

DEPARTMENT OF FINE AND APPLIED ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF JOS: THE AXIOM, NEXUS AND HISTORIOLOGY.

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Abstract

The establishment of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts in 2013 also known as the Jos Art School, bears credence to a long-standing historical antecedence in Plateau State. From earlier traditions of the establishments of art academies across the globe and Nigeria in particular, art sages stand on given philosophies on which they propagate and build their academies on. The Zaria Art Society and Nsukka Art School are some cases in view of the natural synthesis of indigenous forms with Western ideas (Dike & Oyelola, 1998) and the adaptation of *Uli* traditions respectively. The Jos Art School draws from the rich Nok culture and unique landscapes which started with the slogan “avant-gardes in creativity” on a philosophy geared to prepare staff and students to be creative and critical thinkers, artists, and patrons in the visual arts through dedicated teaching and practical demonstrations. This is achieved through fostering creativity and the dissemination of information through exhibitions, art-historical documentation, cultural displays, and all-around aesthetic engagements. One of the projections of the pioneering staff of the department is to have a department in today’s bustling, marketable world, the need for art programmes in the University of Jos to create compelling forms for objects seen in almost anything visual and engage in academic dialogues (Undergraduate Student Handbook, 2019). The department has had three Heads of the department from inception till date with landmark aesthetic visual culture showing in the various tenures and ongoing. This article views the axiom of Jos as a creative hub, the nexus between what was and now, and a historiology of the trends from inception till date. Projections and recommendations were also gleaned from the article to fill the lacuna of the art practice of Nigerian art space.

Introduction

The Jos Art School of the bustling Department of Fine and Applied Arts of the University of Jos as a unique School of Art, is seemingly a new kid in the block. This art school which started in the year 2013 some ten years back is living up to her expectation

by the passing day. This was corroborated in an article by Onoko (2022) titled “NGA, Unijos and the Art of Synergy”. In a speech by the Director General of the National Gallery of Art (NGA) Chief Ebeten William Ivara at an art fair organised to celebrate the achievements of the art school, Ivara

mentions that “NGA seeks to encourage the creative spirit of the Jos Art School, and recognise the immense contributions of the staff and students alike, to the growth of the art school, since its inception in 2013”. In Contemporary Nigerian art, several art schools have sprung up and are doing various things in the establishment, promotion, and propagation of the visual arts culture within and outside the shores of Nigeria. This art School, domiciled in the prestigious citadel of learning in the University of Jos and the faculty of environmental sciences, is doing exceptional things in the creative industry; while exploring new frontiers of engagements and developing the visual arts and tourism sectors. Scholars and students alike are creating works in various fields ranging from drawing, painting, textile, ceramics, graphics design, jewellery, sculpture, and other forms of the plastic arts which of course can be equated to works found in other climes of visual engagements.

Across the globe, several art schools were started based on certain philosophies by scholars who have students around them and these schools have led to the various “isms” in art which of course we study today. There and several new trends coming up with a tweak in the visual arts sector. Examples like the Araism movement started by Mufu Onifade and a team of artists, Onaism, Nogh Noghism, and Ulism just to mention but a few. These names were coined by the proponents to give significant meanings to the movements. These and many more started with a proponent or group of artists who break out from the stereotypes and thereby, advanced new styles and movements. These movements have ethnic flavours and deep-rooted philosophies which drive the production of works entrenched in the philosophy of natural synthesis. Jos as a city is known for creativity and the advancement of peace and tourism among other things. The vibrancy that is seen in the State through

various creative objects, corroborates the avant-garde outlook of the Jos creative industry as seen in the Jos art school. Research, experimentation, exhibitions, and the promotion of the visual culture are part of the unique hallmark of the Art School. It is important to note that, the arts as used is a generic term that ranges from the performing arts and also the visual or plastic arts which include but are not limited to drawing, painting, sculpture, ceramics, textiles, graphics, photography, and several other media of expressions which are emerging (Onoja, 2022). All of these are found in the expressions of the Jos art school. These media of expressions propagate the aesthetic nuances that are seen in this State while carrying messages in symbolism and poignant statements. What makes an art school unique one may ask? The collection of the sages and proteges/ proteges perhaps. The creative dreams, philosophies, experimental drives, insatiable quest for

