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The Origin and Development of Formal Art Schools in Nigeria *(Pp. 502-513)*

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Abstract:

The paper traces the origin and development of art study in the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. The British Colonial Government in the country was not keen at investing on higher education. They feared that increase in knowledge through higher education might intensify the already tensed political agitation for self rule in the country. Therefore, Nigerians were only left with the difficult task of travelling abroad to acquire higher education. This was also the plight of the pioneer College and University trained Nigerian artists.

This paper investigates the eventual establishment of Art Departments in the first higher Institution built by the colonial masters in Nigeria. It traces the growth and transformation of the pioneer higher institution into the power house of art education in the country. It also looks at the subsequent establishment of many other art departments in the institutions of higher learning in post independence Nigeria. It looks at the changes over time in the course content of these art departments which today are completely indigenious. Finally, it concludes with an update of Nigerian Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education that offer art in their programmes.

Key Words: British, Art, Committee, College, University, Polytechnics.

Introduction

The British Colonial Government in Nigeria did not deem it fit to establish institutions of higher learning in the country. This was so because they felt threatened by the activities of the pro-independence politicians, who mostly acquired higher degrees from universities abroad. Therefore, they reasoned that the establishment of institutions of higher learning in the country would obviously produce more politicians and radicals, who may eventually chase them away earlier than they had planned. Nevertheless, they concentrated on their exploitative programme of commercial exploration of the best of the country's natural resources.

At best, they built few secondary schools in the Federal and Regional Capitals, which were not even enough to accommodate the large population of eligible Nigerian youths who craved for intellectual development. Also, they built technical schools where artisans were trained to meet the lower level manpower demand of the government. Such technical schools trained stenographers, carpenters, mechanics drivers, cooks and stewards. This was the plight of Nigerians up till 1952 despite the abundance of her rich natural resources which were mined by the British Colonial Government. Before this period, some Nigerian artists such as Chief Aina Onabolu, Akinola Lasekan and Ben Enwuonwu had travelled out of the country to acquire higher education and trained as visual artists.

Chief Aina Onabolu by the turn of the 20th century, had availed himself of the rare opportunity of professional training at the St John's Wood School in London and Academic Julien in Paris, France. He obtained double Diploma in Painting from both schools. Akinola Lasekan another pioneer modern Nigerian artist travelled to England and enrolled at the Hammersmith School of Building, Arts and Crafts. Before then, he had obtained a Diploma in Painting through a Correspondence College (Chukueggu 1998:18-20). Ben Enwuonwu also was trained at Goldsmith College London, Ruskin College Oxford and Slade School of Fine Arts, London. Following the arrival of these artists in Nigeria, coupled with the strong presence of the pro-independence agitators, it became obvious that the colonial government was simply buying time with regards to the establishment of institutions of higher learning in the country.

The Establishment of Technical Institutes

The unrelenting pressure mounted by Nigerians on the need to establish higher institutions in the country, as well as the demand to cater for the much

needed middle level manpower of the colonial administration, forced the British colonial government to set-up a Higher Education Committee in 1950. They ignored the suggestions of the Nigerian elites for a broad-based committee, but rather went ahead to form a two-man panel headed by the then Principal of Chelsea Polytechnic in Britain – Dr. J.P. Harlow. The other member of the panel was the Chief Inspector of Technical Education in Nigeria Mr. W.H. Thorp, (NCAST Almanac 1958/59:1). No Nigerian was either appointed or co-opted, not even was any reference made to the Nigerian elite politicians or traditional rulers on the location of the College. The colonial government accepted the recommendations of the committee and appointed a member of the panel Dr. W.H. Thorp, as the first principal of the Nigerian College of Arts Science and Technology. The College had two campuses then referred to as the Ibadan and Zaria Branches.

In 1952, the College came into existence through the ordinance No. 12 of the Colonial Government Edit. The two College Branches were officially declared open on the 27th of February 1954 by the Governor-General of Nigeria Sir J.J. Macpherson. He was supported by the then Central Minister of Education, Honourable Shettima Kashim. Consequently, the College commenced full academic activities same year with the admission of architecture students at Ibadan, while the teacher training students were sent to Zaria.

