

“Lack Of Art Materials And Tools: The Bane Of Art Students In Nigeria”

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ABSTRACT

One of the problems student artists in Nigeria are facing is the lack of art materials and tools with which to execute class works. Because most of the materials and tools needed for the creation of works are imported, they are terribly expensive and may not always be available. The thrust of this paper is to encourage local fabrication of art materials and tools using locally sourced ingredients and materials. As long as our nation remains a consumer nation (depending on other nations for art materials) rather than a producing nation, art materials such as paints will continue to be out of the reach of budding and emerging artists. Consequently, some students may not only fail their courses, but also, be discouraged to the extent of losing faith in the profession.

Keywords: Art materials and tools, Students, Visual Art, Self-reliance, Locally Fabricated art materials and tools

INTRODUCTION

The importance of visual art to the development of any nation cannot be overemphasized as it plays a pivotal role in the actualization of goals and aspirations in all sectors of the economy. Unfortunately, the visual arts suffer in Nigeria because Nigeria is a consumer nation as regards the manufacture of art materials and tools

through which both professional and student artist express their muse. When a people cannot provide the basic materials and tools required for the production of their needs, they remain a slave to the market—whatever is given them at whatever price is what they will take; a “non-producer” has no choice. With the exchange rate adversely affecting imported goods in the country today, art materials and tools will further recede from the reach of artist in Nigeria, especially those who are students.

Nigeria is rich in both human and natural resources. She has got what it takes to put her economy on the same pedestal with that of any other nation in the world. Suffice it to say that wealth not properly utilized equals poverty. Hence, all stakeholders in the art sector should come together to seek ways on how to salvage this situation of lack of materials and tools needed for the execution of art works (especially by students). Talabi (1979), author of *Teaching Art in African Schools*, points out that: *if funds are lacking to buy materials, the teacher has no option but to source them locally.*

An artist is a visual scribe who documents and preserves the culture of a people through visuals. He is a sub-creator who explores his immediate environment seeking materials for self expression for the enhancement of humankind through the

produce of his studio. Therefore, the artist would play a pivotal role towards the success of a nation's economy if provided with the enabling environment on which to operate.

PROBLEMS

High Cost of Art Materials and Tools

Material/tool. Materials such as paint are imported from elsewhere in the world, and they are expensive. Most students can barely afford them. Hence, the execution of their class works are either hindered or slowed down depending on when they can buy paints. As Iriwrier(2009 p.10) a lecturer in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Delta state University, Abraka, Delta State, pointed out: *With the increasing cost of foreign exchange, the importation of some art materials is limited.* At the same time, most art schools mandate that students who have reached the specialized stage in painting use oil colours for most of their class assignments, increasing the burden on these students. Besides lacking painting materials, most painting studios in our art school lack easels, assigning up to 3 students to an easel.

Furthermore, it is sad to note that this problem is not limited to students of painting. Some sculpture studios lack such common tools as a vise. Similarly, the ceramic units of some art schools either lack or have few throwing wheels on which students are expected to work. Lack of equipment is also exacerbated by the unstable power supply. This means that students in metalwork cannot rely on using welding equipment when they need to use it, that pottery students cannot rely on electrically powered potter's wheels or electric kilns. Further, the textile unit is no

exception as students do not have access to tap water with which to produce tie and dye and other forms of fabric designs; this problem is caused by either of the followings: lack of stable electric power with which to pump water, poorly maintained taps and water pipes or lack of water storage tanks. If both equipment and materials are problematic, then the future of art production or at least the practical teaching of fine and applied arts is at risk.

Methods and materials is a course aimed at training students on how to experiment with materials available in order to achieve their desired needs. Students learn from how to build stretchers to the production of paint; moreover, students are taught how to fabricate brushes, pallet knives and so on with the locally available materials. But not all art teachers agree with the idea of materials research. When interviewed, some art teachers were of the view that artists (whether student artists or professionals) have no business seeking the alternative to art materials, rather, they should make do with what is available from other parts of the world.

According to Okwoju (2015), a painting lecturer at the University of Benin and a prolific painter:

When I begin to raise issues about artists experimenting on materials, I begin to wonder whether it makes sense because if you are going to be researching on materials, what is the essence of the research? The research is to yield some kind of result in terms of being able to produce these materials. Then if you are going to learn how to produce these materials, for what purpose are you learning it...[Maybe] one is trying to do too many things, and at the end of the day, ends

up doing nothing right. For instance, as a painter, if I have to commit part of the time I have for painting into producing materials for painting like the old masters did, life will be very difficult for me. Paint production was ok for the old masters then because life was relatively simple then i.e. speaking of the cost of living, means of living—everything was basically subsistence. Those days, it was ok to delve into material research; but if I have to commit my time into making colours, brushes and paints, by the time I am done, I will not have the time to paint. That is the reality of it—if I have to make colours, I will stop painting.