knowledge and solving of quizzical design problems, societal engagements, and a myriad of problem-solving activities. Some may argue that the school is still a new kid on the block, however, this kid, through some proactive engagement is changing the narrative on the Jos Plateau through grants won by the staff and students to engage the society in peace discussions, various artworks commissioned by clients and collectors, working on community projects with established artists in the State like the Jos Secretariat roundabout mural project(Plate I) to give the State a befitting look executed by Mark Rwang and a team of artists. This mural has changed the visual narrative on the Jos Plateau and has become a known landmark in the state of visual arts activities. There are also several commissions in various offices and government agencies, homes, gardens, and parks which are attributed to the establishment of the Jos art school.



Plate I: Section of the Mural painting at the
J.D Gomwalk Secretariat Roundabout

The dynamic creation of works represented in the sculpture garden, vibrant gallery practice, entrepreneurially engaging press section, textile designs showing indigenous motifs and new media, interactive graphics, and the encouragement of transforming waste to wealth, in upcycling of materials, are all part of the sustainable diversifications from oil to the creative industry through upcycling and other experimentations.

Great masters are known early in their careers from the prospects they show, likewise, the Jos art school has several potentials from their earlier antecedents. This perhaps will become like the school of Athens producing great masterpieces which the world will pave a path to for visual arts tourism. By engaging

in visual arts tourism, the prospects of increasing the gross domestic product income of all the stakeholders and the country are high. More so, modern art traces its roots to Africa, and for Africa, Nigeria, Plateau State, the University of Jos, and the fledgling Jos Art School...the fresh sapling shot takes its nourishment from the root of age-long traditional arts and culture, thereby shooting out in strength. Like the *Iroko* tree which stands tall and unbendable in the storms, this growing school will provide aesthetic shade to all and sundry. There is, therefore, a call to engage actively with the periodic calls for exhibitions, make linkages and establish befitting gallery spaces for the display of masterpieces as engrained in the core value and philosophy of the Department and that of the National Gallery of Arts.

Early Start

The Department started in a small space at the Educational Media and Technology Studio of the Faculty of Education. The room served as

the office, classroom, and studio space (sometimes behind the Home Economics Laboratory restaurant) for the department. The few students admitted into the programme were resilient despite the somehow lack lustre look and poor available space of the department. The pioneer staff will always hang around in their cars as makeshift offices for privacy while awaiting lectures or attending to other administrative work. A makeshift studio space was subsequently given at the University Library complex. This new space provided additional space for work and cover from the rain as the backspace of the Home Economics Laboratory restaurant was exposed to the elements. However, there was an inferno that gutted the complex and several materials were lost bringing the department to a despondent period. These incidences, while they have the power to dampen the will of creativity and progress, the staff and students like the proverbial Phoenix, bunched back to

life with a new space at the Faculty of Environmental Sciences and an annex studio space at the Cafeteria of the Student Village Hostel which are the current places where the department is domiciled. These current spaces are by far a better improvement and advancement from the small room where the history of the department started and one can look back with a sense of nostalgia.

The Pioneer Head of Department, Staff and Students

The first substantive head of the Department was Professor Ema Ema who was appointed to pioneer and lead the affairs of the department from 2013 – 2017. His doggedness and plans to move the department forward were sometimes met with stiff resistance due to misinformation about the programme, paucity of funds, materials, and equipment, poor staffing, and a myriad of issues. Some of the staff who were moved from other departments in the university like Architecture, Science and Technology Education, Theatre and Film

Arts, and the Medical Illustration Unit to start the department came in with mixed excitement. Staff like Prof. Earnest Agoba, Mr. Babajide Lambo, Dr. John Oyedemi, Dr. Jacob Onoja, and Mr. Ephraim Dankyes were transferred from the aforementioned departments to pioneer the work after the resource verification exercise by the National Universities Commission (NUC). Other staff who joined the early pioneers include Prof. Habila Gukas from the University of Maiduguri, and Dr. Yohanna Datiri from the College of Education, Gindiri, Plateau State. These staff formed the hub of the pioneering work of the department. They researched, taught the various specializations, and actively engaged in exhibitions privately and collectively to bridge the gap in understanding of the visual arts in the university community. A good example

worthy of note is the “University of Jos at 40 Exhibition”.