In 1955, the College introduced courses in Science and Intermediate Diploma in Fine Arts at the Ibadan branch. Another campus was later established at Enugu in the same 1955/56 academic year, this was to satisfy the agitation of the then Eastern Region led by Dr. Michael Okpara. Following this development, Architecture and Fine Arts Units that were formally operating in Ibadan were transferred to the Zaria Branch. This was the genesis of the Zaria Art School which pioneered art of education among higher institutions in Nigeria. The initial student intake into the Fine Arts programme was made up of eight students. Prominent among them were Solomon Wangboje (1931-1998) and Simon Okeke (1937-1969). Simon Okeke later in 1958, became the first president of the Zaria Art Society.

In 1957/58 academic year, the Fine Art Department was affiliated to two prominent Art Institutions based in Britain. They are, Slade School of Art and the Goldsmith School of Art. Both institutions were part of the University of London. Although, the Diploma programme in Fine Arts was for four academic years, the authorities of the Nigerian College of Arts

Science and Technology failed to convert it to degree status. This was inspite of its affiliation to the University of London. The Colonial Government was not interested in developing high level manpower for the country. Their inability to convert to degree status was one of the reasons that caused the agitation which led to the formation of the Zaria Art Society in 1958.

In 1962, the Federal Government of Nigeria converted the Zaria College to a University. Its name was changed to Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The Department of Fine Arts then began to award degrees instead of diploma. Today, it offers degrees in various areas of specialization in Fine Arts as well as the Industrial Arts even up graduate level. In 1963, the Federal Government also converted all the diploma certificates in Fine Arts which were previously awarded by the defunct college to degree certificates.

The Zaria Art School has produced many world-class artists, academics and administrators. Most of these academics and administrators consequently pioneered the introduction of art in many of the Nigerian Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, Vocational Institutes and Secondary Schools. Some of the academics are Professors Adam Baikie and Solomon Wangboje who were at same time Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Benin. Professor Baikie was also until recently the Vice-Chancellor of Nasarawa State University. Others are Professors Uche Okeke, Jimo Akolo, A. Fasuyi, Okechukwu Odita, S.A. Adetoro, Roland Abiodun, C.O. Adepegba, Benjo Igwilo, V.C. Amaefuna, P.S.O. Aremu, Chika Anikor, Chukwuanugo Okeke, to mention just a few. These great academics produced others who have continued to develop the modern Nigerian art in various institutions of higher learning across the world. There are also countless number of practicing artists in the country who directly or indirectly passed through these pioneers. Indeed, it will be difficult to exhaust here, the extent to which the graduates of the Zaria Art School have contributed to the development of art education in the country. Today, Nigerian artists are found among the political class, the Nigerian Armed Forces, the Diplomatic Service, the Organized Industries, the Media and indeed in every sphere of development in the country.

The next University to establish a Fine Arts Department was the University of Nigeria Nsukka. The founder of the University, the late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, first President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, had in 1960 intended to position the new institution as a centre of excellence. This was

why he adopted “to restore the dignity of man” as the University’s official motto and vision statement. Fine Arts was included as a course of study in the institution’s initial academic programmes in 1961. In order to realize his dream in the development of visual art in the institution, he employed the services of Akinola Lasekan, a first generation Nigerian painter, designer and cartoonist. The University also had exchange programme with the Department of Fine Art of the Michigan State University in the United States of America. Lasekan was therefore the coordinator of the new department at its inception. The first Head of the Fine Arts Department was Ms. Margaret Dunlap from the Michigan State University. She took over from Lasekan on arrival and thereafter influenced the course content of the department to be modelled after the art programme of the American institution. More foreign lecturers were subsequently recruited along with few Nigerian junior academics such as Okechukwu Odita.

Similar scenario as obtained at the Nigerian College of Arts Science and Technology, Zaria was replayed here at Nsukka, art was studied based on European academic realism. The Nigerian culture and tradition was completely neglected. This obviously was a complete deviation from the visions of the founding fathers of the institutions.

However, the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war destroyed whatever was achieved in the Art Department. At the end of the civil war, none of the pioneer foreign lecturers was interested in returning to the war-ravaged University. The post-war Vice-Chancellor Professor Hubert Kodilinye, who was faced with the challenges of reconstructing the academic programmes of the University, invited Uche Okeke then based in the United States of America to assist in the arduous task. The arrival of Uche Okeke in 1970 signalled a new beginning in the study and practice of Visual Art in Nigeria. He changed the name of the Department from Fine Arts to Fine and Applied Arts. New courses were introduced and art is study was based on Nigerian culture and tradition. Okeke (1993:37) summarizes the situation thus:

At Nsukka the first University (established in 1960 and devastated during the civil war). Students and Faculty members reassembled in 1970. The three intervening years of the war had, as it were, reconditioned the thought process of the people, more so those from the Biafran enclave. The art programme at Nsukka was restructured to meet the

demands of the new Nigerian society for an aesthetically satisfactory environment.

