art(world) pointing out that artworks are not created by individual artists, rather a joint product fashioned by a group of people within a specific art world “who follow conventions (i.e. patterns, rules of order, standard ways of doing things)” (Becker 2008. p.35). Thus, while innovation in art entrepreneurship may have been recognized through the theories emanating from the context of art worlds, including patterns, conventions, the creation of wholly new art worlds or and the revolutionary changes in art worlds, it fails to expand other tendencies of entrepreneurship as a social construct, which is the gap this paper intends to bridge. While White, (2019) builds on Becker’s (2008) ground-breaking text to support case study observations, which is a theory that helps to explain how arts entrepreneurs facilitate revolutionary changes in art worlds, the theory of art as entrepreneur social construct, builds on both to expand the possibility of art extending beyond the art world to influence the society at large.

Nsukka Art School Adaptation of Pre-Colonial Art Practice

To assuage the educator’s problems of explaining what arts entrepreneurship is to students, the Nsukka Art School adopted the pre-colonial system of educating the students; through art empowerment practices which usually give rise to entrepreneurship conduits for unemployed youths. Entrepreneurship training has this inherent efficacy in combating economic hardship hence, its documentation, especially the academically trained utilitarian artists of the Nsukka Art School, will go a long way in enlightening a good number of members of the society on the need for utilitarian art practice meant for empowerment and proper sensitization of the youths, by giving them insight into the entrepreneur credibility of art as a means of livelihood. While this paper set out to enlighten the teeming unemployed Nigerians youths on the need for acquiring entrepreneur skills availed through various art practices to mitigate their economic wants, further insight is geared towards the strategies employed by these intellectually creative artists and how they have supplemented and supported their income through the production of utilitarian sculptures. Captured also is how they have created atmosphere field(s) and world(s) metaphors for continuity through teacher-student relationship; and finally, how art entrepreneurial social construct has impacted on the wider society. It uses the works of purposively selected sculptors of the Nsukka School, to examine the convergence between production and marketing of artworks to reconcile art, entrepreneurship, and unemployment. A further attempt is also to situate the thesis of this paper on the fact that the youths must be ready to adopt the pre-colonial form of education which aligns the young stars with the creative artists to achieve sustainable development and proper youth empowerment beyond the field(s) and the world(s) of the artist. This paper is an attempt to fill these lacunas.

Form of Pre-Colonial Art Practice

Most formally trained contemporary Nigerian utilitarian art practitioners, while engaging themselves in their mainline intellectual art, also; produce utilitarian art for

immediate sale to support themselves and their families, since the intellectual line of art usually does not yield immediate financial returns. This is adapted from the pre-colonial art practice and the Igbo theory of *adighiakwuofuebeekilinmonwuliterarily* translated to mean that masquerades are not viewed from one vantage, implying that one should utilize all one's possible advantages while it lasted and admonishes to avoid putting all one's eggs in one basket. A reflection on the Tiv traditional artists, like their colleagues elsewhere in African traditional societies, shows that besides their major occasional commissions, produced utilitarian objects like beds, chairs, baskets, hoes, and so on (Kasfir, 2000). This is found among climes where artists are also involved in farming, fishery, and marketing of farm produce to support themselves and their families and not operating wholly as professional artists. Many notable artists working in Nigeria keep a second job with the private or public sector. El Anatsui, Ozioma Onuzulike, Eva Obodo, Chijioke Onuora, Tayo Adenaike, Kolade Oshinowo, Olu Amoda, Chike Akabuike, Uche Onyishi, and others work as teachers in art schools while practicing their art as well as pursuing more creative projects under less financial pressure. Other formally trained artists who are not working as civil servants, run entrepreneur outfits that yield immediate cash for their day-to-day upkeep.

Notable among the Nsukka School formally trained artists is their ability to practice in-between academic arts and utilitarian sculpture which has gradually evolved into one strategy for innovative entrepreneurship. This is to say that, the production of utilitarian sculptures in wood seems to have become one major strategy for academic artists to support themselves while carrying out their main-line creative productions. Likewise, the unemployed youths must key into this strategy that yields immediate income and not to limit their dreams to acquiring the white-collar job which is not readily available. This entails, therefore, that while the youths engage themselves in their mainline intellectual activities, they can still adopt a partnership in the utilitarian art production and commodification for immediate financial returns.

