

SHOWING THE CHALLENGES OF STUDYING THE COLLEGE TRAINED ARTISTS IN THE PROFESSIONALISM OF THEIR PROFESSION: A BARRIER TO PROJECTING NIGERIAN ARTISTS OF THE 21ST CENTURY AND POST COVID-19 ERA IN THE RESERVOIR OF WORLD ARTISTS

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Abstract

This study examined the challenges of studying the biography of the college trained Nigerian artists particularly those of the 21st century and post covid-19 Era in the professionalism of their profession. Observation shows that many Nigerian artists of both the pre and post Nigeria independence that have European art training and skill with much exposure to better art resources than ever, and with varieties of ideas, styles, and techniques of producing art which contributes to the present creative form are not documented in the professionalism of art profession. It is on this premise that the study fills the gap by directing scholarship to the possibility of achieving insightful biography of Nigerian artists in the professionalism of their profession. The paper argues that the analysis of professionalism would have projected the artists as masters of art and hardworking scholars. This lacuna has resulted to the neglect of showing the level of quality and quantity of Nigerian creative art output. It also affected the projection of the intellectual Nigerian artists in their ideas, techniques, and styles of idioms' in expressing cultural heritage. So also it reduced the patronage of art in Nigeria among other deprivations. The findings are based on biographical survey of qualitative research method and research questions which tests the objective of the study. It adopts the historical survey technique which relies heavily on primary and secondary source of data collection. The study ascertained that this subject matter lies on the students inability to subject art works to critical analysis as to their forms and meaning through the process of visual reading to identify, describe, interpret and analyze the works in terms of period, style, medium, philosophy, ideology, technique, theme, and meaning in descriptive summaries and other related observations as components of biographical study. Therefore the study establishes identification, description, interpretation, and analyzation of the iconographical feature of a work of art as components of biographical study of artists in the professionalism of their profession

Keywords: Challenges, biographical study, College Trained Artists, Professionalism, Post Covid-19-Era.

Introduction

The stiff academic work of studying the Nigerian college trained artists with reference to those of the 21st century, and post covid-19 Era that is seemingly a hindrance to projecting them to

the world, is an important subject matter in biographical studies and swayed the interest of this research. Discussing artists in the professionalism of art profession would have provided insightful biographies of those artists in the reservoir of world art. The challenges of studying the artists are reasons for which a lot of works of the intellectual Nigerian artists are left not known in their ideas, techniques, and styles of art productions. The problem becomes more compounding when some art history scholars cannot embark on biographical study of the college trained Nigerian artists. A proper and adequate study of an artist's works would show the period, style, medium, philosophy, ideology, technique, theme and meaning that guide their production. Showing the challenge of studying the college trained Nigerian artists in the professionalism of their profession, has been described in this study as; the revealing of the obstacles hindering the studying of the academic Nigerian artists in their skillful production of artworks with experimental media and innovative techniques. The visual reading of art works to indentify, describe, interpret and analyze the works in terms of period, style, medium, philosophy, ideology, technique, theme, and meaning in descriptive summaries and other related observations have been identified as the solution to studying the college trained Nigerian artists in the professionalism of the profession, irrespective of the time or era.

Conceptual Clarifications

Challenges: Challenges is the plural of challenge defined by Hornby (2010, eighth edition) as a new or difficult task that tests somebody's ability and skill. Elenwo (2021) also describes challenges as those stiff academic works hindering the investigation of something.

Biographical study: Biographical study in this context refers to the act of examining the life and art activities of an artist from birth for further academic work.

College Trained Artists: College trained artists are artists whose works show that they have learnt western art making skills; example, the Abayomi School, among others (Egonwa, 2011). These artists are also referred to as the intellectual artists described as skilled producers of any kind of artworks particularly in painting, drawing of sculpture (Elenwo, 2021).

Professionalism: Professionalism is described as "skill at doing a job" B.B.C. (1992). Okpara (2002) views professionalism as a factor that affects a recognizable creative trait of a person; a factor which manifests in a number of situations and among people in varying degrees. According to him, professionalism in art included the sequence of all the element and principles of art practice that programs through artistic products, that is, the sequence of skill acquisition in structured curriculum or tradition in a given environment, and the classical approach to works of art which ignores primary principles of professionalism, but insists on long-periods of apprenticeship in order to define creativity and originality as ability to create things in an imaginative way. This classical approach also stress that creativity and originality are more important than technical skill.