However, Erimona (2015), a senior lecturer in the sculpture unit of the University of Benin opined that:

Improvisation has always been the rule in art—it has always been there. Today in music for instance, people blab a lot but blabbing is not new in music. The Negroes who got to America did not know much of western instrumentation; hence they did a lot of improvisation with their lips (blabbing). So also in the visual arts, painting for instance, coloured paper were used, beads, pigments from earth and from leaves. The artist improvises a lot especially when other materials are either very expensive or not available.

In other words, artists who have the time should embark on materials research in order to satisfy their creative thirst.

According to Borgatti (2015) a Professor of Art History from University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria, and Consulting Curator, African and Oceanic Art, Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg Massachusetts:

Whether or not the materials are expensive or unavailable, the passion for the art will cause the artist to create.

Expounding from the above statement, passion will provoke one to seek alternative materials or, sell his or her valuables in other to afford the imported ones.

Impoverished Libraries

Besides lack of materials for the student artist wishing/needing express his or her muse, the problem of impoverished libraries bedevils Nigerian students. Our libraries barely have books about Nigerian artists such as Bruce Onobrakpeya, Yusuf Grillo, Uche Okeke, Abayomi Barber, just to mention a few, let alone books on materials research. These books if available to students would serve as references for the upcoming artist and play a pivotal role in their learning process. According to Iriwieri (2009)

“With the number of textbooks being very negligible, students do not have enough reference materials to turn to in an attempt to widen their intellectual horizon.”(Iriwieri 2009)

Lack of Conducive Studios

Lack of conducive studio space to work in is another problem. Most art studios in our schools are too small for the population of students. Moreover, most of them are but rooms and not studios as they lack the basic amenities such as lockers, tables and stools, electric bulb for proper lighting, broad windows at both ends of for cross ventilation, diffuser, Ceiling fan, modeling wheel and so on; all the amenities necessary to qualify them as studios.

Irivwier (2009) corroborates:

Some schools do not have adequate furniture for students. It is rare to see donkeys, potter's wheel, kiln and photographic materials in the Fine Arts Department. With the non-availability of these basic equipment, tools and materials, the Creative Arts curriculum is adversely affected.

The Way Forward

Nigeria is blessed with the manpower and technical know-how to turn our situation around for the better; all we need is proper planning and reciprocal relationships between units of the Fine and Applied Arts department and other departments in the institution. For instance, tools like pallet knives, scrapers, calipers, spatulas and the rest can be fashioned in the sculpture units of our schools. Furthermore, the ceramic unit can liaise with the engineering department to produce throwing wheels and kilns to their specifications. So too can the sculpture unit work with the engineering department for the production of tools such as angle grinders and drills needed for the execution of its works. Students of painting should liaise with those in chemistry to develop paint from local materials. As painting instructor Mrs. Priscilla Aletor (1991) notes:

It was found that readily extractable, preservable, usable and durable pigments can be obtained from flora, fauna and Earth crust derivatives. This improvisation finds great interests and experimentation amongst students of fine and applied arts. More avenues have been opened up for further research into this interesting field

as well as rosy prospects for entrepreneurship.

Therefore, interdisciplinary research should be encouraged.

Not only should interdisciplinary research be strongly encouraged, it should be actively fostered in our schools of art to enable us to solve most of the problems that often cripple our efforts to be visually expressive. On interdisciplinary research, Erimona (2014) further asserts that:

the two sides (scientists and artists) have contributed to the development of our discipline. We know of an early era in which the students in training were taught to put materials together in order to compound what he would use for the production of works. They were taught to take eggs, pigment, earth, solvent, vinegar, etc. Egg and vinegar are available for [such] purposes. They are food. However, they form part of ingredients for paint manufacture. A trainee in painting would have to learn how to put all these things together in order to create a painter's colour; and they used this for many years. Gradually, from their own effort, some persons came up with the idea that they should embark on the manufacture of artist colours; they may not have been artists but they saw the problem of the artist and decided to produce artist paint since they had insight in that regard. So if this could happen in the developed world, why can't it happen here when we have all the raw materials? Men of science can use their background knowledge to advance what the artist had been doing.

He continues by saying that

the artist usually begins by improvising in order to create what interests him. Then if

his improvisation is very effective, people (men of science) around may start an industry there. With their background in science, they try to relate the work of the artist to what they know and see if they can produce something close to what the artist likes to use and bring it to the artist to try. And when they succeed, they start determining the parameters for that medium: the more we do it like this the better.

Ekpenyong (2015) further maintains that *with locally sourced materials like calcium sulfate, titanium powder, casein, white glue and pigments, one can fabricate an alternative water-soluble paint, a medium that is cost effective, vibrant and with a glossy finish.*

Conclusion

Without materials and tools, there will be no art works. The artist (whether student or professional) does not have a voice if he does not have materials and tools to use in order to express himself or herself. Therefore, in the absence of the imported and expensive materials and tools, artists and art students should seek alternatives, using the locally available ingredient and materials. Moreover, since Nigeria is currently experiencing a rising wave of unemployment, it is recommended that the Government can provide financial assistance to those who may want to embark on material research to provide new employment and also alleviate the sufferings of art students in Nigeria

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