However, a great number of our youths are not well equipped to undertake the challenges involved due to the paucity of experiential facts. What these youths may need is the exposure and knowledge in the field(s) and the world(s) of the pre-colonial system of engaging in such an enterprising expedition through the instrumentalist of art entrepreneurship. This is irrespective of their original field of learning since venture in art involves commercialization which usually includes sales and purchase which even the internet has made more viable. This way, the local traditions that inform contemporary African practice will be sustained (Rea, 2013), (Nwafor, 1998).

History of Utility Sculpture in Nsukka Art School

A critical review shows that little or no substantial study has been done on Nsukka Art Schools' practices on entrepreneurship, especially on her utilitarian sculptures. However, textual materials on, sculptural techniques, styles, and innovations abound which describes explicitly the potentials of utilitarian sculptures and their entrepreneurial prospects. Among such studies includes Nzewi's (2001) techniques, materials, and modes of execution, which observes that the schools' enterprising innovations and resourceful nature in sculpture processes, can be ascribed to the intellectual and creative assertions of the lecturers in the process of imparting artistic knowledge. Nwafor (1998) describes her radical experimentations, focusing on painting and sculpture. He observes that experimentation in the department conflicts between what is African and Post Modern. Offiong (1999)

discusses the sculptural garden aesthetics, considering areas where the sculptural works could be well fitted for environmental enhancement. Onyishi (1999) explores the schools' new sculpture ideas and forms. While Ibe (1996), on the other hand, notes on utility and its contribution to the value of contemporary Nigeria, centring on the works of Gbubemi Amas Amanoritsewor; who seems to be the pioneer of utilitarian sculptures in the Nsukka Art School. Ibe encourages the place of utilitarian art practices in Nigeria. However, he is worried about how the contemporary artists tend to dwell more on the aesthetic and elitist qualities of art, neglecting the functional values of art, noting that artworks are weighed by their utilitarian value.

Nonetheless, literature also shows that the utilitarian sculpture was institutionalized through Ernest Okoli, who joined the faculty in 1992 from Ehamufu College of Education to teach a sculpture course on utilitarian sculpture termed "Sculpture Process: Carving". As a result of his passion for students' immediate financial wellbeing, he introduced utilitarian wood sculpture. His objective was to teach students how to fish and not just how to eat fish. This is the ability to make money while in school and beyond because the exploratory and experimental sculptural processes practices that were taught before this period were mainly conceptual and academic which could hardly bring quick cash for daily upkeeps for the students. According to Nzewi (2001), Okoli believes that art should provide a basic source of livelihood for the practitioners. His functional art ideology is situated on this basis and though relatively new, he insists this genre must serve a definite function, combined with the aesthetic qualities deserved of artworks. "Special emphasis is laid on the sculptural process of joining without using nails and other permanent aids for easy dismantling and assembling without diminishing the strength, durability, and aesthetic character of the work" (Nzewi, 2001, p.10).

Mining this mindset deeper, Okoli, propagated an innovative aspect of wood carving, which was influenced by Gbubemi Amas, who was already practicing utilitarian sculpture. Okoli availed Amas' studio to his first students to understudy Amas' styles, techniques, forms, and processes in utilitarian wood sculptures making. Okoli's approach to the course in wood carving reshaped the trend of events in the section because before his arrival, the sculpture that was practiced in the art school was experimental and exploration of unconventional materials as imparted by El Anatsui one of Africa's leading versatile sculptor, notable for his wood panels and bottle tops configurations (Obodo & Morgan, 2014).

The combination of these two approaches to artistic practices gave rise to a rich and fine-grained approach to art training capable of standing in-between what is African and Post-Modern artistic creation proficient to sail both for main-line artistic work and through the creation of objects of daily use, capable of yielding immediate means of livelihood. A great number of graduate students have become successful entrepreneurs, among whom include Iyke Okenyi, Chibuike Onyirioha, Gerald Chukwuma, Uche Onyishi, etc.

Students Teachers Working Relationship

One interesting thing and worthy of note in Nsukka Art School is the student teacher's great ability to work together like the pre-colonial master-apprentice relationship (Woronkowitz & Noonan, 2017); (Perrill, 2019). Where the younger generation shares a workspace with the elderly to understudy them for continuity. Worthy of note is that this relationship motivates their students to establish sculpture studios at graduation. Among such students include but not limited to Eva Obodo,

