

Imperatives of Visual Art in Contemporary Nigerian Architecture

ENOBONG BENNETT EQUERE (PHD)¹, SAMUEL GREGORY EFFIONG (PHD)²

¹Department of Architecture, University of Uyo

²Department of Fine and Industrial Art, University of Uyo

Abstract - Architecture holds immense value and does reflect the identity and culture of a society. It is sometimes regarded as an art form that represents a society's ideals and goals. Art functions as a form of Architectural history, theory, and analysis, through which these values, identity, culture, and history can be expressed, maintained and sustained. Art on buildings were more commonly seen on traditional buildings. However, these values seem to be lost in Contemporary architecture. Contemporary architecture is seen to have rejected the abstract features that art previously provided. Through the review of relevant literature, this paper highlights the significance of artistic expression on the design of buildings, with special references to Nigerian examples, focusing on ways architecture can reflect social, cultural and economic values on buildings through art. The study asserts that incorporating creative arts with architecture can reflect cultural identity and heritage sustainability in our societies. Artistic elements can articulate the character and sites to foster community pride. Study findings include the importance of adopting traditional and cultural insights in architectural perspective as it pertains to Nigerian identity. It is believed that if properly harnessed, it can be of continental and global relevance as far as architectural design is concerned.

Indexed Terms- Art, Contemporary Architecture, Imperative of Visual Art, Nigeria, Traditional Architecture

I. INTRODUCTION

Art is a multifunctional concept that can be expressed in different ways. Art can be relevant in a range of practices, and within the general perspectives of life. There is art in variants of concepts including social

constructs, religion, economics, education, science, engineering, history, and more. Art allows the artist communicate latent intents, modifying thought and interpreting same to audience through diverse scopes of manipulating skills, materials, and media. Based on the aesthetic pivot of art, it is introduced to ranges of human activities to foster appeal and assimilate applications to many concepts. In this study, art is discussed as it can be applied to express the specific essence of architecture, and in particular, contemporary architecture in Nigeria. The study essence here is basically of visual art.

Architecture evolved from the essential offering of shelter and security, to intricate building designs, styles, and construction. Majorly, it is an art of fusing technical and mechanical acumen and materials to attain structures that are basically geometric in form. Architecture is sometimes regarded as an art form that represents a society's ideals and goals [1]. Historically, architecture was usually embellished with decorations and details on the elevations and other building components [2], having symbolic representations using arts and art forms. Madanovic [3] noted that different historical periods existed within specific sets of conditions, and that the dominant architectural style was an expression of those conditions and that period. Art on building facades allowed one to surmise a building's purpose through its external appearance, which in turn would arouse emotional reactions amongst people.

On the other hand, contemporary architecture, not being timebound, has been described as architecture of the moment, of what is popular or in vogue [4]; continuously evolving and borrowing styles from different era. In this era, contemporary architecture is noted for being shaped by paradigm of sustainability, energy efficiency, renewable energy sources, green

trend, recycling methods, and climate considerations; with the elements of these paradigm greatly determining the building form and appearance. Contemporary architecture is seen to have rejected the abstract features that art previously provided. The rise of modernism in architecture and planning have expelled works of art and craft from the fabric and substance of buildings [5]. More particularly, Ridwan and Eze [6] noted that the lack of traditional Yoruba housing features in modern buildings has made it hard to protect the Yoruba cultural and historical heritage and has weakened the cultural identity of the people. In another study [7], evaluating users' perspective of architectural attributes of iconic buildings in Nigeria, it was concluded that the majority of architectural landmarks in Nigeria lack cultural and lifestyle representation of the sited communities, and thereby fail in their cultural and social relevance. The study [7] further opined that the implication of this was that such architectural landmarks lack the uniqueness of local architecture and cultural potentials that may boost the economy through tourism, for instance. To sum the relevance of art in architecture, [1] assert that artistry in architecture contributes in boosting the economic values of structures through adding grandeur to edifices, raising the value and inspiring patronage. It has been observed, however, that art and traditional features on buildings were more commonly seen on traditional buildings. Omale and Ola-Ajayi [5] harp on the essence of utilisation of traditional materials, incorporation of indigenous motifs, and collaboration with local artists and craftsmen as imperatives to environmentally relevant modern architecture.

Through the review of relevant literature, this paper highlights the significance of artistic expression on the design of buildings, with special references to Nigerian examples, focusing on ways architecture can reflect social, cultural and economic values on buildings through art. The research begins with analyzing the correlation between arts and architecture. It gives an overview of art in traditional Nigerian architecture and discusses the imperative of art on contemporary architecture in Nigeria. In conclusion, it offers recommendations towards engaging arts on contemporary architecture.

