Promotion And Sustenance of Curatorship And Curatorial Services in Nigerian Museums And Galleries

BY

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Abstract

Curatorial practice over the ages has helped in promoting and sustaining the values of visual artifacts in museum practice in Nigeria. Unfortunately, many people seem not to be aware of its existence and its values in the promotion and sustenance of contemporary artifacts. Thus, this paper is designed to examine and discuss the values of curatorship in the promotion and sustenance of contemporary Nigerian visual artefacts in museum practice towards nation building. To achieve the aim and objectives of the paper, it briefly discusses an overview of curatorship in Nigeria and its responsibilities of curatorship Nigerian visual artifacts towards nation-building. The paper further discusses the challenges and prospects of curatorship in Nigeria. This paper concludes that if special attention is given to curatorship and the necessary needs of curators are provided for the country, it is believed that curatorial practice will efficiently promote and sustain the nation's artifacts in such a way that it will generate revenue for the nations. This paper recommends that the Government and relevant stakeholders should allocate resources towards training programs and capacity building initiatives for curators and museum staff.

Keywords: Curatorship, Contemporary Nigeria, Artifacts, Nation Building.

Introduction

The values of curatorship globally can never be overemphasized in terms of its role in the promotion and sustenance of contemporary visual artifacts of a nation. The practice of curatorship in Nigeria has existed for a long time ago, but unfortunately many persons seem not to be aware of their existence in the country and their responsibility towards the promotion and sustenance of visual artifacts. This situation many curatorial practitioners have blamed it largely on lack of unawareness of people due to ineffective publicity and sensitization on the existence of curatorial practice in the country. Thus, a lot of practitioners have suffered neglect and disregard in the country, due to this situation some of the curatorial practitioners are beginning to opt for other professions which are giving room for only a few curatorial practitioners to exist in the country. Nigerian museums often struggle to reach diverse audiences, particularly those in rural areas and underserved communities. Factors such as geographic barriers, lack of transportation infrastructure, and low levels of digital connectivity contribute to this challenge, restricting access to cultural resources and educational opportunities.

The challenges curatorial practitioners face in the country gives opportunity for non- professionals to take up their jobs to curate most exhibitions in the country without any experience. This situation is regrettable, and it has made some practitioners in the country begin to be less enthusiastic and passionate for the job, despite the fact that they are very few in the country. Religious influence is also not left out as one of the challenges affecting curatorial practice in the country because some religious beliefs and doctrines see curatorial practitioners or curators as fetish people, this is another reason which has made some of them decline from the practice (Croucher, et al 2017). The challenges enumerated confronting curatorship in the country no doubt among others has adversely affected the country in protecting the nation's artifacts as expected for it to generate revenue or to

contribute towards building the nation artistically. Curatorship or curatorial practice is usually carried out by a curator. A curator is responsible for the caretaking, collection, interpretation and documentation of artifacts among others. According to Anderson (2009), a curator is the head of the curatorial department unit or other collection: the administrative head of a museum, or gallery. Anderson adds that a curator is an exhibition organiser: somebody who organizes and chooses the items in an exhibition in a museum or gallery.

Looking at the challenges earlier mentioned confronting curatorship in the country, it is supposed that if nothing is done, Nigeria will lose most of her artifacts to art smugglers hence, there is a need to act and act fast to protect the practice of curatorship in the country by protecting, promoting and sustaining the visual artifacts artistically and culturally. Adaelu (2014) believes that if there is enough awareness, education and sensitisation, the challenges curators and curatorial practices suffer will largely be surmountable and reduced to the minutest level. Adaelu adds that its protection will also contribute largely towards the building of a nation proud of its visual artifacts. Thus, this paper is interested in examining the values of curatorship and the challenges confronting its role in the promotion and sustenance of contemporary visual artifacts in a nation like ours. The paper also aims at creating greater awareness of the responsibilities of curators in protecting, promoting and sustaining the visual artifacts of the nation.

