

# Workshop Practice and Documentation of Art Works

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## Abstract

*The focus of this paper is on the importance of workshop as it relates to the development of art in Nigeria. It evaluates the value of documentation of art works. Furthermore, the paper clarifies that the activities and creativity of previous civilizations would be better appreciated through documentation. Issues militating against the development of art works during workshop practice are examined. The paper also showcases different ways of enhancing the development of contemporary art in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Workshop practice, Art Works, Documentation, Contemporary Art.

## Introduction

Workshop is conjoined with visual activities and can be referred to as a place where people with mutual understanding and related opinions gather to carry out creative work. Tomlinson (1984) describes a workshop as a place where there is the possibility to learn how to become a skilled worker. The size of a workshop is determined by the number of people working there. A group of five people would be regarded as a very small one while the one made up of hundreds of workers can qualify as a large workshop. Apprentices are placed under the tutelage of a team leader or master who is regarded as an experienced person in the aspect of whatever he is demonstrating to the apprentice. The idea of workshop first emanated in Eulogy. As at then, it was still referred to as symposium.

Amada (2000) notes that "workshop dates back to the time of Vincent Van Gogh: the famous and controversial Dutch Painter. The export of symposium as a concept to Africa brought about the change in name to workshop".

Documentation is also known as record keeping. Hornby (1974) refers to a document as something written or printed to be used as a record or evidence." In actual fact, it is important for any skillful artist to imbibe the habit of documenting his work for future references. Unlike an Art oriented nation like Italy which is in Europe, art works are less valued in Nigeria. People treats records keeping with levity and many people are ignorant of the value of art works.

## Workshop

Workshop is the core of learning about different Materials, equipment, tools and manufacturing practices that are observed in different manufacturing functions and operations. Workshop is also of prime importance when you want to gather about the practical knowledge. Workshop practice is the backbone of the real industrial environment which helps to develop and enhance relevant technical hand skills required by the technician working in the various engineering industries and workshops. ... Workshop practice is also important since only practice can make the man perfect (Online, 2020).

There are two groups of workshop practice in Nigeria: These are: The Informal Experimentalists and the Formal Trained Intellectuals. "Because there was no Western education in Nigeria before that advent of the European", Fasuyi (1973) states that, "artists underwent training through the apprenticeship system which is usually made up of the family members of the artist at the initial stage". Interested people, in their environment, joined to learn the informal skills. Akinrujomu (2001) notes that "the training and acquisition of craftsmanship did not only flourish in art schools, apprenticeship system was also adopted to teach the crafts to non-literate communities".

Workshop experiments like Mbari club in Ibadan, Mbari Mbayo Art Center, Osogbo and Ori Olokun, Centre in Ife all came to existence because of this experience, Some members of the Osogbo school are Taiwo Olaniyi (a.k.a. Twins Seven Seven), Rufus Ogundele, Muraina Oyelami, Jimoh Buraimoh, Yemi Bisiri and Ademola Onibonokuta, among others. "The most famous and most successful in the history of the art workshops in contemporary Africa is the Osogbo Mbari Mbayo art centre" (Adejemilua, 2002). The Agbarha-Otor Harmattan Workshop Experiment founded by Bruce Onobrakpeya has also played a prominent role in promoting visual arts in Nigeria. It accommodates untrained and trained artists.

Participants are occasionally divided into small groups in a workshop for experimentation. Participants are expected to be attentive to what the instructor is teaching in the workshop before putting what they learnt into practice. The grouping enables participants to develop according to their ability without any serious emotional attachment. Also, two or more skills could be learned during workshop activities. The exercise gives participants the chance to express their views by using new materials which may either be in foreign or local form. It also promotes the selection of appropriate medium for the execution of a particular work.

As attested to by Hausman (1971) "a workshop is that which deals with materials and media and provides valuable personal experiences in the shaping of art forms". It is believed that new method of approach to art is always developed with the urge to practice with new materials. Onobrakpeya (2002) notes that, "art is a scientific course, which can be investigated and experimented with at will". He said further: "I used to investigate life...the new idea that comes to me, I use it to create new things; so there is just no way of being pigeon-holed and remaining in one particular position".

As a result of his involvement in workshops, the artist's ability to make accurate judgment about art works increases. A restless approach which Egonwa (2002) calls the "relative judgmental attitude" Egonwa (2002) explains that "the restlessness of an artist appears to bring about works that could be classified as objective, subjective and relative aesthetic judgments". He also notes:

Subjective perspective assumes it is possible for everyone to see works of art from a common viewpoint, using established criteria. Objective — means everyone has his or her taste. While relative aesthetic judgment is to be democratic (Egonwa, 2002).