II. CORRELATION BETWEEN ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Art has had significant influence on different approaches in architecture [8]. It has encouraged explorations and adaptations. Incorporating art in architecture adopts artistic elements to buoy aesthetic perspectives, providing better and relevant structures and spaces to occupy the built environments. Valenca [9] asserts that art has influenced the functionality and meaning of modern architecture. Adopting creative artistry in architecture has inspired ingenuity and innovation, it has awakened stylisations and remodeling. The correlation between art and architecture are experienced in the following ways:

A. Organisational Principles, Aesthetically Based Elements, and Perceptual Interactions.

The correlation between art and architecture has had varied distinctions. Different analogies have different concept analysis. However, Hnin [10] in his postulation sees the similarities of art and architecture as being of same organisational principles, aesthetically based elements, and perceptual interactions. The correlation between art and architecture exhibits how both disciplines employ similar elements and principles to create meaningful and impactful experiences. The use of similar design elements is the first factor of both disciplines. Similar elements and principles employed include form, space, texture, pattern, and repetition, etc. even the shared techniques as modelling, sketching, and iterating, are applicable in both disciplines at different perspectives. Sometimes geometric progressions and technicalities are effective to inculcate certain elements and principles to translate concepts as identity and aesthetics to sooth and reflect humanity. Belloni [11] opines that art is a kind of seismograph that pushes architects to look beyond the field of the unspoken, in other words, art helps the architect to express more. Hnin (2022) observes that art creates changes in architecture by certain features it inculcates in architecture. Art softens the rigidity of architectural straight edges through introducing appeal, flexibility, radiance, and regality on materials that would ordinarily be stiff. (Belloni, 2023) further states that the main functions of art in buildings, therefore, are to provide a particular type of experience, defining the

aesthetic features and values, and serve as a device to substantiate aesthetics in architecture.

B. Cultural and Historic Significance and Identity

Additionally, architecture and arts are both culturally and historically significant to the built environment. This study observes that the art-architecture combination provides insight into broader cultural, historical, social, and economic trajectories [12], that would help in analysis of society's links to the environment it was made in [1]. Abdulrahman, Adefila, Adeniyi, Salihu and Usman [13] assert that traditional ornamentalations and decorations of art could be used to customize building fabrics for promotion of regional identity. For instance, the unique feature in Hausa architecture, like the conical protruding of building tops have become characteristic architectural styles that have become identity of Hausa building structures.



Figure 1: Harmony of Architectural composition of geometric patterns, forms, and shapes with traditional Hausa art symbols. Source P- ArchitecturePorn.com

Figure 1 shows a contemporary harmony of modern architectural compositions of geometric patterns, forms and shapes, with traditional art content of the Alama Hausa signs to achieve architecture.

C. Evoking Therapeutic Essence

Art and architectural collaboration allow artistic elements in structural layouts. The harmony provides unison, fosters atmospheric fulfilment which raise social, mental, health well-being, and connection with nature and the built environment while evoking therapeutic essence in life experiences. Art in architecture modifies the complex and diverse perspectives of the environment. It encourages paradigm shifts in both disciplines, fostering new scopes and endeavours. This correlation equally

encourages architects to shift bounds, explore and adapt new materials and methods to create spaces that uplift the human spirit, transform the physical society, reflect the diversity of human creativity, and present bold statements in interdisciplinary expressionism.

III. ART IN TRADITIONAL NIGERIAN ARCHITECTURE

Igbaro, Omoru-Oke and Akinbileje [14] assert art as an integral part of the African society; that it reflects in all aspects of life especially architecture; and that artistic representations, such as traditional African motifs and modern symbols, reminisces past experiences and translates in visuals as memoriam. In Nigeria, the artistry of traditional Hausa architecture as seen in Figure 2, for instance, was expressed through elaborate engravings on the walls, crafted by skilled builders and artisans. Historically these designs were Arabic, blended with touch of traditional Hausa characters.



Figure 2: Traditional HausaArchitecture with artistic motifs.Source P- ArchitecturePorn.com

The artistic characters of Hausa scripts and motifs which are totally elements of visual arts contribute details in the Northern structural identity [15]. These features boldly pronounced the identity of their architecture. Colourful designs and decorations enhanced the aesthetic of external walls and functional quality of interior spaces. The Yoruba were known for the abstractive sculptural patterns to embellish walls and entrances. These are visible in residences, courtyards, parks, and shrines. Figure 3 shows the Visitors Reception building at the Osun Grove, UNESCO World heritage Site, Osogbo, Nigeria [16].



Figure 3: Traditional religious symbols on walls of Osun Grove, Osogbo, Nigeria. Source: [16].

The traditional Igbo architecture used a wide variety of art in their buildings. Uli wall paintings and the mural decorations were most prominent [17]. The uli painting, motifs symbols and colours served for decorations as well as symbolisms of traditions and religious meanings. In traditional Igbo architecture, decoration was not restricted to their compounds and sleeping houses only. Structures such as the Obi (the reception of the head of house), shrines and public buildings, were also often decorated. The use of the carved wooden doors was an integral part of buildings, used in doorways into the compounds of titled men (Chiefs) and houses of the wealthy. Figure 4 shows a typical Igbo decorated wall, having a decorative carved entrance gate [17]. Figure 5 also depicts a grand entrance gate to a chief's compound. The entrance gateway was a key aspect of Igbo architectural form, and the carvings, mouldings and paintings on the walls or wooden door leaves spoke of wealth and high standing in the society.