He argued that the form and content of the art programme of the post war University must reflect the concept of Nigerian culture and tradition. Today the artists produced by the University have pioneered the establishment of Art Departments in many Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and Secondary Schools in Nigeria. The Department has produced great artists in various fields of endeavour in Nigeria and abroad. Thus visual art study and research have continued to develop to various amazing levels in the country. Prominent among the Nsukka products include, Professors Babatunde Lawal, Obiora Udechukwu and Ola Oloidi to mention just a few.

The Next University to offer art was the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University). The Institution started offering courses in Fine Arts in 1969. The art courses at that period, was meant to service the Faculties of Education and Arts. However, in 1973/74 academic year, it started to run full degree programmes under the Institute of African Studies. The programme was in 1970 transferred to the Faculty of Arts as a full department. The Department has produced world class academics and artists, (Lawal 1984:8-9). Professor Rom Kalilu, a former Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Ladoke Akintola University, Ogbomosho is a product of the Ife Art School. The University of Benin which was established soon after the Nigerian civil war also came up with an art programme. Like the pioneer Arts Schools, the Creative Arts Department of the University has also produced world class academics and practicing artists, they include, Professors Osa Egonwa and J.T. Agberia. Many of the former students of the Department have contributed immensely towards the development of art education in Nigeria.

In the field of technical art education at the middle level manpower, the Yaba College of Technology founded in 1954 pioneered this category in Nigeria. The College has also produced great talented artists whose art studios are scattered across the country. Many of their products are also found in industries and the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria and abroad. With the exception of the above mentioned pioneer art schools, many post-civil war Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education have continued to introduce different kinds of art programmes. It is important to note that most of the pioneers of these art programmes are graduates of the Zaria Art

School. Provided in the table below shows the names of the Institutions of higher learning in Nigeria that offer art in their programmes.

From the available records, there are twenty-one Universities, ten Polytechnics and forty-eight Colleges of Education that offer art, at various levels and areas of specialization in Nigeria. However, more institutions of higher learning have also commenced the process of introducing art in their programmes. Equally interesting, is the fact that many of the Art Departments in these institutions particularly the Universities are expanding rapidly with the introduction of certificate and post-graduate programmes. This has indeed given rise to hundreds of graduates in Art that are being turned out yearly by these institutions.

Conclusion

Today, study of art in Nigeria is totally indigenous in course content, form and application. Infact, the environment where the art schools are located, have steadily gained upper hand in influencing their creative approach and orientation. This tendency has given rise to variety and multi-cultural approach in the artworks produced by Nigerian artists. Through this way, art study and practice based on the Nigerian multi-ethnic culture and tradition is gradually developed. For instance, artists who trained at the Zaria Art School or the Maiduguri Art School, have always demonstrated the Muslim influences and the Northern Nigerian culture in their paintings, textiles, graphics, sculptures and indeed all the seven studio areas of specialization. In the artists who trained at Nsukka, Ife, Benin and Abraka Art Schools, we have the manifestations of the Igbo, Yoruba, Edo and Urhobo cultural influences respectively. This is however, irrespective of the original cultural background of the artists. Chukueggu (1998:231) has it that this amazing development, no doubt has greatly projected the multi-ethnic cultural endowment of the country to the outside world. Today, artworks from Nigeria complete effectively with those from other parts of the world. The resultant effect is the establishment of Nigerian art shops in major world cities, International Airports and Hotels across Africa, Asia, America and Europe.

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Table 1: Universities that Offer Art Programmes in Nigeria