Supporting similar view is the opinion of Igbokwe (2012) that Art and Design require professionalism to be admired or adopted for any use. This therefore suggests that Artists and Designers who promote the tough of professionalism are worth awarding honour and recognition as their works show skillful master pieces to stand-out in the crowd of the unmindful. However, as discussed, professionalism cannot be complete without a mention of "Profession" the parent world. Okoh (2004) describes profession as a job with specialized

training. He also defines it as a specially desirable and dignified occupation with an implication of intellectual training and largely mental expertise''. In addition, a profession is an occupation demanding specialized skills and knowledge: requiring an extended time for their acquisition, where the practitioners carefully select and; limit the members admitted to its ranks and maintain high standard of performance through methods of self-discipline. It usually wields certain powers, not only over those who render the services it gives but also those who receive them''.

Mba (2005) views profession in a number of ways. It could simply be an occupation, that is, an activity from which one earns a living. This concept of a profession is usually used when someone is remunerated for something which everybody does without remuneration. A professional dancer, footballer or drummer is good example because one is so skilled in a particular area that he is paid to do what he does. Not just being paid but earns his living through doing that particular thing. A profession, in its most common usage, is an occupation that requires advantaged education and especially training and carries a certain social prestige. It is usually marked out from others by identifiable characters. This definition of a profession implies that it has to be specially acquired. One must undergo certain things or processes or activities in order to acquire the necessary skills. A profession must be one which commands respect. The activities and training involved make people in the society have high regard for it and for those who practice it.

Barrier to Projecting: Barrier in BBC English Dictionary refers to a thing that makes something difficult or impossible to happen or to be achieved. Projecting, according to Hornby (2010), means to present somebody to other people in a particular way, especially one that gives a good impression. Barrier to projecting therefore means difficulty in presenting people in a particular way, (Elenwo, 2021).

Nigerian Artists of the 21st Century: This refers to the intellectual Nigerian artists of the fifth decade of post Nigerian Independence that have the skill of western art productions and can produce art of many kinds in painting, drawing or sculpture among other forms of art, (Elenwo, 2021).

Nigerian Artists of the Post Covid-19 Era: These are the intellectual Nigerian artists that emerged after the period of "Coronal virus Diseases of 2019 (Elenwo, 2021).

Reservoir of World Artists: These are the internationally ranked and acclaimed modern artists, (Elenwo, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

This research study of showing the challenges of studying the college trained artists in the professionalism of art profession is guided by three theories; psychoanalysis, professionalism, and developmental/ modernization. The theory of psychoanalysis proposes that creativity wells up from unconscious drive. Therefore the future artist should disassociate with real objects and fall in love with the world as a whole. Art historians should use biographical narrative approach which takes the idea of story, iconography or significant imagery, and provide information on the benefits of art to mankind (Samuels, and Samuels, 1975). This theory enabled the researcher to make psychological enquiry about the college trained

Nigerian artists in the professionalism of their profession. It also enabled the research to document this researcher's findings as a historic record for further academic work. It notes that all information about creative expressions usually comes from oral story, memoranda and other materials. The aim is to produce rich descriptions of persons or conceptualize structural types of action which means to understand the action logics or how persons and structures are interlinked. The theory of professionalism postulates that professional groups should apply their theoretical knowledge to their professional practice so that the narrative content, symbol, emotion, and politics contained in their creative forms can be deduced (MacDonald, 1995). This theory enabled the researcher to ascertain that there are challenges in studying Nigerian artists in the professionalism of their profession. The theory is more effective problem solving as it makes for more effective innovations, financial rewards, and ethical conduct.

So also does the theory of development and modernization posit that undeveloped countries can be developed if the social variables of development such as economic, social-cultural, and political forces are adopted as modern practices (Max Webber, 1864-1920). This theory enabled the researcher to suggest to the art scholars of the possibilities of studying the college trained Nigerian artists in the professionalism of their profession.

