

**WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN THE CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN ART  
EDUCATION AND CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF  
PEJU LAYIWOLA**

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## **Abstract**

*“Train a woman and you train a generation” is a Chinese proverb that is now a popular saying among the literates in contemporary Nigeria. The belief in the olden days was that the “kitchen was women’s office”. Consequently, parents and guardians declined to sponsor the education of the female children. Not only that, certain visual arts practices were seen as the exclusive rights of the males. For example, it was always considered as a taboo for women to practice sculpture and they were confined to the production of craft works such as mat weaving, basketry and traditional or local fabric weaving (aso ofi), to mention a few. This position of the pre-colonial Nigerians has since been upturned after their contact with the Europeans. The girl child has since been enjoying both educational and other opportunities with their male counterparts. The result is the presence of many women in various fields of human endeavours including visual arts. This trend is exemplified by Dr. Peju Layiwola, a renowned and erudite artist, the founder of Women and Youth (Wy) Art Foundation and also a lecturer in the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, Akoka. This paper examines the contributions of Peju Layiwola to visual arts propagation and creative development in Nigeria. It observes that her scholarly and professional activities have enhanced self-reliance among Nigerian women and youths and contributed immensely to the development of arts globally. The paper concludes that Peju Layiwola is one of the few frontline Nigerian artists whose works and achievement should be emulated by upcoming Nigerian female artists*

**Keywords: Creative-arts education, employment generation, gender involvement, global development, self-reliance, skill acquisition, workshop practice,**

## **Introduction**

“No nation can progress, without developing her art”

--- Creeh Jones

Art has always been a formidable element of African society and culture. It is often considered as a kind of mirror to the past, that is, a way of gaining valuable insights into bygone eras. It is a unique media through which African experiences are created and interpreted before the arrival of the Europeans. Mittler (2000) maintains that it is always impossible to imagine any society without art of some kind. Indeed, the visual arts, music, drama, dance and other forms of art, add a sense of pleasure to life. The art are a vital part of civilization, an essential part of any culture. They are the universal language through which human beings express their dreams, aspiration, ideas and their feelings. They make it possible for all of us to communicate, understand and appreciate each other. The arts have always been and always will be the language of civilization. Mittler posits that by starting at the beginning and observing the development of art from year to year, decade to decade, century to century, we can see that the origins of today’s arts are to be found in the art of the past.

## **What is Art Education?**

The term “art education” is a combination of two salient words or concepts, “art” and “education”. To understand this phrase, it is necessary to define them independently. Without gainsaying, the term has been defined in various ways by many scholars according to how they have related to them. From the various attempts made at defining both art and education by various scholars, it shows that the two do not agree with one or a single definition. Wangboje (1989) cited in Adedokun (2001) as well as Emi and Adekoya (2011) maintains that several scholars have attempted to define art, and it could be stated as a summary of their definitions that art is a universal language through which an artist expresses himself to other

people irrespective of differences in spoken language or communication tool that makes it possible for the artist to interact with people in a psychic manner. In another definition, Emu Ogumor (2007) in his book, *Certificate Art for Junior Secondary Schools* sees art generally as a way of life and as the power of doing anything. To him it means any skill, trade, craft or acquired expertise. He maintains further that it is the study and creation of things in forms, texture, lines and colour which gives pleasure to the mind and satisfies our sense of beauty.

Similarly on education, Oduolowu (1999) notes that education as a concept does not lend itself to a precise definition. She maintains that education has been defined in various ways by several authors. For example, the Hornby (2000) defines it as “the systematic training and instruction of people especially the young ones in schools and colleges” The training process involves acquiring knowledge and abilities. Taiwo (1980) cited in Odolowu (1999) also defines education as the training of young people to enable them grow up and develop into adults who can fend for themselves, live in a society and be of service to that society. Lawal, (2004) concurs with the opinion of Odolowu when he posited that education as a concept is very difficult to pin to a particular definition, because the definition of education varies from one scholar to another as the concept may be perceived from different angles. He however claims that the concept has been traced to two Latin words; “Educere” and “Educare” by education scholars. He maintain further that while “Educere” can be interpreted as “to draw out or to lead out”, Educare on the other hand means “to nourish”, “to bring up or to raise”.