Plate II: Some pioneer staff of the Department. From Left to right. Mr. Babajide Lambo, Prof. Ema Ema, Dr. John Oyedemi and Dr. Jacob Onoja.

The department started with 11 students through Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) in the 2013/2014 session and an additional 6 students through Direct Entry admission in the 2015/2016 session bringing the total of the first set to 17 students. These pioneer set after graduation have been making their marks in teaching and studio practices and handling various commissions.

S/no	Matriculation Number	Name
1	UJ/2010/ED/0690	AKPAN, ITORO ASUQUO
2	UJ/2011/NS/0305	MWAIBONG, DANIEL
3	UJ/2014/EV/0074	AGU, EMMANUEL CHIDERA
4	UJ/2014/EV/0080	SHEMFE, FAITH NENKIMUN
5	UJ/2014/EV/0082	UKENI, CHRISTIANA ONYINYECHI
6	UJ/2014/EV/0089	ONOCHE SYLVIA UCHE
7	UJ/2014/EV/0141	ANENE, CALISTUS CHUKWUBUKA
8	UJ/2014/EV/0208	FELIX, ELOHIMA LAR
9	UJ/2014/EV/0263	OTABE, JERRY
10	UJ/2014/EV/0272	EKPO, ITA ANDYNO
11	UJ/2014/EV/0306	NACHO, PHOEBE ADDAS
12	UJ/2015/EV/0052	KESWET, SAMUEL
13	UJ/2015/EV/0269	ADEBANJO, JAMES OLUSEGUN
14	UJ/2015/EV/0285	OLUWAWEMIMO, SHOLA VICTOR
15	UJ/2015/EV/0342	ROGO, NAOMI MINKE
16	UJ/2015/EV/0410	CHISHAK, GOMA LUKA
17	UJ/2015/EV/0441	KABRUK, CHIYIA DONATUS

Table 1. Students lists of the pioneer set.

The Three Eggheads of the Department

Prof Ema Ema

The Pioneering efforts of the affairs of the Department started with Prof. Ema Ema. The poor provision of start-off space and

infrastructure did not deter the dogged spirit of the pioneer Head of the Department. Several entreaties were made to the University authority and faculty without

commensurate responses. Some staff volunteered some help in terms of cash and other personal effects to move the department forward. During his tenure in office, there was the NUC resource verification and also the accreditation exercise afterward. The Department got partial accreditation from the reports of the NUC team. It is important to note that, despite the poor start of the department, Prof. Ema Ema was able to make linkages and collaborations which boosted the image of the department. Little wonder one of the pioneer students Mr. Samuel Keswet created the bust of Prof. Ema Ema (Plate I) as one of the first sculptures in the Sculpture Garden of the



Plate III: Bust of Prof. Ema Ema during the unveiling at the Sculpture Garden of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Jos.

Department. Other notable landmarks include periodic exhibitions by staff and students, workshops, and excursions to neighbouring educational institutions like the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria, Abubakar Tafawar Belewa University (ATBU) Bauchi, The Federal College of Education Pankshin among others. These visits gave the students and staff a varied outlook on the various possibilities in the various specializations and a need to keep improving and creating synergies in the creative industry. Travel is indeed learning. Ema's diverse knowledge and exposure created an enabling learning environment for the staff and students even though with little incentives.

