

Visual Art and Role in Communication

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Abstract

Visual art plays a very crucial role in communication and often act as an alternative to other languages. While language communicates through words, visual art does it through forms, shapes, lines and colours. Visual art language can be perceived via forms, symbols, signs, designs, colours, textures, lines, etc. The nature of visual art and its role in the society have been subjected to various interpretations. Some view visual art as a kind of personal therapy, others as a vehicle of political expression and a catalyst for social and political change. All these are forms of communication and they contain the same truth as a language. Today, in Nigeria, visual art instruction has been so narrowed down in the school curriculums, such that the subject is no longer regarded as an important school subject. This, in effect, diminishes the importance of visual art in the Nigerian society and thus limits its appreciation as a communication tool. The aim of this study is therefore to showcase the importance of visual art, as a means of communication and ready tool for mass mobilization. The same way spoken or written words are used as a means of communication, visual art likewise perform similar functions in communication.

Keywords: Visual art, communication, symbols, signs, mobilization, information

Introduction

The position of visual art in the socio-political economy of the nation, particularly regarding communication, cannot be over emphasized. Visual art as a means of communication influences society at large. In this regard, Dumbadze and Hudson (2013) posit that artists, art historians, critics and theorists seek to complicate the register of aesthetic judgement by linking its formal pronouncements to context, politics and history; yet 'form' remains everywhere.

To a layman visual art is just drawing but to an artist it is a medium of expression, which can have both intrinsic and extrinsic value. Visual art is the art appreciated by sight, which includes painting, sculpture, textile, ceramic, graphics, etc., expressed through the instrumentality of forms, symbols, signs, designs, colours, textures, lines, shapes, etc. It is an integral part in the process of living. The act of forming the image of man is art. Visual art encompasses all the fundamental aspects of life and living, starting from our environment to our hair-do; from the dress we wear to the shoe on our

foot. It has the power to both represent reality and express it. Visual art is a universal bond and language among all cultures. In this respect, visual art is bonded to human conditions and is a reflection of the cultural fibre of the society.

The aim of this study is to showcase the importance of visual art in communication, information dissemination, and as ready tool for mobilization. These can be seen in the different types of non-verbal communication and behaviour which include facial expressions, positives gestures, signs and symbols, etc. The most direct contact with the mind is through the eye. On that, Hayakawa and Hayakawa(1992) opine that our visual experience of the world is so profoundly influential that it constitutes a nonverbal language all in its own. The same way words spoken or written words are used as means of communication, likewise, visual art performs similar functions in visual communication. Visual art as tool can easily sell any propaganda or message and play a significant role in mass communication, especially, within an illiterate population. Like in churches, biblical stories are rendered using the instrumentality of visual signs and symbols to inform the believers. The graphic artists convey messages and influence our political, social and commercial environment, through advert through his/her work. Visual art plays a very crucial role in communication and often act as an alternative to spoken or written words. In the same regards Rezeide (2016) also opines that communication is the art or process of using words, sounds, signs, symbols or behaviours to express or exchange information, express ideas, thought, feelings to someone else.

Visual Art as an Instrument of Representation and Expression

Visual art can be used for representation and as a means of expression; hence, Storne (1970) opines that to recognise the meaning of art, there should be an appreciation of the properties of representation and expression, through which the meaning, understanding, and the aesthetics of art becomes clearer. This entails the study of the emotions, psychology, sociology and philosophy of art. The philosophy of art analyses the quality that we call beauty and its locus, which includes the sensation of pleasure, enjoyment, disturbance, or meaning, all that people can experience when viewing a work of art. The aesthetic content of what an artist created is analysed through an intrinsic and extrinsic evaluation of the representation associated with its semiotic rendition. To represent is to bring to mind by description. Visual art can be said to be similar to spoken or written language and it is to be understood in the same manner as in scenery painting; if the majority of the pictures are about entirely imaginary scenes and episodes, there would be no difference from spoken or written work in literature. This relationship between a work of visual art and its subject captured in spoken or written word is all about representation and expression.