Putting the summary of the definitions of the two concepts (art and education) together, one can then define “art education” as the systematic way by which people are exposed to art training to assist in developing the artistic or creative talents in them such that the knowledge, skills and the abilities they already acquired will be enough for them to take care of themselves without necessarily waiting for someone to fend for them.

## **Provenance of Art Education in Nigeria**

Oloidi, (1995) claims that what is referred to as “art education and creative development” today, in Africa and particularly in Nigeria started with the activities and singular efforts of Chief Aina Onabolu (1882-1963) an indigene of Ijebu-Ode, in Ogun State, southwestern Nigeria. Regarded as the patriarch or the Father of Modern Nigerian art and also the genius and the defender of African creativity – he was the first to teach art as a subject in any of the Nigerian schools. Supporting the foregoing, Babalola, (2004) affirms that the history of contemporary Nigerian art definitely evolved with the advent of the great sage and art educationist, Aina Onabolu, who not only excelled as a painter per excellence, but also carved a niche for himself in pioneering art education in Nigeria. He maintains that not much was going on in the West African sub-region on contemporary art before 1920 when Onabolu began the struggle to make art education recognized as a viable formal school subject.

## **Other Factors that Contributed to the Growth of Modern Nigerian Art**

While it is generally accepted that the history of modern or contemporary Nigerian art began with the pioneering efforts of Aina Onabolu in Lagos, a lot of other factors in other parts of Nigeria contributed significantly to the growth and development of contemporary Nigerian arts. These include the contribution of Kenneth Crosworth Murray (1902-1972) who was employed in 1928 from Britain to teach art in Nigeria consequent upon Aina Onabolu’s request and recommendation. Other people in the pioneering group who also contributed to the growth and development of modern art include J.D. Akeredolu, Akinola Lasekan, Adam J. Udo Ema and Festus Omo Idehen to mention a few.

The emergence of various art schools/institutions across the country and workshop centres significantly contributed immensely to the development of contemporary art in

Nigeria. Typical example is Oye-Ekiti Catholic workshop ran by Father Kelvin Carroll which Asobele, Timothy (----) claims were established in 1948 basically for traditional carvers. This was during the colonial era. Asobele posits that the proprietor of the workshop, Father Kevin Carroll at that time was desperately looking for Nigerians carvers who can make artworks for the church that were needed as visuals teaching aids for converts. Similarly, the Mbari experiment/workshop was first established at Ibadan by Ulli Beire in 1961 before Duro Ladipo established Mbari Club at Osogbo. Babalola, (2004) maintains that most of the participants in it were primary school drop-outs, local carpenters and bricklayers (all interested artisans). Babalola, asserts further that owing to the positive impact which the workshop had on the community, it was called Mbari Mbayo (meaning, “If I see (it), I will be happy”).

Also in the late 1990s precisely in 1998, Bruce Onobrakpeya established Agbahar – Otor Harmattan Workshop first in Lagos but moved it to Ughelli in Delta State due to lack of adequate space. Agbahar-Otor workshop is an annual event where professionals, academic artists, students of art and artists in training gather to learn new things – skills, techniques, materials, media and also exchange ideas. The workshop which is open to both male and female participants, regardless of age and status, also features all aspects or areas of visual arts, vis-à-vis sculpture, painting, ornamenting smithing, etc.

Amoda (2002) traces the history of workshops to the time of Vincent Van Gogh, the famous and controversial Dutch painter and his contemporaries. According to him, the objective then was simply to find a common ground on which studio practice could be explored. He also notes that it was called symposium then and it still exist in the east European countries because of the high level of intellectual debates, and experimentations generated therefrom. The experiments conducted then produced very exciting art pieces from

participants who seek to express ideas in medium that are usually not within the range available to them in their studios.

