

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACCESS, POSSESSION AND PUBLIC VALUE PERCEPTION OF MODERN ART EXHIBIT VISIT IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the relationship between access, possession and public value perception of modern art exhibit visit in Akwa Ibom State. The ex-post analysis using art exhibits as experimental units is based on a retrospective study which examined an existing data from variables in eight art exhibitions held in Uyo. Effort was made to elicit by verbal procedures visitor's comments which were considered to express a range of values relating to modern art. The descriptive statistics was used for the analysis. Analysis of the data revealed that a premium was placed on the aesthetic value of beauty and pleasure respectively. The synergies between access, possession, value perception and aesthetic contemplation in promoting art exhibits visit were established.

Keywords: *Access, possession, public value perception, art exhibit*

INTRODUCTION

The modern art scene is characterized by many phenomena which defy any single definition. Most share a rejection of traditional value and many draw upon formal training or earlier styles to form ideas about Nigeria contemporary life style. The works often promote openness to the many facets of contemporary culture and the ever-changing environment occasioned by globalization. Modern art has major options in fine arts, which include painting, sculpture and printmaking. Others are the applied art which include graphics, textile design and ceramics. Other forms of art are performing art like drama, music, poetry and the liberal arts. To make this study less amorphous, emphasis is on the Fine and Applied arts which largely constitute modern art collections and exhibits visits.

The fine art tradition nay modern art romance with digital trends, with influence felt across in advertising, film, music, television and so on, represent a period of great diversity in artistic development which apply modern style to modern experience, glorify technology as the basis of modern life. This has attracted some set of attitudes towards modern art appreciation and perhaps account for its failure to satisfy the quasi-religious expectation of art (Pickstone, 1997). Technologically, it has gradually been overtaken by the camera art of photography, film and video. Some critics consider photography as a relatively scientific device unrelated to art, others see it as a tool useful in assisting artists but without much independent merit.

The development of photography has been seen as freeing painting and sculpture from practical task of recording event. (Getlein, 2002). It is further devalued by the flooding of the market with mass-reproduced copies of its finest work and is marketed in much the same way as musical albums. Art galleries use mass-marketing techniques to sell their products (Solomon, 2004). Churning out art products for a mass market as well as incorporating it to promote products seems to make fine art less sacred, more to do with entertainment and marketing as image from pure art is increasingly being incorporated into marketing efforts. The people of Akwa Ibom State have been widely acclaimed to be rich culturally. This is attested to by the fact that they formed the major chunk of the then South Eastern state of Nigeria which emerged as the overall winners in 1992 Festival of Arts (Bassey, 1976). The foundation for the rich artistic heritage is perhaps largely attributed to the existence of exotic dancers, mask carvers, masquerades and traditional institutions. The material culture is rich in varieties of wood and timber trees such as Mangrove, Ebony, Mahogany, Iroko, Bamboo, Cane, Raffia palm and oil palm.

The people are warm, accommodating with legendary cuisines. The soil is rich with numerous deposits of limestone, black clay, kaolin, oil and gas. The state is dotted with various tourist attractions which include historical buildings and monuments, political, educational institutions and luxury hotels, resorts and beaches. A variety of cultural features which include ways of life, folklore, artistic expressions etc provide valuable attractions that are beautifully preserved. A vibrant art community can be located at the University of Uyo creative art department, the imposing sculpture garden at the town campus and the state polytechnic art and design department.

Two national museums at Oron and Uyo, state owned Ibibio heritage museum, National gallery of art and strong preserve of society of Nigerian Artist, and other professional bodies and many private galleries some of which include Biuti N Glori Int'l, Drumbeats African art, Versatile ceramics, etc. Traditional art which has flourish include Ndom Annang, raffia and wood carving at Ikot Ekpene, carving and mat weaving, pottery, brass smiting and aluminum casting. However, the dwindling fortunes of traditional art are as a result of change in religious sentiments that has favoured the development of modern artistic taste. The implication of all these on value perception of modern art collection and exhibit visit makes this study imperative and desirable. The objective of this study therefore, is to explore the relationship between access, possession and public value perception of modern art exhibit visit in Akwa Ibom State.