Nature and Role of Visual Art in Society

The nature of visual art and its role in the society could be subjected to many interpretations. Some view visual art as a kind of personal therapy, others see it as a vehicle for political expression and a

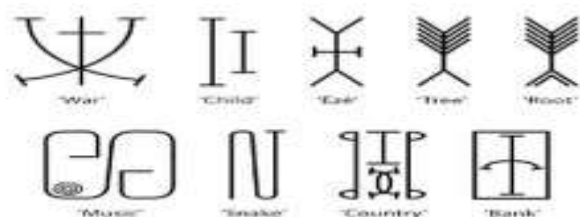
catalyst for social and political change. All these are forms of communication and they contain the same truth, as contained in spoken or written words – languages. Visual art is the ultimate language in imagery, form and shapes. Images are universal language that is timeless; they erase all linguistic barriers both for literate and illiterate population. Anyone can understand it. Even those who can't draw, for example, are able to distinguish and recognise line, shape, colour, figures, symbols and signs. Yet, visual art instruction has been narrowed and undermined in most schools curriculums in Nigeria and thus not regarded so much in the society like other subjects and disciplines, largely due to lack of understanding and appreciation. Hayakawa and Hayakawa (1992) stressed that the language of vision determines, perhaps even more subtly and thoroughly than verbal language, the structure of consciousness. The most direct avenue to the mind is through the eye; our visual experience of the world is so profoundly influential that it constitutes a nonverbal language all on its own.

Visual art has the ability to make something out of another by shifting its function. It is the mental development and expression of thoughts and ideas through signs and symbols, shapes, form and texture, as may be manipulated. It is a universal language and the first means of communication even at kindergarten level. Words and visual art are two different languages; visual art with words is almost an act of translation and is one step removed from actual experience. As Udentia (1998) argues, effective communication is usually the result of a careful selection of the appropriate visual medium or media available.

Visual art involves the act of drawing, graphics, painting, sculpture, textile, product design, ceramics, etc. All these make visual art a very significant tool in and for communication, especially for mobilization and essential for visual experience. Words used to describe that experience are simply a means of discussing the nature of our perceptions. Words help us to analyze and understand the infinite ways in which the visual artist constructs visual forms. Visual art language is a “form” which serves as a means of easy and free communication among peoples of all ages, cultural and linguistic differences. In the words of Duane and Sarah (1994), “visual art is the quality production or expression of what is beautiful, appealing, or of more than ordinary significance. A work of visual art is the aesthetic expression of an idea or experience formed with skill through the use of a medium”.

In Nigeria, for example, symbols were commonly used to convey information either on the wall or on the human body. Uli, for example, is a traditional symbolic art form common in Igbo communities of Nigeria. It is a flat linear decorative art. It has both cosmetic and communicative essence. These symbols are largely drawn on human body and on walls (houses). It is usually practiced by the women folk. It is an art form in which the artist's intent is to convey a concept and message relating to perception which results in abstract and non-figurative representation. Uli

traditional artists have since the ages developed different motifs and symbol which are linear to communicate.



Uli symbolic form

A medium is a particular material, applied in visual communication using appropriate technique (Duane & Sarah, 1994). Duane and Sarah further opine that a visual art can inspire, beautify, inform, persuade, entertain, and transform, and it can also deceive, humiliate, anger and arouse our emotions, spark our imaginations, delight our senses; lead us to think in new ways, and help each of us develop a personal sense of truth.

A given work of visual art may serve several functions all at once. Visual art is self-expression and a great deal of our expression is visual thinking. The visual artist's expression is the fixing of an image whether abstract or real on paper, canvas or board with colours, pigments or pencil, rendered in two or three dimensions. It is one aspect of an artistic creation and the formation of this image is determined by the artist's mental and emotional response as well as by the artist's choice of media and manipulative technique and tools. Expression is determined by the quotient creativity of the artist. To visualize is to use imagination and visual memory to consciously preview events or plan before they occur. The process of visualization provides a means by which ideas, images and goals can be materialized. Many people, though, cannot understand the language of the visual artist any better than the equations of the physicist or the formulae of the biochemist.

