

The Imperatives of Technology in the Visual Arts in Nigeria

¹Sukanthy Visagapperumal Egharevba & ²Blaise Gundu Gbaden

¹Department of Visual Arts and Technology, Faculty of Environmental Sciences

Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, Nigeria.

²Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Environmental Design

Federal University of Lafia – Nigeria

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Abstract

As emerging technologies are advancing at a rapid space worldwide, technology and its accompanying tools, devices and programmes has become a priority for use by visual artists in Nigeria. This is more visible in the art output of contemporary Nigerian painters who are versatile in their creative exploits. This paper has examined technological devices such as photography, video/cinematographic devices, tools powered by solar energy, electricity or batteries, Digital Imaging (DI), large format printing, visual teaching aids, the computer and its vast array of programmes and other viable industrial design appliances and approaches and the impact they have made on the art practice of painters. The paper has done some cursory analysis of the paintings of Chike Obeagu, Obioha Nwaegbe and Princess Indrani Egharevba. They employ technology in three different ways. One uses digitally mastered photographic cut outs; the second uses waste produced by products of technology; and the third applies digital painting tools for enhancement of her paintings. The paper concludes that technology is a tool or perhaps even a weapon of great advantage to visual arts promulgation and administration both in the classroom and in the wider society.

Keywords: *Imperatives, Technology, Contemporary, Painters, Technological Too*

Corresponding Author: **Sukanthy Visagapperumal Egharevba**

Background to the Study

Technology, and all its attributes, is an imperative factor for the growth of the visual arts in Nigeria. For the Nigerian educational sector, the role of technology is indispensable. It is capable of bridging the gap between the visual arts and scientific innovation and the overall progress of society as we envision it for the 21st century. A simple way to look at technology is to approach it from the perspective of the application of suitable or innovative tools and methods in doing things or accomplishing tasks. It is the study, development, and application of devices, machines, and techniques majorly for the design, manufacturing and productive processes. Technology is also viewed as a method of applying technical knowledge and tools to achieve set goals and targets. In so doing it is presumed that certain machines, equipment, and systems considered as a unit, are applied. In a more wholistic form technology is the sum total of a society's or culture's cumulative practical knowledge, especially with reference to its material culture.

Technological Tools and Innovations for the Use of the Visual Artist

Technological tools, facilities and materials or even ideas have enhanced the visual arts essentially in the 21st century where the growth of technology has leaped in multiple bounds. Let us examine how technological ideas and tools are reshaping the viewpoints of visual artists.

Photography

This digital tool and its computerized accessories and accompanying programmes have introduced several innovations into artistic expression for visual artists in Nigeria and elsewhere that the practice is widespread. On one level artists use it simply as a means to gather reference materials for the production of paintings, sculptures and other relevant artworks. On a more advanced level of engagement, those who engage in the art of photography itself have no more need for the dark room since computers bear programmes such as Photoshop, Corel Draw and other still and animation programmes principally designed to serve photographic purposes. This way time and resources are saved while giving room for innovative photography that serves its immediate needs.

Video/Cinematic Appliances

Video being closely related to photography has also become a reliable means for art expression in the 21st century. Video enhances the motion picture and has become a valuable tool for visual communication.

Power Tools

Tools powered by solar energy, electricity or batteries such as screw drills, hangers, planning machines, cutters and sharpeners are in use by artists, especially sculptors. These equipments were originally designed for carpenters, artisans and electricians. Over time artists have come to adapt them to enhance their productivity. This way they are better able to get quick results and a better output in terms of quantity of items churned out as well as ensuring quality of products of international value.

Digital Imaging/Large Format Printing

Visual artists have been able to conceptualize, design and print artistic objects on large format printers. In the past what they relied on was layout, typography and proofs. These were tedious processes. But today the computerized system of printing where digital imagery takes the eminence the tedium is much reduced and productivity guaranteed.

Teaching/Visual Aids

Teaching or visual aids rely heavily on technological innovations to accomplish the task of elucidation to students. These are produced to complement lessons or instructional presentations and can be in the form of three-dimensional models (skeletons, anatomical simulators of the human body, manikins), charts (pie, bar), diagrams, illustrations, animations, maps (navigation, meteorological), or even movies.

The Computer

The computer, being an electronic device that accepts, processes, stores, and outputs data at high speeds according to programmed instructions is vital to this enterprise. It is a key factor the success of technological application in the dissemination of knowledge in the visual arts. It is through its usage that most of the progress made in advancing knowledge today can be traced to.

Industrial Design

This is the art of designing the shape, size, or appearance of manufactured objects for human consumption. It involves almost any aspect of human living ranging from the appearance of a toothbrush, a piece of soap, a space ship, a motor vehicle, a submarine, an air conditioner, a military boot to as minute an object as a needle for surgically stitching wounds by surgeons in the operating theatre. All these objects are firstly designed by artists before they can be manufactured. In cases where the artist is not directly involved it still does not stop the artistic processes of aesthetic considerations or functionality from being adhered to.

Direct Usage of Technological Tools and Materials for Art Production

Below is a review of the artworks of artists who have directly made use of technological tools and products for the production of enduring art forms.

Chike Obeagu (b.1975)

Chike Obeagu's painting titled *Monologue*, shows the skillful use of digital photographs cropped from high quality magazines and applied unto the canvas surface using a technique the artist calls photo-collage. In many cases he has had to scan and then use digital imaging to print out large sizes or suitable portions of the human body, eyes, lips, noses, clothing items, table ware, jewelry, wine bottles, guns and several other elements most suited to his design concept at the time to make valid points pointing at the social climate of the country he loves so much, Nigeria.