Iconographical identification as a component of biographical study: This paper seeks to establish the appropriate analytical techniques of studying Nigerian artists particularly the college trained artists in the professionalism of their profession. It notes that subjecting artworks to visual reading, and identifying the iconographical features in them is the first appropriate analytical technique for biographical studies. Iconographical in Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English language (2013 Edition) is the adjective of iconography defined as the science of the description and study of paintings, sculpture, portraits, busts, statues, emblems and symbolism. Egonowa (2012) defines iconography as the use of images to write. Ohuoba (2013) concur with the ideas above that iconography is the study of subjects matter in art; that is, the meaning of the figures that an artist chooses to portray in a work of art. Iconographical therefore is the ability to study the signs, symbols or images in a piece of art (Elenwo, 2019). Iconographical identification refers to the ability to point out the pictorial elements in art works and arranging them in their state of appearances for further use. (Elenwo, 2021). Biographical study is the ability to investigate and provide the detail and accurate account of a person's life activities in whole or part through a systematic procedure of documentation based on in-depth and unstructured or semi-structured interviews or personal documents (Elenwo, 2019). Works of art generated from a particular aspect of need or condition of a person or events must be clarified before it can be understood. Such clarification must begin from examining the signs, symbols and images in the works. The inability of many art researchers to identify the signs, symbols and images in art works and arrange them by their nature of appearances for further academic work has been identified as the first difficulty of studying the college trained Nigerian artist in the professionalism of their profession. This paper provides guidelines on identifying and arranging art works by the pictorial elements in them for easy accessing of meanings from them. Works that are properly identified and arranged in their type of signs, symbols and images would show their periods, styles, philosophy, ideology, theme and medium, and would be use as data presentation in a biographical analysis of qualitative research thesis.

Shown below are the examples of works for iconographic identification, and include plates 1-18, Tobenna Okwnosa's work.

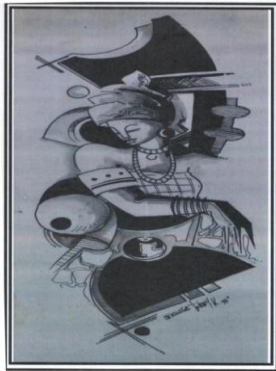


Plate 19: A dancer, 1997, ink on paper, 13x38.5cm.
 Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)

Plate 1



Plate 22: Femininity, 1997, ink on paper, 13x38.5 cm.
 Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)

Plate 2

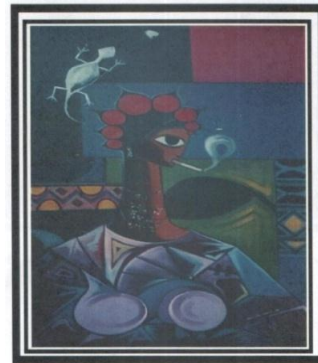


Plate 25: Negative Western Influence, 1999, oil on canvas, 66cm x 116.5cm
 Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)

Plate 3

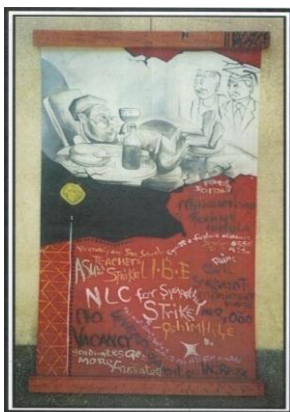


Plate 26: The way we are, 1999, acrylic leatherette and wood,
 Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)

Plate 4

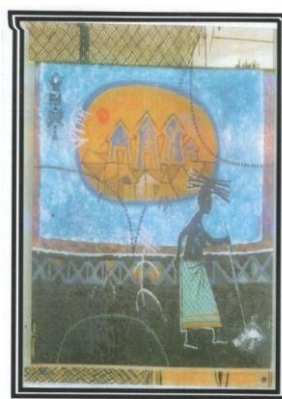


Plate 35: Leading by example, 2002 Acrylic, leatherette & wood, 41x42cm
 Source: Okwuosa T. (2003, An Exhibition of Sacred Paintings: Motherhood, Femininity, and Values)