THE OBJECT-NESS OF FINE ART

Art works, as objet d' art are vulnerable to neglect, theft, alteration and destruction. The establishment of the galleries, museums, tourism boards, ministries of art and culture is first and foremost the result of the objectness of art. The production and collection of modern arts in Nigeria has grown into a multimillion naira business with galleries located in major cities. Our art is one of the most renowned in global perspective and enjoys the artistic quality of beauty, fulfillment and social regeneration

(Dike, 2002). The National gallery of art or public access central art repositior (Weils, 1983), have been constructed with zonal branches across the Nation and other privately owned galleries. Artist regards the galleries as their agent whose function among others is to access and possess art productions for public view. The galleries are largely responsible for the enormous number of solo, group or touring exhibitions not only to attract comparatively little known artists or acquire their works while prices are still relatively low, but also reaching out to local communities.

ACCESS AND POSSESSION FACILITATION BY GALLERIES

Before the development and growth of galleries, important works floated from one collection to another, the mortality of collectors and looting of our traditional masterpieces by Europeans necessitated the emergence of galleries and museums. Galleries are basically established to preserve cultural heritage as depicted in collective artistic endeavours and exhibit same for public appreciation. The advent of national Gallery of art zonal headquarters in Uyo, Umuahia, Lagos and Abuja has spurred on extraordinary growth of interest in access and possession of artworks with diverse stylistic presentations.

Visits to art exhibits provide the needed access for the public to possess works of art gradually by viewing them repeatedly, reflecting on the formal qualities and most especially learning about them to improve on visual literacy (Getlein, 2002). The concentration of important works in gallery and private collections has tremendous consequences on appreciation and sales. Art appreciation comes with repeated exposure, evidence abound that mere repeated exposure to a stimulus is a sufficient condition for enhancement of one's evaluation of the stimulus (Zajonc 1968). Sadly, it has been observed that those who would most benefit from such repeated visits are least likely to visit the galleries (Weils, 1983).

Art galleries have throughout their history embraced a multiplicity of purposes paramount amongst these is her educational role. The consequences of lack of this public education on our visual literacy are not difficult to imagine. Prior studies on public access to art exhibition in Nigeria is primarily descriptive in nature, while this study agrees with previous ones on the educational role of the national gallery of art (Edore, 2005). Consequently it is worthy to note that, to the uninitiated appreciation and interpretation of the art forms are rarely simple and straight forward at first glance or visit.

Furthermore, studies on variations in visual perception in a targeted group identified naive and reflective interpretation of the same visual image. This method, using an image to probe for an individual basis of visual interpretation was based on the premise that, all thoughts are image based (Damasio, 1994). From these insights, there is an unquantifiable heterogeneity in visual perception, coupled with the fact that any art is a product of a cognitive process. Perhaps this could explain the inhibitions and apathy shown by the public towards art exhibits visits. To this end, the content of the work, the intention of the artist and at least the history or period must be understood to provide sufficient knowledge for appreciation (Ocvirk, Stinson,

Wigg, Bone and Cayton, 2006). The galleries both public and private by the very nature of their organization and policy are equipped with the tool for the educational purposes of teaching art appreciation. The notion that art gallery is at the core role of access, possession of artworks and education is apparent, but emphasis is on attendance at exhibits in order to benefit from her educational role.

Besides, people are exposed to artworks continually in their everyday life endeavours because we live in a visually intensive society. Visual stimulations from outdoor sculptures, bill boards, logos, mural paintings, road signs and so on form ubiquitous visual experiences. Some visual encounters are of long duration and involve direct communication and engagement, others are brief and short, such encounters often lead to fleeting romance with artworks in homes, offices, hotels and so on. Nigerian women have cultivated an insatiable appetite for couture, generally they often do amateur fashion sketch that move the design process. Carnival dancers with elaborate use of art forms during displays have consciously and unconsciously create visual awareness. Similarly visual artist are commissioned to paint portraits of people for donations to commemorate important event and enlist relationships. All these constitute an integral educational experience of the public outside the confines of the art galleries.