Monologue is a metaphoric representation of the EndSars! Protests that shook the nation in 2020, and the unfortunate suppressive events that characterized its aftermath. Here we see a

depiction of an interrogator, in this case representing the government of Nigeria. He is dressed in black suit, with a tie, much like a civil servant, and fiddles a gun which he hides under the table. Seated opposite him is a youth of indeterminate gender who seems to be talking continuously attempting to convince the stern fellow. From the posture of the interrogator one can surmise that government is not listening. The idea is that government has got its mind made up. Let the youth yap, we know what to do. What should be a dialogue with government ends up being a monologue with only the youth exhausting their energy and getting no results. History has gotten all the facts of the matter already; we know how it all ended, in killings and suppression of the protests. The aftermath was looting of government facilities and store houses by those who could not afford to waste their energies to follow the peaceful path of the youth agenda. Furthermore, the leaders of the EndSars! Protests were rounded up and victimized while the vandals went away scot-free. It is a country of great contradiction. (Gbaden, 2021).



Fig. 1: Chike Obeagu, *Monologue*, Mixed Media Collage, 153 x 190cm, 2021

Identical Twins (Fig. 2) is executed on a pair of 61 x 61cm canvas using discarded MTN recharge cards. The cards were cut into different shapes and pasted unto the surface in no particular order. The work is predominantly yellow, the brand colour of MTN a mobile network provider in Nigeria. Dotted shades of white, red, black texts, and isolated imageries crated a galaxy of multiple tones. The thick nature of the cut-out cards created a highly tactile surface quality of real texture on the work.

The use of the same material that embody the same shade of colour to create this collage pieces on the same size of canvas, gives them an identical look. The little difference can be deduced from the speckled shades of white, red and black. Another identifiable difference on one of the panels is a cut-out piece of GLO Mobile card, another mobile network provider in Nigeria, in green shade. This goes to point up the fact that no matter how identical two things might look, there is always an identifiable difference when put under close scrutiny. In relation to plan of this research, *Identical Twins* examines the relationship between the body and mind as

identically related, complementary, interconnected and interdependent structures that are also capable of independent existence.

Though the work *Identical Twins* was created in line with the existing two-dimensional diptych structures, the thought process that led to its creation was a build up to more conceptual ways that the research tinkered with the already existing conventional two-dimensional diptych structures. The use of discarded recharge cards is also laced with metaphorical undertones that align with the objective of this research to provide “another body” for a supposedly dead material thereby giving it a renewed life (Obeagu, 2021).

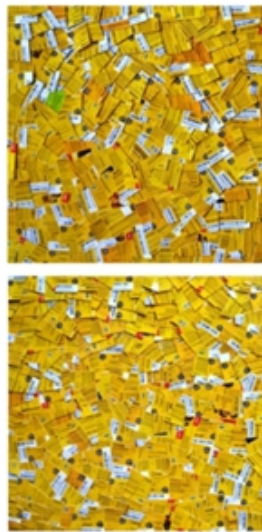


Fig. 2: Chike Obeagu, *Identical Twins (Part1)*, Mixed Media, 61x61x122cm, 2017

Obioha Nwaegbe (b.1979)

The products of technology applied in most of Obi Nwaegbe's paintings are most often discarded tin cans of soft drinks and largely of alcoholic beverages. And he makes no effort to conceal their origin as it forms a central core of his artistic expression that these items be seen as what they are and for the viewers to feel the effects such have on human society.



Fig. 3: Obi Nwaegbe, *City Girls*, Found Tin Cans on Board, 165cm x 240cm, 2021,

Princess Indrani Egharevba

Indrani uses digital painting tools to modify paintings she usually starts with acrylics on canvas. Her paintings are usually centred on her person, mostly self-portraits and then evolve over time and gradually morph into the finished product which she calls a “destination”.



Fig. 4: Princess Indrani Egharevba, *Rani x Mars*, Digital Painting, 2022

Conclusion

It is clear that technology is imperative to the growth and sustenance of the visual arts in 21st century Nigeria. It is a tool or perhaps even a weapon of great advantage to visual arts promulgation and administration both in the classroom and in the wider society. How to harness the advantages available is the responsibility first and foremost of the art teachers and culture experts in the field of education, industry players (NGA, museums, private Galleries, corporate sponsors, embassies, collectors, promoters) and also of the art practitioners themselves, and lastly of the student body we are training to take over helms of affairs in the near future.

The curriculum has to be refashioned to reflect these realities as they affect us in a local sense in Nigeria. Entrepreneurial skills are being neglected and excised from the education of artists to the sole emphasis on academic prowess which hardly helps the artist survive the harsh economic terrain of contemporary life outside the shores of our universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and most other tertiary institutions. The authors of this paper notice that this development, continuing to manifest in the 21st century will not auger well for the growth and sustainability of visual arts propagation. It will rather stunt it.

We are called upon to be active actors in this drive towards developing new curricula that would address the challenges of the 21st century. If art can be used to revolutionize progressive processes in the country, then the realities of our times must move us to re-think the educational system and how it is being run. Notice how patriotic the artists reviewed here are.

They have consistently depicted social issues as they bother on the psyche of the Nigerian youth who are at the receiving end of the brute harshness of the 21st century economy. Their art works call for change. It is for this crop of youth that change in perception would impact on in a positive way.

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