Plate 5

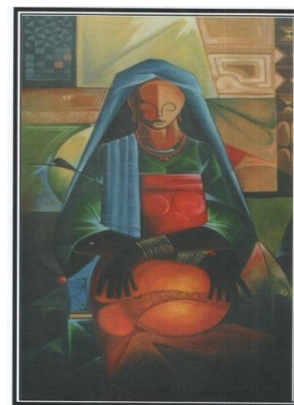


Plate 29: Chastity, 2000-2001, oil canvas
 Source: Okwuosa T. (2003, Vibration of Life – A Joint Exhibition of Paintings)

Plate 6

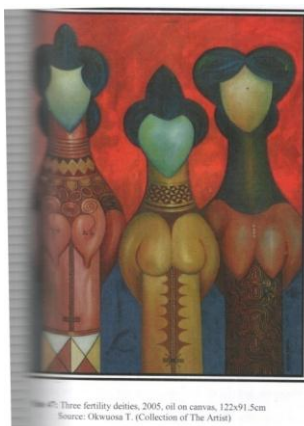


Plate 47: Three fertility deities, 2005, oil on canvas, 122x91.5cm
 Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)

Plate 7

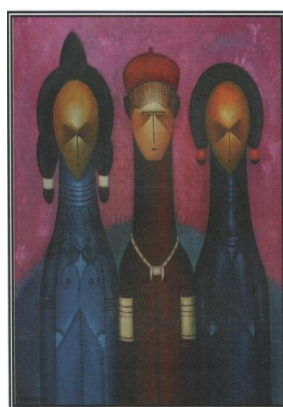


Plate 46: My grandfather with his two wives, 2005, oil on canvas, 81.5x91.5cm
 Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)

Plate 8

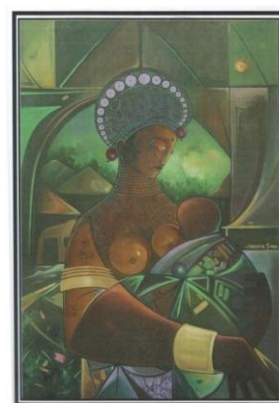


Plate 39: Affection, 2002, oil on canvas, 101.5x70cm
 Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)

Plate 9

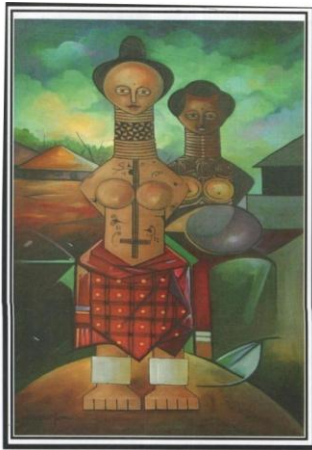


Plate 48: Women of honour, 2002 oil on canvas, 101.5x54.5cm
 Source: Okwusa T. (Collection of The Artist)

Plate 10



Plate 54: Forces of defacement, 2007, 120x84cm
 Source: Okwusa T. (Collection of The Artist)

Plate 11

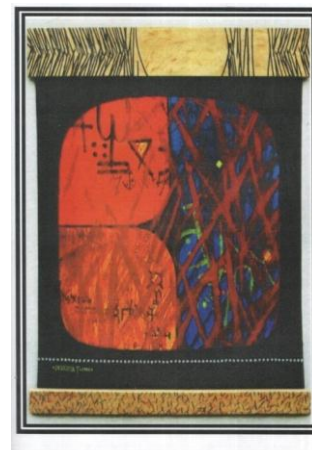


Plate 49: Mutilated history, 2006, 97x92cmx5
 Source: Okwusa T.

Plate 12

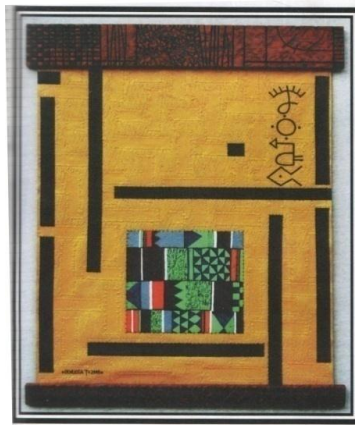


Plate 72: Another beginning II, reincarnation series, 2008, acrylic, leatherette, twine, Abura wood, 113x84cm. Source: Okwusa T. (Collection of The Artist)