Martin Iorliam, Emeka Okpara, ChijiokeOnuorah, Chikelue Akabuike, Casimir Nnamele, Uche Onyishi, Amarachi Okafor, Nnenna Okorie, Anthony Eze, OziomaOnuzulike, AmaucheNgwu, etc, who as students and beyond, have worked as studio assistance at one point or the other at Anatsui's studio. On the other hand, ChijiokeOnuorah and Eve Obodo former students of Anatsui, and now lecturers in the school have to their credit lots of students passing through their *Top Studios* too. The present development for the compulsory industrial attachment during the first semester of third-year students has further strengthened this relationship. Most students not just within the Nsukka art school but also from without now found the opportunity to work with the academically trained artists in their various studios. As ascribed by Kasfir and Förster, this is a typical working definition of "apprentice", a situation where people share a workspace in order to draw expertise knowledge from senior members of the group (Woronkowicz& Noonan, 2017);(Perrill, 2019). Drawing from integrated economic and sociocultural analyses, Kasfir and Förster "reveal the fluidity of the "shared" nature of workspace, "stability" of its structure, and power dynamics of "seniority" (Perrill, 2019.p.131). As a result, humans have survived and evolved as a species partly because of their capacity to share knowledge, which in turn, benefits everybody within the social group (Woronkowicz& Noonan, 2017). This is the underlying principle that drives the Nsukka Art School and the same concept, that is typical of the Traditional African Society. Even though teaching is not seen as a profession in pre-colonial African, the traditional artist used it as a means of continuity, hence, the system of apprentice system of learning and teaching is hinged on the sharing of knowledge (Akabuike, 2013); (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopaedia 99). This singular role separates the artists and places them as playing a unique role in the community although they may be engaged in other means of livelihood and where only initiates are allowed to practice some kind of arts. (Kasfir 1987); (Hanna, 1974);(Warren d'Azevedo 1973); (Kasfir, 2000).

Utility Art Production, and Commodification

Means of livelihood is always generated in the production of utility art not just for the artists but for a wider range of direct and indirect participants within the process of production till it gets to the patrons. This is because there is a vast range of people in-between the object production and constantly produced tread for both the international and local art markets. For examples the making of masks in Pende the Republic of Congo; and the Idoma in Nigeria, working for local patrons but visited by traders and dealers from all over the globe; Asante in Ghana, Yoruba in Nigeria, and the introduction of Church patronage among Ekiti carvers in the colonial period, (Kasfir1989). Also, from the point a tree is deforested to a point where the artwork is sold to the patron, financial value is constantly transmitted from one person to the other. Urbanization has also helped to boost the entrepreneur potency of utilitarian art objects. The commodification and the international art and souvenir markets, ranging from Makonde, Kamba in East Africa, Senufo, Dogon, Asante, Benin in West Africa, to the central role of middlemen and traders as culture brokers who put demands for "Originals" and "copies" (emulation), (Kasfir2013) has all aided entrepreneurship. While these utilitarian artists work and live on the proceeds of their endeavours even when they have other means of supporting their families, worthy of note is the chain of other participants who also make a living through their endeavours. The community who owns the wood, chainsaw operator, the loaders who load the woods for transport, the driver who transports the wood, the market woman

who buys the wood for retail, and numerous other equipment and tools producers and sellers who directly or indirectly participate in the production of the artwork.

From the ongoing, it is obvious, therefore, that art occupies a position capable of fostering an entrepreneurship landscape in contemporary Africa, through the adoption of the pre-colonial system of teaching and learning for those who wish to produce art and modern trend in commodification for those who wish to partner in the entrepreneurship. More so in this post-colonial era where urbanization, literacy, and the rise of popular art forms have introduced new art forms (both new genres and new media/techniques) to the pre-colonial experience. The youths can capitalize on these frameworks to key in by utilizing the introduction of the Western internet and the creation of a new global subculture with its connectedness to non-African sources and influence to commodify these works through print, and other electronic media. Since mechanization has made visual media both in small portable paintings and studio sculptural works possible (Kasfir, 2013). These factors make entrepreneurship even more viable in our contemporary society, and this is the key to 'Art Entrepreneurship as a Social Construct,' yet the youth are wallowing in penury.

Utilitarian Sculpture of the Nsukka Art School

The Nsukka Art School has a distinctive utilitarian approach to sculpture production relevant to contemporary society. It is obvious that her indigenous perspectives to utilitarian art production are concurring and contributing to the creative art industry, entrepreneurship, and youth empowerment. This propensity can be harvested and harnessed to improve the thrive of the creative industry and youth empowerment in Africa and Nigeria in particular. It is against this background that this study draws from Gillian Rose's Visual Arts Research, Visual Arts Practice, and Visual Arts Research Practices (Rose, 2001), and apply the social construct to focus on the schools' entrepreneurial attributes, of utilitarian sculptures (though individual approaches may exist in materials, sourcing of materials, tools, techniques, forms, and styles), as a basis for understanding the dynamics of utilitarian sculptures as an entrepreneurial venture.