An Overview of Curatorship

In considering curatorship, it is imperative to first consider who a curator is, and the historical responsibilities of a curator in promoting and sustaining artifacts. A curator according to Hornby (1998), is a person in charge of a museum, an art gallery, etc. Horie (1986) opines that a curator is someone who carries curatorial responsibilities. Richards, G. (2024) defines curation as the meaningful and persistent selection and organization of content and experiences to relate

production and consumption and facilitate better choices to increase aesthetic value. The objects of a traditional curator's concern unnecessarily involve tangible objects of some sort, whether it is artwork, collectables, historic items or scientific collections. Relatively, Marriam-Webster (2002) states that a curator is one that has the care and superintendence of something; especially one in charge of a museum, zoo, or other place of exhibit. Camenson (2000) points out, that curator or curators are specialists in a particular academic discipline relevant to a museum's collections. They are generally responsible for the care and interpretation of all objects and specimens on loan or belonging to the museum, and they are fully knowledgeable about the history and importance of each object. As it relates to curators' responsibilities Camenson explains that a curator's responsibility is to conduct research, publish the results, give public presentations, prepare or supervise the preparation of displays and exhibits and conserve the museum collections. Camenson further explains that a curator must possess the ability to explain and interpret the collection to the public and be familiar with the techniques of selection, evaluation, preservation, restoration, and exhibition of the museum's collection.

The basic academic qualification and requirement for becoming a curator according to Camenson (2000) is an advanced degree with a concentration in an area related to the museum's collections. Camenson adds that three years experience in a museum or related educational or research facility is usually required before a candidate could advance to fill the curatorial position. Similarly, Chisholm (1911), states that curators generally hold a higher academic in their subject, typically a Doctor of Philosophy or a master's degree in subjects such as history, history of art, archaeology, anthropology, or classics. Wikipedia adds that curators are also expected to have contributed to their academic field, for example, by public talks, publishing articles, or presenting at specialist academic conferences. In the area of expertise knowledge, curators must know the current

collecting market for their area of expertise and be aware of current ethical practices and laws that may impact their organization's collecting.

Roos-Brown and Fellow (2013), while considering how one become a curator in the twenty-first century states that traditionally, a curator was required to obtain undergraduate and graduate degrees (and sometimes, a Ph.D) that allowed them to specialize in a particular area. The authors add that this specialization comes with a great deal of research and publishing typically done alone. According to Ekong (2011), curators involve the caretaking of work, providing for its safety, cataloguing and recording the marks for generations to come. Ekong adds that curatorial practice requires developing a critical eye around artistic production, offering commentary and consultation that helps artists in developing an understanding of where one can grow and where it's headed. Deducing from the meaning, explanations and assertion from the different scholar's views on curatorial practice above, it is obvious that curators are caretakers, keepers and organizers of exhibitions, and they are also responsible for the preservation, promotion and sustenance of artefacts, relics and literary documents in a country. Thus, their responsibility in the promotion and sustenance in Nigeria is vital to our nation building.

Challenges of Curatorship in Nigeria

In Nigeria, curatorship has suffered major setbacks due to the fact that a lot of persons are ignorant of its role and contribution towards promoting, preserving and sustaining the country's traditional and cultural artifacts. Also the neglect of serious attention not been given to its practice in the country has over time prevented it from laudably fulfilling its role in promoting, preserving and safekeeping of our artifact in the country. This is because only but a few curators are employed to work in our museums and galleries, the ones that are employed are not even well paid for their

good services, and no good in-service training for them among others has made a lot of the practicing curators to have less interest for the practice. Thus, this situation has adversely affected its contribution towards the building of the nation's visual and cultural artifact, in terms of promoting and sustaining the country's image artistically. Notably, it is observed that due to the challenges confronting it, some curatorial practitioners in the country are not very enthusiastic to practice because of the neglect and lack of encouragement by the government and other organisations that are saddled with the responsibility to care for curators and artefacts in the country.