Plate 13



Plate 68: The Lord's Prayer in Ife script, reincarnation series, 2007-08, acrylic, leatherette twine Abura wood, 120x74cm
 Source: Okwusa T. (2008, An Exhibition of Scroll Paintings)

Plate 14

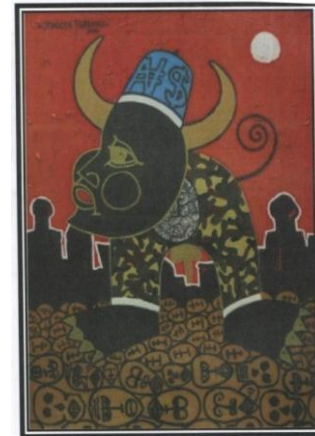


Plate 77: Greed will kill the beast 2010, acrylic on canvas textured paper, 16x12 inches
 Source: Okwusa T. (Collection of The Artist)

Plate 15

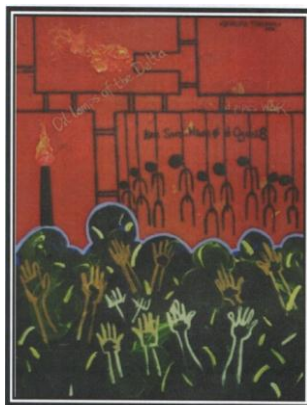


Plate 80: The pipes war I, 16x12cm, acrylic on canvas textured paper, 2010
 Source: Okwusa T. (Collection of The Artist)

Plate 16



Plate 95: Okwusa Tshema (2015), The New Face of Lagos, framed on plywood, 3 panels, each 175x175 cm
 Source: Okwusa's Ph.D. Art Exhibition catalogue (2017), Visual Dialectics of Texts and Forms on Recent Changes in Urban Spaces.

Plate 17



Plate 91: Okwusa Tshema (2014), The 'I Dae' 's, Leatherette, stencil, marker and plywood, 6 panels, each 158x158 cm. Source: Okwusa's Ph.D. Art Exhibition catalogue (2017), Visual Dialectics of Texts and Forms on Recent Changes in Urban Spaces.

Plate 18

Iconographical Description as a Component of Biographical Study

Iconographical description as a component of biographical study has also been difficult on art researchers to carry out proper and adequate study on the life and works of the college trained Nigerian artists. It has caused a drastic setback on deciding and or accessing meanings from artworks. It has also caused the neglect of disseminating information, and educating people through signs, symbols, and system of writing through pictures. This paper provides guidelines on describing the signs, symbols and images of artworks for easy accessing of meanings from the works. Iconographical description refers to the ability to explain the pictorial elements of an artwork (Elenwo, 2019).

As noted earlier, work of art generated from a particular aspect of need or condition of a person or events must be clarified before it can be understood. Such clarification must begin from examining the tangible and intangible visual elements contained in the works. This implies that the external influences in relationship to personal, social or historical information that cannot be perceived by simply observing the works are considered. Therefore iconological analysis that emphasizes identification, description, classification, and interpretation of forms, symbols and themes in visual art must be applied. Erwin Panofsky (1892 - 1968) advocates that it is a viable approach to studying the content and meaning of art works that is primarily aimed at classifying and establishing dates including other necessary fundamental knowledge concerning artworks.

In this study therefore, most works of the college trained Nigerian artists are objects of visual communication that need to be interpreted to the public. Iconographic analysis become relevant to this study because it is use to confront the issue of identifying the forms, symbols, and themes in studying the content and meaning of art works including other essential information about the works. An example of iconographic description is as shown in the meaning from one of the creative works of Tobenna Okwuosa an academic Nigerian artist. Tobenna's. Creative paintings begin from the philosophical concepts that he evolved in his search for creative identity. One of the philosophical concepts was explained in the visual readings of his paintings as thus;

Okwuosa explored through the popular technique of "ink and oil colour painting", and evolved his philosophy of Afrocentricism. He describes this philosophy as the recognition of African cultural practices in opposition to western cultural influences. With the philosophy, he produced works that reflect indigenous motifs whose aim is the promotion of Nigerian arts that is African in inspiration, as shown in the work "A dancer (1997) executed in ink, and paper. This work (plate 1 and 19) is a representation of a lady dressed in Igbo ladies dancers' costumes. The costumes include a scarf, a necklace, earring, bangles, and breast tube. There are specific symbols expressed in silhouette. Other designs and forms of social ornament from Igbo traditional cultural practices are contained in the work. The painting is monochromatic, see picture