Dr Yohanna Datiri

After the tenure of Prof Ema Ema in 2017, Dr. Yohanna Datiri, an Associate Professor of Ceramics became the head of the Department, of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Jos. During his tenure, the

department experienced remarkable development. He fought for more facilities that could house the two-in-one department conveniently. One of the struggles gave birth to a new structure that was built exclusively for the department when Prof. Sabastine Maimako was the Vice Chancellor of the university. The new edifice provided ample studios for painting, graphics, textile, ceramics, and sculpture sections. 300-level and 400-level painting studios are in the second floor, and textiles 300 and 400 levels also occupy part of the second floor. 300 and 400 levels graphics are on the first floor, while sculptures 300 and 400 levels are on the ground floor. The ceramics use part of the ground floor but had more equipment in the annex studio outside the department complex in the Students Village Hostel Complex.

There are offices and stores within the new building. On the ground floor is a printing studio with a large flex printing machine and a Direct Imaging (DI) machine. This

equipment, which was bought during Datiri's tenure, has boosted the department in terms of entrepreneurship. The students of the department do print their projects in the department with subsidies and the quality is high. This has minimised the many mistakes that students' projects do have as a result of rush and lack of understanding of the type of scholarship by some business centres. On the same ground floor is a furnished seminar room befitting for multiple functions with state of the art interactive board and other things necessary for a befitting meeting room.

Datiri struggled with the university to provide equipment that are strange to some of them due to the peculiarity of the programme. At some point, they felt the department was consuming so many resources, however, with the presence of artworks that have started decorating the university environment in the Sculpture Garden and relevant offices, the university gave in and supported by releasing

money for such purposes. Under the supervision of the Head of the department, about a hundred donkeys and thirty easels were constructed. About fifteen desktop computers currently in the resource room/library, two interactive boards, four electric kilns, fifteen sewing machines, one large flex machine, and Direct Imaging (DI) were acquired among other equipment.

Several offices were gotten for staff who were either sharing offices or hanging in the Administrative Office as it was during the early days of the department. The offices can boast of adequate furnishings with Air conditioning systems and ceiling fans. During his tenure, the first two sets of students graduated; in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Each of the sets had final-year students' exhibitions that included works from painting, graphics, textiles, ceramics, and sculptures. Samuila and Gunok (2020) explain that "the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Jos, had her

second edition of Final Year Students Exhibition from 29th January 2020 to 7th February 2020. Artworks were displayed in the Newly finished Fine and Applied Arts Edifice. About thirty-five students exhibited their works ranging from Sculpture, Ceramics, Graphics, Textiles, and Painting." Examples of some works in selected exhibitions include



Plate IV: Gwanjo Market, Oil on Canvas, 5ft x 4ft. Ngbako Shem. 2019. Photograph: Ezra R. Samuila



Plate V: Character Portraiture, Polyn Resin, 2ft high. Engom Nathan Otsa. 2019. Photograph: Ezra R. Samuila



Plate VI: Yohanna Joshua's Sculpture Project in the Sculpture Garden. 2020



Plate VII: Little Beginning, Oil on Canvas, 90cm x 100cm. Shantok Kromyon. 2020. Photograph: Ezra R. Samuila

Dr John Oyedemi Joshua

At expiration of Dr. Yohanna Datiri's tenure as Head of Department, Dr John Oyedemi was voted into office in 2021. On arrival, the department got a new boast. He continued to pursue for more materials for the department. Dr. Oyedemi came into office at the time that the department was going for its full accreditation exercise as the initial accreditation was of partial status. He got the support of all the staff members to advance this common course for the system. In the process, the university gave more resources to the department and the new Head of the department made more purchases. He got new big gas cylinders for the ceramic kiln,

customised glass tables as painting palettes and reading cubicles for the departmental library. Dr. Oyedemi set up the new library, gallery and seminar rooms into use. It is important to note that, the team spirit of the Head, staff and students gave impetus to the academic progress of the department from inception to date.

