

A REVIEW OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF LAFIA CAMPUS ART GALLERY

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Abstract

This paper presents the enormous roles that university art galleries play, not only in academic context but in a broader civic and artistic term. It also discusses how University art galleries will make the work of art as products of human inspiration an integral part of campus life and the community at large. Hence, the author looks at the essential roles of most art galleries which are to collect, preserve, exhibit and interpret objects of historical significance. The paper also suggests ways the art gallery can attract students and audience for the enjoyment and education of people in the society as well as future generation. The paper is of the opinion that, this will serve the purpose of knowledge building for generation to come and as a way of enhancing art appreciation especially as it regards the role of the institution art gallery.

Key words: Art Gallery, University, Museum, Campus, Review, Institution

Introduction

Museums/galleries serve as meaningful and valuable cultural resource centres for their host institutions and the communities in the immediate environs. They are more like agents of historical, aesthetic, and scientific promotion through their collections and exhibitions to the public. Apart from that, galleries encourage a natural and individualised form of learning through a lifelong educational process, which takes a gradual increase in one's sense of art appreciation. Through this, both students and visitors experience new ideas viewing beautiful objects of cultural value, different from their culture (Encyclopedia, 2012).

In what might be interpreted as a desperate endeavour to survive; this clarification would be less to many people of good will in the gallery world who have sought, against great odds, to adapt their institutions to modern conceptions of the role of the gallery in education (Microsoft Encarta 2009). In this study, efforts would be made to review Fulafia University Art Gallery as an educational resource centre. Hence, attempts will be made to situate effective ways to establish fruitful educational roles; highlight the importance of an art gallery to students; not only that but to the entire community at large.

Art galleries in contemporary society have become learning and leisure centers due to the reinterpretation of the fundamental functions of the institutions, which placed them in the world of

education, as well as in a new and rapidly growing world of enjoyment and consumerism (Greenhill, 1994). Weil (2002) regards galleries as private/public institutions which are dedicated to study of objects meant to inspire students for higher academic activities and amazement for the institution's visitors. This makes the roles of museums and galleries to be almost the same. However, by late 20th century, museums began to shift away from a strict observance to the mission to collect, preserve, and to study toward a transformed and a rededicated institution that can use its special skill in dealing with objects just to improve the quality of lives of individuals. This means that, there is need to understand the difference between the two terms: museums and galleries.

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) defines Museum as: "a nonprofit, permanent institution in the society which is open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits products of historical value, for the purposes of study education and enjoyment of the material evidence of human creation". On the other hand, (Ikpakronyi, 2010) affirm that, gallery is a room or a building for the display of art works that existed in our communities in various forms. This definition fall short of the various roles that galleries perform in our society. In Netherlands, the word gallery indicates a commercial establishment that displays and sells works of art. According to (Schuster 1995),

and Ellen (2009) the term “gallery” is interchangeable with museum but perform the same functions, even though they are different types, concerned with helping people understand, appreciate, record historical importance, care for them, study, interpret, and exhibit for the purpose of advancement of knowledge.

In our everyday life of an academic environment, a gallery explicates how students, faculty, and the public interact with the institution through art works by visually interacting with different issues captures in the arts. From the above, one can see that both gallery and museum foster academic pursuits that defined their parent institutions which becomes a consequence that is losing some of their educational value even at the larger institution (Andrew, 2013). However, the central objective of higher institutions is to see galleries as outlet for aesthetics crucial center for teaching, learning, and expression in university education that will always make their struggle and presence felt beyond a limited learning space. “The Role of University Art Museum as well as gallery in the 21st century”, no-where on the campus has the visual arts richly represented with the nature of what constitutes the visual arts and the visual images of every kind that would confront us at every turn (Klee, 2013).

History of the Art Gallery in Nigeria

In the 20th century, a number of social forces influenced the development of museums and galleries especially the national and regional museums through great increase of gallery in the 19th century. Of course, by that early 20th century, interest of people moved towards information and educational resources in both its purposes and programmes that were developed. However, galleries were not well organized to meet the changing social condition. As a result of this, majority of campus art museums/galleries were under-developed not for anything but for lack of marketing and much emphasis focused on the debates of the nature regarding budgets and funding both from outside and inside the institutions (Dawn et-al 2013).

The years following World War II were a period of notable achievement for galleries as it has reflected national policy in the individual museum particularly as they responded to rapid change and better education society. These became an educational facility, a source of leisure activity, and

a medium of communication that also led to the rapid growth in promoting the development of facilities as competitive market entities that result to unsatisfactory primary role as a simple instrument of teaching and learning in the 1960s.