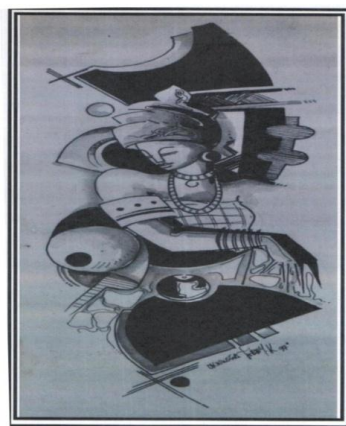


Plate 19: A dancer, 1997, ink on paper 13x38.5cm.
 Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)

Plate 19

Iconographical Interpretation as a Component of Biographical Study

Iconographical “interpretation is noted as another impediment to embarking on the proper and adequate biographical study of the college trained Nigerian artists particularly on those artists that emerged between the 21st century and post covid 19 era. This paper notes that a proper and adequate iconographical interpretation is only made when a critical visual identification and description of the features of an art work have been carried out. Iconographical interpretation refers to the ability of explaining or deciding meaning from a work of art. Interpretation of works of art usually anchors on Martin Heidegger Hermeneutics’ theory of interpretation which explains that: understanding is not an isolated act of cognition but part of human existence, and emerges from the assumptions and opinions generated by human concrete experiences in the world. Understanding therefore is rooted both in history and time and is always embedded in the observer experience (D’Alieva, 2005:123).

Artists use iconographic interpretation to disseminate information contained in a work of art to the public. They also use it to educate people on the meanings of signs, symbols or images of cultural specifics. So also does it serve as a parameter of deciding meanings of works of art. Axiomatically, works of art are better understood when their meanings are provided through interpretation of the medium, techniques, and form with particular reference to periods, styles, philosophy, and themes behind their production. These ideas agree with the theory of iconography that seeks to reveal the meaning of works of art, rather than their form. Iconography recognizes any work of art as a cultural artifact that speaks to the public through its visual language. This language is spoken through the symbolic codes, or a system of writing through pictures that is embedded in the work. (Erwin Panofsky 1892 – 1968).

Any properly interpreted work would have shown the artist’s creative philosophy, understanding of diverse media, and their application, especially when such have Afro centric and soul centric content, and the fact that the artist are fully conscious of their creative individualism. This paper provides guidelines on interpreting the signs, symbols and or images embedded in works of art in order to decide their meanings in a biographical analysis of qualitative research method. An example of iconographic interpretation is as shown below; using the meanings from Tobenna Ok|wuosa’s paintings.

Okwuosa's creative themes hinge on his creative philosophy "Afrocentricism and Soulcentricism" but revolve around Mythological and Meta-philosophical concepts. These concepts were evolved from his exploration of many African culture and western art forms by combining western art principles and traditional Nigerian themes in contemporary paintings. He reflected the old and new life styles of Nigerians, but the old life was privileged in this discourse. His work on the subthemes of Mythology *indigenous motifs* plates 1,2,19 and 20 with the caption "*indigenous Igbo motifs*" in the theme of mythology, mean *Decolonization*. The form was produced in 1997. It is typical representation of an activity in traditional Igbo community. It portrays the communal life of people of the same tribe. It also shows that every person in the world irrespective of race is a product of one source. In the portrayal of communal life, the dancer, mean celebration. The dancing is a special activity organized to make the celebration colourful and interesting. This is an area of celebration in Igbo traditional setting and involves music and masquerading which attracts performance strategy for invoking life. Plate 2 of the works in this theme attest to this claim, as it is representation of the source of human population. The work shows all the features that every human being has in common which Indicates oneness and unity. (Elenwo, 2019)

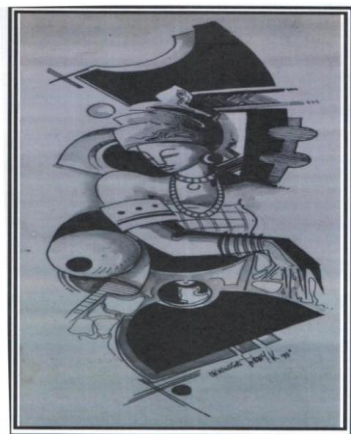


Plate 19: A dancer, 1997, ink on paper 13x38.5cm.
 Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)