Materials and Sources

The primary materials include *naturally configured curvilinear and unprocessed woods* mainly meant for firewood, all sourced from the original site of deforestation, and *processed woods* sourced from the Sawmills or Timber shed including the wood market.



Fig: 1,2, & 3 Processed woods from the timber. Photos. The Author ©



Fig: 4, 5, & 6, Naturally Configured Curvilinear Wood (side and central view). Deforested wood still at the site of cut. Photo, Author ©

The unprocessed woods can be bought directly from the owners during deforestation or from the *Wood Trade Union members* who bought them to retail them to the last consumers who usually use them as firewood or for minor carpentry works. Other



Fig: 7, 8, & 9, Un-configured natural woods at the site of retails. Photo, Author ©

resources used in the production process include Solid objects such as metals, like nails, and Soft objects, or semi-liquid such as glues. Attempt are made to avoid the use of nails in joining as much as possible. These materials are also very common and affordable in the local markets.

Tools

The electric-powered and manual tools are acquired from the local market which includes filing, jig-saw, router, and the cross-sectional cutting saw machines, Chainsaw, chisels, and locally constructed or formal oxy-acetylene set, etc.

Most times, more than one form of *wood* maybe combined to produce a given work. In doing this, one or two of the above-mentioned materials are used to strengthen and enhance the work. Also, these materials and given tools determine the process and the technique with which any *naturally configured curvilinear wood* is reconfigured. The site of production as theorized by Rose is applicable here (Rose, 2001).

Forms and Styles

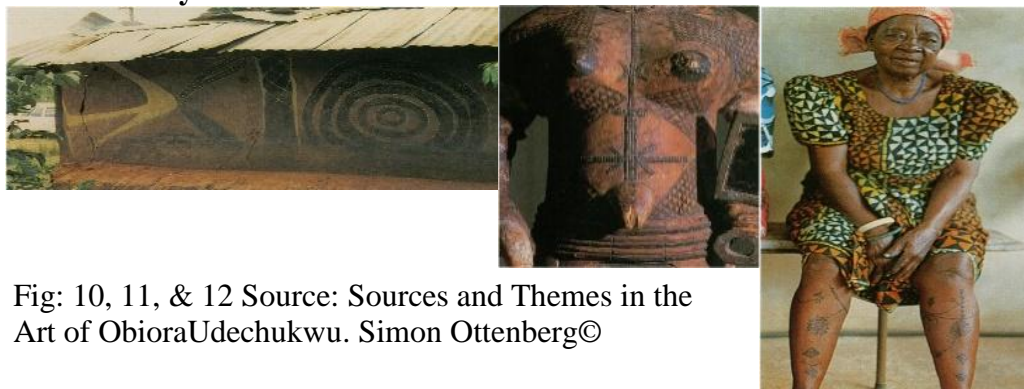


Fig: 10, 11, & 12 Source: Sources and Themes in the Art of Obiora Udechukwu. Simon Ottenberg ©

Natural Synthesis which its driving force is geared by *Uli*, has flourished around the Nsukka-Enugu axis in the South-eastern part of Nigeria since the 1970s; and has constituted the major style in the works of the Nsukka Art School. *Uli*, a traditional design in which its elements are used for indigenous murals and body decorations by the Igbos', provides the visual template and the master grid on which all the artists are connected in varying degrees (Jegede, 2000). However, *ulias* a focal element of design in the works of the Nsukka Art School cannot be discussed without a reflection on Uche Okeke, the graduate and leader of Zaria Art Society who though is an accomplished poet amidst other creative prowls, has in the history of contemporary Nigerian art, been acknowledged as the patriarch and precursor of *uli* movement (Emeka & Albert Ehi, 2013). Other propagators of *Uli* are scholars of the department

who are El Anatsui, Vincent Amaefuna, and Chike Aniakor (Obodo & Morgan, 2014).

While *ulises* serves as the visual template, the *forms* fall between Earnest Okoli and the works of El Anatsui, whose prodigious rapport with wood through burnishing and pyrography has influenced a great number of his students. Though no modernist art historian or critique may identify a stylistic sameness in the woodworks of Anatsui and his students, however, an intensive study may show a selection of several artists



El Anatsui, wood panel ©

who produce works that, though of varying stylistic strengths, yet are connected by an interest in and exploration of a local design phenomenon known as Uli. Herein and on Okoli's functionality production approach, lies the strengths of the Nsukka Art School entrepreneur possibilities. It offers an insight into the nature of works that may offer a liberating hand to the teeming youths

who may need this creative avenue as a parallel between their dreams and the woodworks of professionals, El Anatsui, Gbubemi Amas Amanoritsewor, Okoli, the students of Nsukka Art School- Iyke Okenyi, Uche Onyishi, Gerald Chukwuma's, etc, to alleviate the plight of unemployment in Nigeria. These categories of artists may not be in the same level of artistic paradigms but can be identified with the stylistic-presence of *uliburnishing* and the functionality of their works. With this in mind, I demonstrate why Nsukka art school utility works are most engaging and also evocative to the plight of unemployment.