Figure 4: Typical Igbo decorated wall and carved entrance gate [17].
Source: [Http://ukpuru.tumblr.com/](http://ukpuru.tumblr.com/).



Figure 5: Entrance gateway of a Chief's compound in Nimo, Anambra State. Source: [20]

IV. IMPERATIVE OF ART ON CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN ARCHITECTURE

As earlier noted, contemporary architecture of this era is being shaped by paradigms of sustainability, energy efficiency, green trend, renewable energy sources, recycling methods, new classical style [4], and climate considerations; with the elements of these paradigm greatly determining the building form and appearance. Contemporary architectural design has long been noted for negating aesthetics, where the form is far removed from the content, and the aesthetic form is emptied of social content [18]. It is observed that the modernists approach to architecture which has influenced contemporary designs, is seen to pay more attention to innovation, abstraction, and mechanistic efficiency at the expense of human-centered and organic values in architectural viewpoints and structures [19]. Madanovic [3], asserts that architecture, which once was said to inspire a spiritual sense of wonder, has rejected its interpretative and non-tangible aspects, resulting in buildings that are no longer concerned with their relationship with humanity which tends to lead to cultural disconnect. This stand is collaborated by the view of [18] that the separation of form from content in architecture can be likened to the divorce of culture from society.

In another perspective, the art imperative in architecture is of prominent essence in universal cultures. In the African culture, it depicts the identity of the people and evinces the interests, beliefs, and preoccupation of the African about his abode. These have created structures with not just visual appeal, but natural scopes that ensure positive emotional essence,

cultural representation and heritage identity. Local architecture equally inculcates abstract features and nurture social and environment relevant essence. However, it is noted that the contemporary architecture in Nigeria is being greatly influenced by styles ranging from post-modern eclecticism, slick-tech to productivism [21]. Reference [21] posits that post-modernism seems to reject the cultural approach to design in favour of ornamentation, leaning more toward the abstract.



Figure 6: Typical contemporary residential building design, showing abstract features. Photo obtained by author.

Another example of contemporary architecture having abstract ensemble can be said to be the Makoko Floating School in Lagos, Nigeria. Designed by architect Kunlé Adeyemi [22]. The innovative structure, floating on community waters solved educational issue by offering classroom on water space. The project was an epitome of a social relevant project. It was a case of artistic interpretation of architectural essence based on climatic influences.



Fig.7: Makoko Floating School, Lagos- Nigeria.
Source: [22]

The floating school is also adorned with murals and artworks created by local artists, highlighting the strong connection between architecture and art in

contemporary African design. It goes a long way to confirm that socio-cultural and environmental factors can influence contemporary African architecture and art. These have been driving forces for innovation and sustainability in art and architecture through recycled, improvised materials, energy-efficient systems, and emphasis on ecological interests. It has birthed new styles and forms, adopting unconventional materials and methods, and has inspired the focus on creating beautiful and functional spaces while addressing social and environmental issues.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has been able to establish that inculcating art in architecture installs and reflect cultural identity and heritage sustainability in environments. Architecture can reflect social, cultural and economic values on buildings through art. Artistic elements can articulate the character and sites to foster community pride. The artistic harmony in architecture balances the stiff geometrics of technical approaches with nature. It ensures meaning and emotional relevance in structural designs. Fusing art with architecture encourages exploration, experimentation, and innovation, trends and paradigm shifts are results of such exercises. New materials, skills, and methods are derived from such innovative practices and are avenues to derive new concepts and theories, techniques and styles that further add to new knowledge and scopes to both disciplines.

In addition, driving interdisciplinary union of art and architecture modifies the complex and diverse perspectives of the environment. It encourages paradigm shifts in both disciplines, fostering new scopes and endeavours, and inspire new formations and principles to motivate and better the status-quo of the two disciplines. We make the following recommendations towards engaging arts on contemporary architecture.

From observations from the above study on artistic imperatives on contemporary architecture, the following recommendations are derived:

1. It is recommended that as much as possible, art and artistic elements should be inculcated in architecture. This balances the mechanical and technical attributes of architecture with natural

and humanistic attributes as emotional connection and social interaction. It equally fosters user engagement which is establishing relationship between humanity and the built environment. Artistic elements such as sculptures, murals, and installations, integrated in architectural edifices can inspire optical radiance and therapeutic flair in such spaces.

2. It is recommended that local culture in the guise of symbols and motifs, or cultural patterns and insignias be inculcated in architectural designs. This is a measure of responding to the surrounding, pronouncing the identity of the environment hence establishing character. These are sources of environmental aesthetics with tourism potentials and therapeutic contents.
3. Further studies are recommended due to the interdisciplinary contents. Collaborations between artists and architects can nurture new ideas and approaches, and innovative solutions to real-life issues concerning the two disciplines. Interdisciplinary collaborations stimulate creativity, encourage professionals to push boundaries, and boosts propensities to challenge conventional norms.
4. This study is recommended because it can reflect the social contents of the environment; a celebration of culture, history, and identity. This can be an avenue of inspiring communal interests, addressing social issues pertaining to the scope, and promoting positive change and community development.

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