Visual Arts Workshop

The visual arts workshop was one of the major programmes during his early period of administration in the department. This programme was organized by National Gallery of Art (NGA) in collaboration with the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Jos. The Workshop which was tagged "Repositioning Visual Art Sector, Curriculum review, challenges, prospects and new media and contemporary Art Pedagogy". The workshop was packed with art issues and creative ideas. It suggested changes to

artistic perception of art and new media approach. Academic papers on art issues were presented by various lecturers like Dr. Blaise Gundu Gbaden of the Federal University Lafia and Prof. Earnest Agoba of the Department Fine and Applied Arts University of Jos respectively. The programmes were an artistic period of refreshing the creative ability of art teachers, and students both in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Questions were raised and well-articulated responses were received from the students in attendance. It is hoped that the communique reached will be implemented by the stakeholders respectively.

The Programme later ended with dignitaries viewing the exhibited works of the graduating students of the fine and applied arts department of the Institutions.

The Representative of the Governor of Plateau State, The Representative of Chairman, Plateau State Traditional Council of Chiefs, the Vice Chancellor, University of Jos was also represented by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) Academics of the institution. After which, the guests were taken to the departmental gallery as the exhibition was declared opened. The tenure of Dr. John Oyedemi Joshua came with a lot of academic programmes in the department, this has further exposed and advertised the progress of the Department to the global community. (see Plate VIII).



Plate VIII: The Curator of the exhibition Dr. Jacob Onoja discussed some works during the art fair 2022 to distinguished

dignitaries during the exhibition opening in the department of Fine and Applied Arts Gallery

Some Exhibits During the Art Fair



Plate IX: An Exploratory Study of Lamingo Dam Scene using Liquidized Technique in Painting, Acrylic on Canvas, 4 x 5ft. Nianglong Nyoimor Noel. 2021. Photograph: Ezra R. Samuila



Plate X: Terracotta, Faith Gagara. 2021. Photograph: Ezra R. Samuila



Plate XI: A Depiction of the Nsibidi Symbols on the Ancient Benin Traditional Mask in Painting. 4 x 5 ft. Acrylic on canvas, Emmanuel Onobun, 2021.

Synergies and Collaborations

The department has enjoyed a good working relationship with the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA), National Gallery of Art (NGA), Ministry of Culture, Hospitality and Tourism, Banks and Financial houses, art connoisseurs and several other agencies and parastatals in the government and the private sector. These synergies through staff and students engagements, have helped to build and building a robust visual culture in Jos the Plateau State capital and environ. The Jos Joseph Gomwalk Secretariate Junction overhead bridge mural was successfully executed with students in participation as

ready skilled human resources while still learning. Periodic exhibitions within and outside the state like that of John Oyedemi Joshua's engagements in Lagos, Port Harcourt and outside Nigeria, the Landscape and More Series staged yearly by Jacob Onoja is becoming a melting point for the media and the society at large in visual arts based issues. This project which started modestly in the University of Jos, now has a flavour of town and gown meetings on a regular ongoing bases in the month of December annually. The NGA has often supported the show through the supply of exhibition screens and other professional inputs. The tourism potentials of the state have been eulogized since the colonial era, hence, gift shops and other souvenir points patronise the creative works of the Department thereby helping in boosting the economic outputs of the participants. Art clubs, therapy centres, art talks, workshops, seminars and symposia and several other

services which the department's staff and students are rendering is helping to institutionalise the Jos art School visual culture and appreciation in the society. While we look forward to greater synergies and collaborations with stakeholders, newer frontiers are still being explored for greater productivity. Perhaps, few years from now, the narrative will be different in terms of global flavours from the Jos Art School.

Conclusion

The Jos Art School has come a long way from the early days till now and is still metamorphosing. The tedium, drills and experimentations are bringing out a new stage of untold beauty like the butterfly

emerging from the cocoon. The various sages and their contributions which are invaluable and still contributing, is bringing the art school to the forefront of contemporary practice and modernity in the visual arts space. In the words of John Keats (1817), "The excellency of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with beauty and truth". Perhaps, the established axiom which links the nexus of the struggles will bring forth a history that posterity will applaud given the beauty projected and the truth amplified in visual allegories.

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