Gerald Chukwuma, though trained as a painter in the Nsukka School ended up an experimentalist sculptor creating out of rich uli tradition.

Iyke Okenyi's artistic creative production is predominantly of utilitarian sculptures. He found new exciting ways of producing utilitarian works with more intricate designs. He is highly interested in found objects (wood) and the manipulation of wood that has natural forms. He claims to be the first person to use the popular creeping tree



A Peoples Paradise Gerald Chukwuma 2016 burnt wood panel, Images from www.smocontemporaryart.com ©

You by Gerald Chukwuma 2016 © burnt wood panel H60 inches

(Ogbu), roots and hollowed woods as functional art materials (Okenyi).



Okenyi's© Utilitarian Sculptures embellished with uli and nsibidi forms

Onyishi adopted some of Okenyi's styles and forms probably because they lived close or shared the same course content dealing with the production of utilitarian sculpture termed "Sculpture Process: Carving" Onyishi was able to, combined his experiences, influence from Okenyi, and the course taught in the department by Ernest Okoli.

Conclusion



Plate 6: Uche Onyishi, Plate 24: Set of Chairs with Tables ©



Plate 6: Uche Onyishi, 1 Chair (front and back view), wood, 3'x 2.8' ©

These works spanning from wall aesthetic decorative panels to sets of house-hold furniture constitutes part of the entrepreneurial culture of the Nsukka Art School. The traditional *uli* symbols, a movement that emerged in the 1970s from the University of Nigeria and operated to expand and modernize the aesthetic of Igbo culture are used for its embellishment. These works not only have local but also foreign patronages; this substantiates Förster's flexibility between material and social collaboration in the master-apprenticeship system (Perrill, 2019). The artistic productions fall within a fine-grained observation of social construct. The long chain of financial transmission from the sites of deforestation to production, particularly their utilitarian woods are astute and reveal the fluidity of entrepreneurship in Nsukka art school as a canonical site.

The students have affirmed apprenticeship as a logical framework, and a window through which researchers can view and review the cultural entrepreneurship and socio-cultural constructs involved in artistic production across cultural and geographic divides. Also, as a veritable tool to boost the lives and economic standard of Nigerian youths. This is buttressed by Kasfir and Förster's description of economic institutions, which provides comparative examples from Gothic European artisanal workshops, as well as the structures formed by Walter Gropius at the Bauhaus art school in Germany. They point out that such a master students relationship has been neglected as an analytical category, despite its relevance (Ejigiri, 2014).

This calls for a need for African societies to not neglect her original tradition of artistic apprentice system of learning and training which has proven to be a viable means of entrepreneurship. Kasfir, though, astutely observes that a constellation of factors may be influencing this practice, however, also hints that the online networks are becoming fixtures of global art and might benefit youths artistic-wise (Kasfir, 2013). Youths who may not participate in the physical production of artworks can go into online commodification, through global tourism, and urbanization. Pieces of evidence abound that highlights the internet's value as lenses to study the construction of "localities," concurring with the sense of community as defined by Arjun Appadurai as "an achieved sense of social immediacy among the members of a group" (Perrill, 2015, p. 133). In the contemporary art world, for instance, digital 3D printing, collaborative art practice, and global workshops are challenging the geographical basis of localities and increasingly bringing Appadurai's theories to life, integrating materials with social constructions (Ejigiri, 2014). It is in this moment of hardship in Nigeria and Africa that such studies as found in these theories are required to increasingly ameliorate the difficulties our youths are facing in this perilous time.

A lot of disciplines have been struggling to reconcile social and economic construct; however, art is the most viable tool for its actualization. The Nsukka Art School practice has proven this to be true. As validated by Kasfir and Förster, apart from the school as a place of learning and interaction, the relationship and its social settings, give credence such that the youths, align themselves into the experience and works of others senior ones (Ejigiri, 2014), to sustain entrepreneurial continuity. The government is not left out as implementation of entrepreneurship studies from the secondary level will go a long way to help in reconditioning the youths for entrepreneurial engagements.

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