S/N	Name of University	Departmental Nomenclature	Degree Level
1	Abia State University, Uturu	Fine and Applied Arts	First Degree
2.	Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi	Industrial Arts	First Degree and Post Graduate
3.	Adekunle Ajasin University Akengba-Akoko	Creative Arts	First Degree
4.	Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	Fine Arts, Industrial Design	First Degree and Post Graduate
5.	Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma	Fine Arts	First Degree
6.	Delta State University, Abraka	Fine and Applied Arts	First Degree and Post Graduate
7.	Federal University of Technology Akure	Fine and Industrial Design	Certificate, First Degree and Post Graduate
8.	Federal University of Technology, Yola	Industrial Design	First Degree
9.	Imo State University, Owerri	Fine and Creative Arts	First Degree and Post Graduate
10	Ladoke Akintola University, Ogbomosho	Fine and Applied Arts	Certificate, First Degree and Post Graduate
11.	Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island	Fine Arts	First Degree
12.	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	Fine and Applied Arts	First Degree and Post Graduate
13.	Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye	Fine and Applied Arts	First Degree and Post Graduate
14.	University of Benin, Benin City	Creative Arts	First Degree and Post Graduate
15.	University of Lagos, Akoka	Creative Arts	First Degree and Post Graduate
16.	University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri	Creative Arts	First Degree and Post Graduate
17.	University of Nigeria, Nsukka	Fine and Applied Arts	First Degree and Post Graduate
18.	University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt	Fine Arts and Design	First Degree and Post Graduate
19.	University of Uyo, Uyo	Fine and Industrial Arts	First Degree and Post Graduate
20.	Rivers State University of Education, Rumuolumeni	Fine and Applied Arts	First Degree
21.	Wukari Jubilee University, Wukari	Fine and Applied Arts	First Degree

Table 2: Polytechnics that Offer Art Programmes in Nigeria

S/ N	Name of Polytechnic	Departmental Nomenclature	Certificate/ Diploma level
1.	Abdul-Gasua Polytechnic, Talata Mafara, Zamfara	Fine and Applied Arts	OND, HND
2.	Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi	General Arts	OND, HND, NCE
3.	Benue State Polytechnic, Ugbokolo	Fine and Applied Arts	OND, HND.
4.	Federal Polytechnic, Oko	Fine and Applied Arts	OND, HND
5.	Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu	Fine Arts	OND, NCE, HND
6.	Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna	Fine	OND, HND, NCE
7.	Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja	Fine Arts and Industrial Design	OND, HND
8.	Lagos State Polytechnic, Ikeja	Fine Arts	OND, HND
9.	The Polytechnic Ibadan, Ibadan	Fine Arts	OND, HND
10.	Yaba College of Technology	Fine Arts, Industrial Design	OND, HND

***source – Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board UTME Brochure, Version 1.0, 2010**

Table 3: Colleges of Education that Offer Art Programmes in Nigeria

S/ N	Name of College of Education	Department/Course Status	Certificate Level
1.	Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Ijankin	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
2.	Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
3.	Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
4.	College of Education Akwanga	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
5.	College of Education Ankpa	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
6.	College of Education Katsina – Ala	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
7.	College of Education, Agbor	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
8.	College of Education, Akamkpa	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
9.	College of Education, Azare	Fine and Applied Arts	NCE

The Origin and Development of Formal Art Schools in Nigeria

		(Double Major)	
10.	College of Education, Ekiadolo	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
11.	College of Education, Gashua	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
12.	College of Education, Gindiri	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
13.	College of Education, Hong	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
14.	College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
15.	College of Education, Ilesha	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
16.	College of Education, Ilorin	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
17.	College of Education, Jalingo	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
18.	College of Education, Kafanchan	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
19.	College of Education, Minna	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
20.	College of Education, Oju Otukpo	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
21.	College of Education, Oro	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
22.	College of Education, Warri	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
23.	College of Education, Zuba FTC.	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
24.	Federal College of Education Technical, Akoka	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
25.	Federal College of Education Technical, Asaba	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
26.	Federal College of Education Technical, Eha-Anufu	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
27.	Federal College of Education Technical, Omoku	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
28.	Federal College of Education Technical, Potiskum	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
29.	Federal College of Education Technical, Umunze	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
30.	Federal College of Education, Abeokwuta	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE

31.	Federal College of Education, Kano	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
32.	Federal College of Education, Katsina	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
33.	Federal College of Education, Kontagora	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
34.	Federal College of Education, Obudu	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
35.	Federal College of Education, Olene	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
36.	Federal College of Education, Pankshin.	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
37.	Federal College of Education, Yola	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
38.	Jigawa State College of Education, Gumel	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
39.	Kano State College of Education, Kano	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
40.	Kashim-Ibrahim College of Education, Maiduguri	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
41.	Kebbi State College of Education	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
42.	Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
43.	Ogun State College of Education, Ila-Orangun	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
44.	Our Savour Institute Science and Technology (College of Education) Enugu	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
45.	Oyo State College of Education, Oyo	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
46.	Rivers State College of Education, Port Harcourt.	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
47.	Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE
48.	Tai Solarin College of Education, Ijebu-Ode	Fine and Applied Arts (Double Major)	NCE

***Source – Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board UTME Brochure, Version 1.0, 2010.**