VALUE PERCEPTION

Studies have identified value perception as consumer behaviour which involves the process when individual or group, select, purchase, use or dispose of products, service to satisfy needs or desires (Solomon, 2004). In this study, value perceptions have been linked with modern art to determine public value perception of it because every culture has a set of values that it attaches to product and services. Thus, the desirability or otherwise of any product or service is indicative of the level of value attached to such product. In most cases societal values such as peace, pleasure seeking, good health are universal, however exceptional cases abound where individuals within a group exhibit some principles of valuation that are psychological and natural (Carver, 1998). From the foregoing, it is apparent that any value treasured by a culture therefore creates opportunities for products that might seem less valuable and translate these products into specific preferences. Since our society is evolving into universal value system as occasioned by globalization, the relative importance of modern art in the culture value system determines society's value perception towards modern art exhibit.

Art product constitutes both intrinsic aesthetic value and extrinsic values; the study has identified intrinsic aesthetic value to include the factors in art production as the artist's creativity, style, content, medium and material. While the extrinsic value comprises the price value which appreciates with time probably due to the scarcity or death of the artist. The intrinsic aesthetic value is therefore constant and at variance with the extrinsic value of rising price index. When consumers buy art products, they inadvertently pay for aesthetic satisfaction as well as buying the skill and services of the artist.

Art purchases belong to an extensive problem solving retail experience from the point of obsession to making snap decisions based on determinant attributes to ascertaining the aesthetic value of the art work. Visual ordering, pleasing colour relationship and forms are some of the pleasing aspect of art work that entice and open the threshold to an aesthetic experience. Evidently, public taste in visual matters is formed by recourse to the art objects in museums and galleries (Weils, 1983). Correlationally, Akwa Ibom and by extension the Nigerian public forms its taste and desires that informs value perception on the basis of what they see in art galleries and not necessarily on ubiquitous encounters.

METHODOLOGY

Traditionally, visitors that attend art exhibitions are duly tutored as they go around the works in the gallery and at the end they make a written comment on the visitors' book of their impressions about the works. These expressions given its aesthetic content were of interest, consequently this warranted investigation. The comments were gleaned from eight group art exhibition in Uyo from 1992-2006, and 675 diverse comments were involved. Effort was made to elicit by verbal procedures, comments which were taken to express a range of values or beliefs relating to modern art. This was grouped into six clusters of related meaning. These six clusters included comments on modern art as having aesthetic value of beauty, aesthetic value of pleasure, imprints of cultural heritage, cognitive role, money value and creativity rationale. These comments were used as parameters in measuring public value perception and cultural meanings attached to modern art.

The approach used in the data is grounded in the procedure, for rigorous interpreter analysis of comments and part-to-whole comparison from a resource based perspective. The next stage was to draw up a data table showing 6 cluster comments from 8 group art exhibit as shown on data table 1 and presented in simple statistical and percentage format. Data Table 2 presents the summary sheet that forms the basis of empirical analysis based on the comments considered.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the analysis on table 1, it was observed that out of 675 comments 17.89% saw modern art as having the aesthetic value of beauty. This showed the highest proportion in the overall. Closely followed is value of pleasure with 10.26% commentators out of 675. Thirdly it was modern art cognitive role showing 8.50% out of 675 comments. The intermediate is the cultural heritage of modern art with 6.60% out of 675 and and the least is 1.17% of modern art as creativity rationale. With this proviso the study have found that public value perception of modern art boards on the aesthetic value of beauty that humans have common physiological reaction towards the stimulus of art and are capable of having an aesthetic experience during art exhibit visit. People still appreciate arts in terms of beauty which in art circles today is considered obsolete, an out dated classical Greek historical attitude of measuring beauty in art. Apparently, this is an indictment on the need for a robust art education.

Secondly, the study has found out that public projections of their desires or assumptions on the product of art form parameters in measuring its value and determines the overall priorities that are attached to art works, which in this case have shown an orientation towards the value of beauty without a corresponding increase in money value as shown on table 2. It is instructive to note that public evaluation of a product is a result of what it means rather than what it does (Solomon, 2004).