Camenson (2000) while viewing funding of museums identified funding as one of the challenges of curatorship in Nigeria. This is because without finding the curators in the country will not be able to educate, promote and sustain our visual artifact for them to build a strong nation proud of her artifacts. Similarly. Adaelu (2014) identified religion as also a major challenge confronting curatorship in Nigeria. Adaelu (2014) because of the religious challenge of curatorship explains that Ufomadu narrations on the challenge of curatorship by stating that Islam and Christianity have eroded our cultural values, and the average Muslim will tell you that objects like the ancient masks are idols. Ufomadu also narrates that we all know how it is in the Christian community once you become born again, the first thing you do is to put away old things even the art objects you like and appreciate. Some person in the country also believes that for being a curator one is a member of a secret cult. This is because the curator relates with artifacts by collecting them and promoting them. Just for the fact that some Christians and Islamic worshipers relate to artifacts as idols. Most religious worshipers believe that curators who take care of them are not just cultists but idol worshipers. Thus, has discouraged some people who have an interest in going into the practice not to venture into it due to people's perception towards it.

The centre for Contemporary Arts, Lagos, Nija 247 News (2014) points out that Nigeria's culture had been eroded by Western education and religion. In the same vein, Silva (2014) also states that the Nigerian government does not formulate a good policy on art that will safeguard art and culture in the country. Silva adds that there is no friendly policy to protect the valuable culture of a country, automatically it will be stolen and eaten off by civilization. Deducing From the experience of Silva and other curatorial practitioners it is obvious that due to the influence of Western religions, education and civilization, most Nigerians has disregarded their culture and their artifacts. Thus, in the same way, curators among them are also not regarded nor valued. Therefore, it affects the visual artifacts of the nation in terms of promoting and sustaining the artefact to contribute towards the building of the nation's reputation in terms of cultural heritage,

Responsibilities of Curatorship in the Promotion and Sustenance of Contemporary Nigerian Visual Artifacts Towards Nation Building.

The preservation and sustenance of the cultural heritage of a nation has become an impulse towards its development (Ajaji, 2009). Ajaji adds that most states of the globe have come to realize that cultural heritage is an essential aspect of human life promotion, and preservation and an asset of a state. Thus, the responsibilities of curators in Nigeria over the ages in the promotion and sustenance of Nigerian visual artifacts are commendable because they have been able to promote and sustain the contemporary visual artifacts of the nation as well as literary materials among others. Although very few people know about their effort in using visual artefacts, relics and other literary materials to build the nation. Camenson (2000) identifies that curators generally are responsible for the care and interpretation of all objects and specimens on loan or belonging to the museum, and they are fully knowledgeable about the history and importance of each object. Camenson adds that they also conduct research, publish the results, give public presentations, prepare or supervise the

preparation of displays and exhibits and conserve the museum collections. Ekong (2012) acknowledges that curatorial practice as part of its responsibility educate the public about Nigeria's art heritage.

As noticed in this country, it is also the responsibility of curators working in the museums and galleries to organize exhibitions in the country as a way of promoting and sustaining visual artifacts of the nation. It is believed that regular organizing of exhibitions in and outside the country will promote the nation's artifacts in a good light. According to Obodo (2014), curators in the National Museum is entrusted the responsibility of collecting artifacts exhibit themselves and also preserve them from smugglers.

Relatively, Wikipedia (2014) opines that curators may have sole responsibility for acquisition and even collection care. Wikipedia adds that the curator makes decisions regarding what objects to take oversees their potential and documentation, conducts research based on the collection and history, provides proper packaging of art for transportation, and shares that research with the public community through exhibitions and publications. Similarly, in contemporary art days, curators have the responsibility for selecting works; the curator often is responsible for writing labels, catalogue essays, and other supporting content for the exhibition.

Perusing the responsibilities of a curator vis-sa-vis curatorship it is obvious that the responsibility of curatorship goes beyond just collecting, keeping and caring of artifacts in her custody. It is obvious that curatorship also involves the responsibility for organizing exhibitions as a way of exposing the nation's artefacts collected or in war custody for promotion or sustaining the visual artifacts and other historic items in the nation. The contribution and the responsibility of curators help in nation building because their activities bring people together and unite them. The practice

of curatorship also serves as a platform for educating Nigerians on their visual artefacts and other historic materials.