Every field of human endeavour has its own language that must be learned and internalized before one can become conversant with it, and visual art is no exception. Visual art can help to abridge a seemingly lengthy written or spoken narrative. On this, Duane and Sarah (1994) opine that the language of visual experience considers the fact that hand writing which is equally an art is sometimes accepted as legal evidence in court, and cartoonist communicates to the audience the passage of time and movement through their art; thus this language looks at how colour affects emotion.

Art has its special language, with a vast array of forms, concepts, terminologies and self-expression uniquely designed for understanding it with variation of concepts. Artists select media that best suit the ideas and feeling they wish to present. When a medium is used in such a way that the object or performance contributes to our understanding or enjoyment of life we experience the final product as 'art'. When people speak of the visual arts, they are usually referring to 'fine art' and 'applied

art'. These terms are used to distinguish the two basic types of artistic intention. Fine art refers to art created for purely aesthetic expression, communication or contemplation. Painting and sculpture are the best known of the fine arts. Applied art is described as aesthetic values used in the designing or decoration of utilitarian objects. Textile, graphics, ceramics are equally best known as applied art. Each art form is perceived by our senses in different ways, yet each grows from a common need to give substance to feelings, ideas, insight and experiences. This can be seen in drawing, painting, sculpture, film making and architecture.

Most times our communications are verbal and any single medium of expression has its limitation. Certain ideas and feelings can be communicated only through visual form while other instincts can be expressed also, for an example, only through music. Visual art language is derived from elements of visual design which include line, shape/form, texture, and colour (Ocivirk & Wigg, 1981). To approach visual art from the angle of expressing meaning and ideas, there is need to know something of the ingredients or components that make up a work of art. These components are the subject, the form and the content.



Role of Visual Art in Modern Communication

Visual art, a non-verbal method of communication, plays a great role in modern information technology and communication through signs and symbols. Visual art can inspire, beautify, inform, persuade and entertain, etc. Every field of study has a given language that must be learned before one can become conversant with it. Visual art is no exception, it is a language that is not made up of words that can be "read or memorized". Visual art in terms of words, are made up of adjectives rather than nouns, instead of telling us what things are, it tells us about their special qualities. A piece of information can be passed to a recipient through a work of art using icons, symbols, signs as integrated in information technology, employing element of design as shape, line, dot, texture, colour instead of using word; hence saving time and energy. Thus, Aniakor (1991) opines that the artist has to protect and preserve the humanity of his society if need be by challenging prevailing orthodoxies.



Through the art of symbols and signs, commuters are able to understand the right direction and road to use without written word thereby making communication easy and fast. Facial expression and gesture are responsible for a huge proportion of non-verbal communication. Expression and feeling can be communicated using mobile phone with nonverbal language such as facial expression, icons, etc. Consider how much information that can be conveyed with a smile or a frown.



Colour and Communication

Visual art plays its role in communication through the use of colours which is one of the elements of arts. It is one of the most expressive elements. Its quality affects our emotion directly and immediately. Walter (2017) opines that colour is the element of design or visual art that arouses universal appreciation. It affects us directly by modifying our thoughts, mood, actions and even our health. Psychologists and designers of schools, offices, hospitals and prisons acknowledge that colours could affect our work habits and mental conditions (Foster, 2017). Forster further opines that colour is one of the most fascinating elements of art; it functions alongside line, shape, form, value, texture, and space to create dynamic meaningful works of art. Hence, artists communicate through colours. Information is communicated to the road users through colours, without written or spoken words. Traffic movements are controlled by the colours of the traffic light, for instance. Red signifies 'danger, don't move'; green signifies 'life, acceptance'; yellow means 'cheer up and get ready'.

There is a relationship between colour and mood. For instance, blue signifies 'subdue' while strong light gold shows 'magnificent'. Purple is often associated with 'royalty' while black is often interpreted as 'evil', and sometimes as 'power'. Thus, colours have communicative potentials and functions. Foster (2017), in this regard, posits that, more than any other element, colour shapes the way we see the world by evoking emotion; it can be stimulating, calming, unsettling or mysterious.