The study has identified cultural issues like education to account for variations in attitudes within society towards art exhibits. The notion that artwork are consumed because they are instrumental in attaining more abstract values like aesthetic value, pleasure and monetary value is established. The study has also shown that aesthetic values and the artist skill in all artwork remain constant and are not always the reason for the question of rising price value. Rising prices are subject to the marketing process of art dealers and the related question of time and scarcity. The study provides insight into the antecedents and consequences of immediate or intrinsic and impulsive consumption on art product sales.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The attitudes within society towards art exhibitions are sufficient ambiguous and ambivalent resulting in the expression of range of values or comments. Result gleaned from these conclusion indicates that, public value perception of modern art borders on the aesthetic value of beauty, in spite of the fact that modern art in Nigeria evidently comes from the process of conceptual abstraction, installation and experimentation both in materials and technique. Given this scenario, the historical or classical paradigm that deals with the appreciation of beauty in time past is relevant in modern art appreciation. Moreover, beauty cues are associated with political and social issues, it is evidently that standard of beauty prevalent in popular or dominant culture tend to be adopted by other less powerful cultures and modern art in Nigeria is not all-exception.

Regardless of style, period, artist, many people apparently want to engage in art exhibits to satisfy their aesthetic urge but lack of relevant visual art education seems to add to their inhibition. Sequel to the findings, the following recommendations are preferred. There is need to encourage repeated visits to arts exhibitions to heighten experience, because human memory system has the capacity to store event information and information on event repetition (Haberstrol, 2002). Galleries should improve on the cognitive competitiveness of both the artist and the public. They should also simplify the roles governing the management of artistic events and must further encourage the growth of strong local and larger appreciative audiences through art education and exhibit visit.

Table 1: Eight Group art exhibitions in Uyo from 1992 - 2006, depicting 6 clusters of comments

Title of art exhibition	Venue	Organizers	No of wks exhibited	No. of artist involved	Yr/Duration	No. of visitors attended and commented	Beauty Value	Pleasure Value	Cultural Heritage	Cognitive Role	Money Value	Creativity Rationale
Emblemshments: An exhibition of printing and sculpture	N.M, Uyo	D.P	55	4	29/08 - 4/11 1992	34(5.04%)	10(4.02%)	8(5.71%)	2(2.22%)	7(6.03%)	5(7.94%)	2(11.76%)
Seasons of harvest: An exhibition of works by some selected Nigerians contemporary Artists	N.G.A, Uyo	N.G.A and A.K.S.G	49	24	1995	97(14.40%)	37(14.80%)	20(14.29%)	12(13.33%)	21(18.10%)	26(9.52%)	1
Women and War	N.G.A, Uyo	N.G.A, Uyo	30	4	13-7Aug 2001	56(8.30%)	32(12.85%)	15(10.71%)	2(2.22%)	4(3.45%)	1(5.59%)	2(11.76%)
Rythms of fulfilment: An exhibition of contemporary Nigerian Arts	N.G.A, Uyo	SNA, AKS in collaboration with N.G.A and AKSG	98	55	23-09-02 Oct 2002	191(28.30%)	65(26.10%)	35(25.00%)	30(33.33%)	25(21.55%)	28(44.44%)	8(47.06%)
Children in Art funfair	N.G.A, Uyo	N.G.A, Uyo	47	23	2002	63(9.30%)	29(11.65%)	9(6.43%)	10(11.11%)	12(10.34%)	3(4.76%)	-
Lines speak	N.G.A, Uyo	N.G.A, Uyo	33	4	2004	98(14.52%)	33(13.25%)	19(13.57%)	15(16.67%)	18(15.52%)	10(15.87%)	3(17.65%)
Life Style	N.G.A, Uyo	N.G.A, Uyo	38	5	25/7-10/8 2005	82(12.15%)	25(10.04%)	25(17.86%)	11(12.22%)	16(13.79%)	4(9.52%)	-
SNA "Save the Child"	N.G.A, Uyo	N.G.A, Uyo	40	15	2006	54(8.00%)	13(7.23%)	9(6.43%)	8(8.89%)	13(11.21%)	6(9.52%)	-

Source: National Gallery of Arts Data Base Depatment, Uyo

Note: Diamond Promotions (DP), Natioinal Museumn (NM), National Gallery of Arts (NGA)

Table 2: Analysis on Cluster of Comments

Total works	Total artist	Total visitors	Beauty Value	PleasureValue	Cultural Heritage	CognitiveRole	Money Value	Creativity Rationale
390	134	675	244	140	90	116	83	16
			17.89%	10.25%	6.60%	8.50%	6.08%	1.17%

Source: National Gallery of Arts database department, Uyo

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