Plate 20

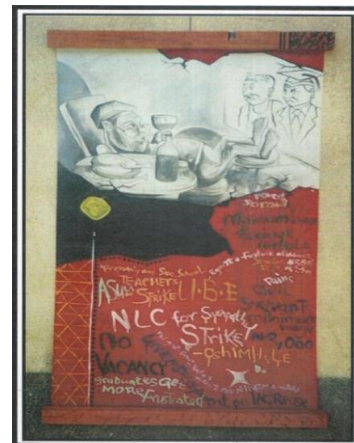


Plate 26: The way we are, 1999, acrylic leatherette and wood.
 Source: Okwuosa T. (Collection of The Artist)

Plate 21

Iconographical Analyzation as a Component of Biographical Study

Analyzing the pictorial elements in the works of the college trained Nigerian artists for proper and detail documentation of their biography in the professionalism of their profession is also a stiff academic work for many Nigerian art scholars. This situation has resulted to the dearth of literature on standard biographical analysis of the works of Nigerian artists. So also does it prevent those artists from being popular in Nigeria and other parts of the world. Data analysis offers interpretations of the data collated from the research question on field work and summaries of findings. A proper and adequate biographical data analysis would have shown the works in their meaning, creative style, techniques, medium, philosophy, theme and ideology of production. Iconographical analysis refers to the act of keeping an explicit record of information about the signs, symbols and images of a work of art for further use.

Nieuwenhuis (2010) notes that qualitative data analysis is usually based on an interpretative philosophy that aims at examining meaningful and symbolic content to interpret a specific phenomenon in his own perception of the phenomenon in terms of documentation.

Professional art works are interpreted based on observation of forms and their creative processes which agree with the ideas above. Analyzing the iconographical features of professional art works privileges contextual and iconographical analysis of historical survey research techniques because they emphasize “form and meaning” based on the context that works of art are either made to satisfy certain needs or to reflect situation that must be clarified before it can be easily, partly, or fully understood. In a biographical study, iconographical analyzation is referred to as the findings of the research.

Findings in a research are described as “the discoveries made from, or the result of a research on a subject matter. (Elenwo, 2020). Findings are components of biographical analysis and include; The photograph of the artist that is being researched upon, the artist’s training, his reason of choosing fine arts as career, his artistic influences, his favourites artist: living or dead, and the artist’s exhibition and research. Also in analysis are the artist’s selected articles and reviews, his commissioned works, his contemporaries, the chronology of his works, his creative themes and ideology, his creative philosophy, his ideology of art, his commitment to the art profession, and meanings form his works.

Biographical studies in art historical research focuses on meanings from creative works rather than the analysis of whole life or portion of a life of an artist. This paper therefore provides guidelines on studying the biography of artist using their creative works.

Recommendations

Based on the study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Art researchers especially the post graduate art history students should take advantage of this paper and be familiar with the use of picture to make proper and adequate biographical analysis of Nigerian artists.
2. These students should be encouraged with this paper to be studying the hardworking college trained Nigerian artists in the professionalism of their profession.
3. Teachers of art history at different levels of education should be subjecting their art students to regular class work and seminar on the biographical study of Nigerian artists as it will enable them to confront the issues of biographical study in contemporary art scene.
4. The scholars and students of other fields of specialization are advised to take advantage of this paper and be making detail biographical studies of the hardworking intellectuals in their respective areas of specialization, to enhance the quality and projection of those scholars of the disciplines.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the challenges of studying the college trained Nigerian artists in the professionalism of their profession. It establishes that no paper has been written in this aspect of study which constitutes the set-back on the projection of Nigerian artists. The paper therefore submits that the solution to studying artists in the professionalism of their profession is by subjecting their art works to visual reading as to identify the iconographical features in them, and describing those features, as well as interpreting, and analyzing them in descriptive summaries and other related observations. With these steps, insightful biographies of the Nigerian artist of the 21st century and post covid-19 Era would be provided in the reservoir of world artists for further academic work.

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