Spencer (1971) affirms that the rebirth of campus art museums/galleries were mostly created by chance donation, and for that reason, “chance may have midwived these museums/galleries and chance may determine their number, but chance will not extricate them from the problems they now face.” The writer's opinion was based on the fact that galleries and art museums, for much of their history, were valued primarily for the care and preservation of their collections as remains for generation to come. By the late 20th century, as institution became increasingly aware of the important role of galleries interpreters of culture, they attempt to bring their collections to the general public when universities have historically gathered various kinds of collections in arts. Still around the same period, institutions became important vehicle for the public about the past and for providing knowledge about a society.

In contemporary times, understanding of their functions has evolved further and such institutions are now understood to provide appealing and memorable experiences. According to Kotler & Kotler, (1998) noted that, even before the 1940's, fine arts developments often had resource centers that housed art works, including photo collections and slide libraries. These collections were primarily for use by art faculty in research and teaching (Bradley, 2009). Subsequently, the era following the 1940s saw a drastic rise in the number of art galleries and museum on campuses with an emphasis placed on acquiring valuable collections. (Bender, 1988) “University has admitted that history has seek for learning that would arrive at least university importance. And the manner of control is generally established as an arm's-length entity to ensure the procedures of institution act freely from its parent organization. More so, academic galleries and museums are naturally connected to a college or university (Tilghman, 2013). This signifies that, the role of gallery in educating people cannot be over emphasized.

Looking at art and the art gallery from the perspective view of the society is worth examining in order to understand its exact position even in the institution. This is because the struggle of artists and

the academics seems to be the reorientation of values that were found in the traditional setting. A desire to preserve their local history has led many to establish small galleries which brought about the establishment in the cities of Nigeria by its National Museums and Monument Commission (NMMC) and to also assist in developing cultural identity and promoting national unity. The National Museum built in 1955 is to preserve Nigeria art even though it is not the first museum in Nigeria but serve the purpose of a museum in Nigeria which offers people the opportunity to give their ignorance on Nigerian history a short life span. It is important to state that most universities have played a role in the dichotomy between two cultural orders; by

- official culture; preserve in art galleries, museums and university courses
- demands cultivated tests and a formally imparted knowledge (Warpole, 1995 in Frow, 1995).

A museum's importance therefore, goes beyond its buildings and collections as the perception appears to be that museums are not community places. Also, there is a rift between what museums present and what communities expect museums to present museums exist in large part in people's hearts and are part of their memories. There are physical and metaphorical barriers to visiting and enjoying museums.

The University should value artistic expression of every kind, promoting object-based scholarship throughout the curriculum, to engage a wide cross-section of the public, and by putting an end to artificial division between the creation of art and its study and appreciation. Faculty of Arts, Media and Creative Arts in Federal University Lafia can engaged with Art Schools in particular, Fine Arts, Visual and Creative Arts in context is a practical Fine-Arts course which addresses questions of sites, context, and audience in which students and staff develop an interest in the relationship between their experience as an artist. University art museums are position to appreciate bringing artist and critic/scholar closer by serving as incubators of new art and not just a receptacle, and millennia. University art galleries need to look forward and backward at the same time. A role university must adopt to create a field in which art is seen as both intensely contemporary, a work in progress if you will, as well as a preserver of cultural heritage.

Brief History of the Department Visual and Creative Art

The Department of Visual and Creative Arts is one of the first foundation departments in the Faculty of Arts of the University. Its academic activities commenced on September, 2012 with other departments like English, History, Theatre and Media Arts. The creation of the Department in 2012 formed the background of founding the University.

The department was established to preserve the nobility of the society. No doubt the department was filled with this need considering the fact that Nigeria history and culture appeared to have been consigned from time past. The university can take into account the historical and cultural aspect of the contemporary fine artists. The pioneer Vice chancellor of the University, Professor Ekanem Ikpi Braide saw the much emphasis placed upon science and technology at the expense of history, brings about the idea of the department to receive pioneer attention in the plans of the University.

The department has now grown compared to when the school was created. From the first years of its establishment, it operated with 13 academic staff and today, the department now has 19 academic staff on like what it used to have then. The department has five units where undergraduates can specialize in. The units are painting, graphics, textile and sculpture. The first Head of Department was Dr. Christ Echetta, later and now Late Dr. Dike succeeded by Prof. Sani Mu'azu Muhammed in 2015 then Dr. Ovet and now the present Head of Department is Dr. Blaise Gundu Gbaden.

Many museums and art galleries are located within local authorities and universities that have their own climate plan, for example Federal University Lafia can focus on empowering staff to bring about change to develop expertise and confidence to strengthen students' capacity and responsibility to influence. This is done to develop findings and to share learning and best practice. Fulafia Art Gallery houses many of the most important fine and decorative art works, which are designated as being of educational importance.