Symbols that instantly communicate important information without words have met the needs of travellers in foreign countries. Symbol is an identifying mark based on pictorial illustration. Businesses and organizations are publicized through the use of a logo – which is the key element and consistent with the brand; hence can stand for the product or service the organization is producing or providing to the public, without any written or spoken word. The purpose of visual arts is to educate the illiterate and enlighten the literate. Thus, visual art can be used for instructions in place of words, because it is often easier to perceive. Even an illiterate can understand for instance the traffic signs on the road. Works of art play a great role in information designs which include diagrams and other visual explanations such as pictograms and ideograms capable of communicating without words.



Dumbadze and Hudson (2013) opine that communication involves communicability, self-opening or concealing of a paradigm of human activity and life without a specific end in mind; that is the work of art. Visual artists play a great role as communicators or as conveyors of information. Their intention and feelings are made known to their audience through their artistic messages by means of two and three dimensional objects, performance or sound. Visual artists often feel more comfortable explaining themselves through paint or movement than through written and spoken language. A poster designed by a graphic artist is also a non-verbal language used effectively to convey message in a flash. Medley(2012) opines that “a poster is a concise visual announcement that provides information through the integrated design of typographic and pictorial imagery.” The creativity of a poster designer is directed toward a specific purpose, this may be to advertise or persuade. In advertising, the visual arts frequently work together. Television advertising is a kind of operative art form that calls upon writers, musicians, and actors as well directors, camera operators, and graphic designers. In printed advertisement, a writer, a designer and often an illustrator or photographer work as a team.



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Visual art is a universal bond and language among all cultures. It is timeless and unlimited aesthetic journey of discovery, a form that represents and sends message. Bernstein (1993) argues that what is significant about autonomous art, then, is its functional capacity for altering inter-subjective relations and releasing the communicative potential repressed by capital's intrusion into artistic distribution and reception. This form comes out as aesthetic end product known as art which is an aspect of representational art. Johnston and Hallet (2010) opine that art is bonded to human conditions and is a reflection of the cultural fibre of the society. For instance clay pertains to container, wood to furniture, fabric to clothing and textile, metal to tool, jewellery to adornment. These are forms of representation.

Conclusion

In visual art, signs and symbols are very significant as elements and tools for information dissemination; they are also a good substitute for words in announcement, entertainment, instructions and warnings. Visual art works are often easier to see, observe and understand unlike words which only the literates understand. From this study, it can be deduced that the role art plays in communication cannot be underestimated. This indicates that art is a valuable discipline and subject that should be learned, practiced and appreciated by all. Thus, through visual artistic presentation, information often becomes more emphasized and memorable than it would have been through other means alone. Therefore, art plays a great role in communication and can be seen as an alternative to other languages and a great access to improvement of a nation's socio-political and

economic development. The language of or spoken written or spoken words, communicates through letters and sound, while visual art does it through form and shape, colours and lines. Thus, visual art plays a great role in communication.

Recommendation

Visual art is not emphasized in the school curriculum and thus not recognized so much in the society like all other subjects. Because the importance is not stressed, many do not understand the language, which makes the dynamism of development through the influence of visual communication ineffectual. In view of this, there should be an awakened awareness of the potentials of art and design skills to achieve the desired goal. This can be done by creating a dynamic school curriculum, such that can reactivate, inform, and educate the students about the usefulness of art from kindergarten to tertiary level creating an empowerment and motivational programmers for students and artists. This will encourage individual direction and the development of personal imagery and also allow for experimentation. Thus, challenge the imagination, the intellect and artistic sense of an art critic, through responsive and Intellectual interrogation.

Visual arts which include painting, sculpture, textiles, graphics, modeling, local material design and utilization, bead making, folk-art, craft, etc., have the ability to make something out of another by shifting their function. It makes the students and artists to be original, experience new ideas and also make them express themselves through creativity. Visual art has a great impact on the mental development of these children through skillful expression of thoughts and ideas. Thus, visual art is a universal language and is the first means of communication at kindergarten level. And this is done using visual images as illustrations. Through this process, the child cultivates interest in creativity and ideas, which simultaneously affects every area of the child's development, thus affecting the child's area of discipline which tends to make the child a complete adult in perceptual, culture and artistic experience. Therefore, visual arts, signs and symbols serve as a means of communication, and information dissemination. The same way English language for example is used as means of communication likewise visual art perform the same function in communication with different forms, thus should be encouraged in schools and colleges.

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