Hence, workshop activities increase the assimilation depth of the participants and give them maximum exposure that will make them to arrive at relative aesthetic judgment. Through documentation, the history surrounding an art work and necessary information about it are revealed. Documentation was not done on paper or through electronic media in the past but through Radio-carbon 14 Analysis. For instance, it reveals that the Nok people were farmers and cattle rearers. Similar works produced in the traditional period were subjected to

this same radio carbon dating. Some of such works were discovered by accident." "Excavations were made at Ita Yemoo at Ile-Ife and Igbo-Ukwu, where the first objects to come to light were found by labourers that were non-archaeologists" (Shaw, 1975).

The examination done on these works revealed vital information such as the title, size and medium. Presently, documentation gives the artist the chance to keep records of his works. Art works in this regard are an integral part of the social, political and economic life of the artist.

The role of print materials like books, newspapers, photographs, calendars and greeting cards before the advent of other means such as the internet cannot be over emphasized. Dasilva (2002) refers to Onobrakpeya as an artist who "encourages his works to be used for calendars and greeting cards which are kept as records." However, some artists do not buy the idea of using their works for calendars and greeting cards due to their own personal opinions. Such attitude is not encouraging for the progress of art documentation. Dasilva (2002) lists elements of documentation. These are:

- a. Name/Signature of artist
- b. Title of work
- c. Medium/Media used e.g. water colour
- d. Size/dimensions of the work
- e. Date of Execution
- f. Objective story (about the work and other necessary details).
- g. Books/Brochures/Catalog
- h. Newspapers
- i. Photographs
- j. Audio cassettes
- k. Video
- l. Internet

Understandably, artists generate visual ideas through emphasis on aesthetic values while engaging in workshop practices. They develop the culture of asserting and re-appraising their own attitudes and values through "creation of their own art forms and appreciation of other people's work" (Hausman, 1971). The aesthetic value being appreciated in a creative work makes ancient art works and that of other climes to be subjected to continuing re-appraisal in the present time.

In this circumstance, workshop becomes extremely relevant as it transforms the lives of some participants. For instance, non-artists were trained at the Mbari-Mbayo workshop experiment organised by Ulli Beier at Osogbo in the 1960s. Adejemilua (2002) notes that "The participants were assembled from amongst actors, dancers, drummers, artisans, singers and jobless primary school leavers." The use of specific tools was learned to pre-determined ends. This system of encouraging and fossilizing non artist has worked well for a long time. Through workshop practice, "Osogbo has found its way into the world map of art's (Udoma, 2000).

At workshop experiments, standard works of art that could fit into contemporary situation have emerged. Arodu Francis' laying of evostic on boards for making relief print is termed: "evolay". Onobrakpeya (2002) has introduced new terms like bronzed relief, plastography and plastocast into the contemporary art dictionary. Filani experimented with petropolystyrene as a medium of relief printing. The same medium was used by Ademuleya Babasehinde for casting objects in sculpture.

Recently, there are some artists that have been internationally recognised as Artists of the new millennium as a result of their participation in art workshops. Some of them are Akin Onipede, Kunle Filani, Bankole Ojo, Segun Adejemilua and Tola Wewe, among others. However, there are factors affecting the growth of workshop practice and documentation of artworks in Nigeria. These are:

- Lack of finance,
- Lack of awareness
- Lack of public enlightenment
- Religious misconceptions
- Lack of diffusion of knowledge
- Lack of space
- Lack of materials and equipment and
- Lack of adequate workshop syllabus

### **Suggestions / Conclusion**

The success of any workshop depends on how adequately funded it is. In this regard, there is an urgent need for government to earmark enough capital for such project. Furthermore, donations from related charity organizations, stakeholders in the creative industry and individuals alike should be encouraged.

To create desired awareness, works of art must be publicized regularly and during Art festivals especially in the news media. Quality information about workshops should also be passed to the public through the radio, television and internet.

It is important that members of the public should have the knowledge of art. People who have difficulty differentiating between art works and an effigy should be counselled and educated.

At the end of the programmes, reports from workshops must be passed down to artist within the community. There should be enough studios or workshops for the artists to make the atmosphere conducive for the execution of works. During workshop activities, members should be taught the technique of making equipments and gadgets.

Workshop practitioners and art collectors should ensure high standard. Interest groups should endeavor to take part in workshops. Artists should partake in regular workshop activities to foster growth and improve contemporary Nigerian Art.

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