And if one may ask, where is the joy if a student or pupil comes into an art gallery and simply gazes at the displays and the exhibits hung on the wall of the gallery; when audience expect to be actively

involved in the exhibits either to informally learn or be entertained simultaneously (Caulton 1998) this shows that galleries can be extended and merely as warehouses for art works and scholarly research places. He went further to explain that, society often looks at art with mixed feelings. Some look at it as mere object of beauty while some look at its aspect as fetish, especially the traditional bearer. But the layman takes it as one of those talents given to men by God. Aesthetic consciousness is lacking in many individuals that is why they cannot enjoy aesthetic experience. Individuals can see visual art exhibition as entertainment, therapy, material for education, commerce, decoration, emotional attachment, historic items etc. Aesthetic education involves encouraging individuals to visit art gallery, museum, artists, and studios and attend workshop, and seminar.

Importance of University Art Gallery

Museums and galleries today are challenged to demonstrate their social relevance and to provide evidence of their community value. Both local and central government policies emphasize the need for museums and galleries to play their part in contributing to a high quality of life for the purpose of improving educational standards and alleviating social exclusion through access policies and the kind of art work they exhibit to the public. It is in view of the need to evaluate and understand the effects of cultural provision that makes campus art galleries to be seen as safe spaces for discussions that cut across national and cultural borders-conversations. Through this method, the universalizing context of the art and creativity provide a common ground for people to appreciate art and educate themselves through art.

Art galleries on Fulafia campus can become as examples of "living the global reality," as one participant put it a lesson that would not be lost on the members of today's highly national bodies whose interest and perspectives are more and more shaped by global dynamics. This is because; museums and galleries are agents of change and development in our society today. They must be seen as bodies that staged cultural events in the society which become instrument of progress by calling attention to actions and events that will encourage development in our society. Hence, Universities must make galleries to become institutions that can foster peace which must be seen as promoting the ideas of democracy and

transparency in governance in our communities. Education is critical for development and for that, if it is devoid of the cultures of the people in the society it is either empty or incomplete.

One of the basic aims of a university (campus) gallery is to educate and to impart cultural education effectively as it houses the tools and materials for doing exactly that through art collections. It also increased knowledge and understanding of people because by engaging with museum collections, Students can develop their understanding in specific areas of academic needs and grounded ways and preconceptions can be challenged for a better understanding of the world or society.

Educational visits to the gallery should be developed and encouraged to cater for all interest groups, and as we approach the turn of the century, it has to become very necessary and important for our museums to ensure that they become children friendly as stated in the 21st Century-post Conference Workshop (1999). Furthermore, galleries possess materials and information that can be used in enriching and improving school curriculum in various disciplines because its collections offer rich and dense experiences that can be recalled and value over long periods of time.

The opportunity to see, touch, and interact with objects firsthand had a profound effect on learning and impressed and effected students in many different ways which is a reason for Programmes especially school programmes to be develop for the various tiers of the school system such as primary school, secondary, colleges of education, technical colleges, and universities among others. In this way, the university gallery will boost the visual literacy of children from schools around the university who will be coming for excursion from time to time. Young people see art galleries as an attractive destination in their leisure doing duty because the gallery is yet to be collaborated as a learning laboratory and training ground for future scholars, curators and museums professionals.

This can be achieved through a variety of programmes that will integrate its collections and intellectual resources, and by remaining open to experimentation and ideas generated by young scholars. A good example is that of the final year exhibition in Visual and Creative Arts Department. It has presented three major student-curated exhibitions stalled in prime gallery space, each has

been organized by group of undergraduate students from various disciplines and each has revealed new ideas about practical training and presentation of the collections.

The Gallery teaches undergraduate students to serve as Gallery Guides, leading special-exhibition trips or excursions and thematic tours of the collections based on the students' personal areas of inquiry and study. How these roles manifested in the dichotomy and the total neglect of the fact that the collection of the gallery is the stimulant for the development of human alertness, mind, and emotions.

Conclusion

The essential part of the contemporary gallery is to promote present and protect contemporary art. Though much has not been written about galleries but government private or foreign established galleries have yielded results, to a large extent to the development of contemporary art both in Nigeria and Africa at large. Since education has become a global issue at the turn of the century, it should be understood that the gallery is a veritable institution in the learning process that should integrate fully into the educational system. Our society today must make galleries promote exhibitions that are tropical and challenging so that it can broaden the scope and not restrict themselves solely to objects and materials in their collections. Galleries must be proactive in their approach to the execution of its vision and mission, which will guide in all the institutions will do.

Recommendations

If only practicing artists can be brought together into their fold, exhibiting and commissioning their works, University galleries will foster the exciting collaboration that can occur when artist and scholar encounter one another. Federal University Lafia can engaged the services of some foremost architects and their building that would have a powerful statement about the importance placed in design, structure and aesthetics on this very campus. Broadening of policy to include the work of contemporary artists in new buildings designs, starting with the convocation hall, Theatre and Media Art Hall, where on the other advice of Dr. Blaise Gbaden, commission a wall drawing that would link both physically and symbolically.

Within the University, the Gallery actively integrates its collections into the undergraduate curriculum, enjoying particularly close relationships with the History department and others in the humanities.

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