Prospect of Curatorship in Nigeria

Nevertheless, there is hope that only government and institution responsible for the promotion and sustenance of the nation's artefacts will retrace their step and value the responsibilities of curatorship in promoting and sustaining the nation's visual artefacts, and act accordingly by providing the necessary fund and tools to curators they will be able to promote and sustain the nation's artifacts as expected of them. And that gesture will also effectively contribute towards the development of the country through arts and curatorial practice. Silva (2014) in trying to give a solution to the Nigerian problem as it regards curatorial practice, explains that Spain's economy was in dilemma at a point in time but it was restored by building a gigantic museum where their cultural heritage was displayed. Silva adds that today, Spain has become a place where visitors, tourists and researchers travel for holidays and cultural research. There is no doubt if the government and people of Nigeria understand the experience of Spain and pay attention to her artefacts and build more befitting museums in the country to promote our artefacts and sustain the nation with qualified curators running the place, there is hope that the nation artefacts will promote and sustain the country. Agberia and Chukueggu (2014) warn that if this is not done, most of Nigerian's artefacts will be left to rot away.

Recommendations

The paper has discussed intensely the promotion and sustenance of curatorship and curatorial services in Nigerian museums and galleries and which therefore, makes the following recommendations:

a. Government and relevant stakeholders should allocate resources towards training programs and capacity-building initiatives for curators and museum staff. This investment would enhance professional skills, promote best practices in curatorship, and ensure the long-term sustainability of Nigerian museums and galleries.

b. There is a pressing need for infrastructure development within Nigerian museums and galleries. Adequate funding should be allocated towards the maintenance, renovation, and modernization of facilities to create conducive environments for preserving and showcasing cultural artifacts.

c. Embracing digital technologies can enhance the accessibility and outreach of Nigerian museums and galleries. Initiatives such as digitization of collections, virtual tours, and online educational resources should be prioritized to engage diverse audiences and promote cultural appreciation.

d. Establishing partnerships with local communities, educational institutions, and cultural organisations is essential for fostering a sense of ownership and inclusivity within museum spaces. Collaborative projects can facilitate knowledge sharing, cultural exchange, and the co-creation of exhibitions that reflect Nigeria's diverse heritage.

e. Government bodies should enact policies that prioritize the protection, promotion, and funding of curatorship and curatorial services. Advocacy efforts should raise awareness

about the importance of cultural heritage preservation and the role of museums in national development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the promotion and sustenance of curatorship and curatorial services are paramount for the preservation and promotion of Nigeria's rich cultural heritage. Despite facing challenges such as limited resources and inadequate infrastructure, there are opportunities for growth through investment in training, infrastructure, digital innovation, community engagement, and policy support.

By implementing the recommendations outlined above, Nigerian museums and galleries can strengthen their capacity to safeguard cultural artifacts, engage diverse audiences, and contribute to national identity, education, and tourism. Through collaborative efforts and sustained commitment, curatorship in Nigeria can thrive, ensuring that future generations continue to benefit from the wealth of cultural heritage preserved within these institutions.

The values of curation in the promotion and sustenance of contemporary Nigerian visual artifacts building towards nation building as postulated in this paper has to do with the Nigerian curators, curatorship and its responsibilities, the challenges confronting curatorship in the nation that is hindering its promotion and sustenance of the nation’s contemporary visual arts as veritable tools for building the nation. Understandably, curatorship has to do with the acquisition, collection and caretaking of artifacts by documenting, sustaining, and promoting of artifacts. Similarly, the practice of curatorship is also responsible for educating and conducting exhibiting with visual artifacts. It also involves research activities and publishes results.

This paper also acknowledged that curators suffer several challenges in the country, ranging from religious influence, western civilization, poor funding, and neglect. It is also acknowledged that the challenges curators and their jobs suffer are responsible for the reason for dwindling number of professional in the country, and the few practicing in the country are trying to make their way out of the country to practice elsewhere. Thus, this has given room for unqualified persons to practice as curators in our country, who most times compromise standards.

Notably, to be a curator it is expected that the person must obtain a higher academic degree in art history, archaeology, and anthropology or related areas like fine arts among others. Interestingly, it is worthy to suggest that if special attention is given to curatorship and the necessary needs of curators are provided for in the country, it is believed that curatorial practice will efficiently promote and sustain the nations artifacts in such a way that it will generate revenue for the nations, in such a way that it will form part of the nation's revenue base as it were with other developed and developing countries like the United Kingdom, Spain and Egypt.

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