Amoda notes further that the export of the symposium to the Western world and Africa brought about the change in name to workshops. The compelling reasons behind initiating art workshops in Africa are the same as when they were first started in Europe; this which was to provide a platform for the exchange of ideas across cultures and continents. It is also believed that they would provide the needed stimuli and confidence that would allow artists to be more adventurous in creativity and move in different directions.

Recently, Princess Dr. Peju Layiwola established the Women and Youth (Wy) Art Foundation whose focus is on women and youths. Its philosophy, among others, is to equip women and youths with necessary artistic skills as a means of empowering them economically thereby making them self reliant capable of facing the present economic challenges in Nigeria.

### **Female Artists and their Emergence in Nigeria Art Scene**

Female participation in modern Nigerian art, particularly visual art did not start or become noticeable and significant until after independence in 1960 when many art institutions were established and female children were admitted into formal art schools. With the founding of the Nigerian College of Art, Science and Technology in Zaria in 1959 which later transformed to Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Osabele maintains that by 1960, the year of independence, such students as Simon Okeke, Yusuf Grillo, Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, Isiaka Osunde, Jimoh Akolo and Bruce Onabrakpeya had been enrolled in Zaria school and had since been blazing the trail in the field of fine and applied arts.

Interestingly, with the establishment of more tertiary institutions with art department like University of Nigeria (UNN) Nsukka 1961, University of Ife now Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ile-Ife (1972), University of Benin (UNIBEN) Benin City in Edo State

1972, University of Lagos, Akoka-Lagos, Yaba College of Technology, Yaba-Lagos, the Polytechnic Ibadan, and various Colleges of Educations across the length and breadth of the country, ex-students (graduates) of Zaria school found their ways into these art departments and continue the propagation of art education. Thus, we have people like Yusuf Grillo at Yaba Tech., Solomon Irren Wangboje first at OAU, Ile-Ife where he established “*Oriolokun art group*” before he later moved to Uniben and Agboola Folarin. Also in the list is, Uche Okeke at UNN, Kolade Osinowo at Yaba Tech., etc.

With the activities of these Zaria graduates in their various schools, subsequently, art began to spread like a wild fire and we now have a mixture of the old and the new generation art teachers. Although at the initial stage, the first generation of art students in the university were mostly men as we can see from the list above, nevertheless, few females artists emerged among this generation of artists mentioned above. They include, Afi Ekong, Clara Etso Ugbodaga (Mrs. Ngu) and Toyin Oguntona. Subsequently, the number of females who attended formal art schools grew and has continued to grow ever since. Before this period, the belief in the olden days was that “kitchens were women’s office”. Consequently, parents (fathers) declined to sponsor the education of the female children. Not only that, some visual arts practice was seen as the exclusive or birth right of the males. For instance, it was considered as a taboo for any girl child to practice sculpture and painting except craft works such as mat weaving, basketry and traditional or local fabric weaving (aso ofi) to mention a few.

Thomas Buser (2006) asserts that the above position of parents has since been upturned after their contact with the Europeans as the girl child now enjoys both educational and other opportunities with their male counterparts. This is with special reference to a large extent to the southwestern part of Nigeria where there is the availability of many women in various fields of human endeavours including visual arts. Banjo (2015) observes that it



appears as if an embargo on women's practice of visual arts was lifted in 1980s when several women artists emerged in the Nigerian art scene. Some blossomed for only a while and many who could not withstand the rigours of practicing art reverted to teaching and others committed themselves to full-time house wives' roles. A handful of them who held fast to the profession continued to practice irrespective of daunting social problems. Bromulor (2001) cited in Banjo (2015) notes that presently, Nigeria can boast of numerable female professional artists – painters, sculptors, printmakers, textile designers and ceramists.

### **Contributions of Women or Female Artists in the Nigerian Art Education and Creative Development Scene**

“What a man can do, a woman can do better”, says an adage. The contributions of women or female artists in the Nigerian art education and creative art development scene cannot be underestimated. Since the period women were exposed to art education, they have showcased their artistic prowess in various ways. Banjo (2015) observes that Nigerian female artists, like their male counterparts who have made immense contributions to various arts at the global level, have excelled in arts such as textiles, calabash decorations, body decoration/adornment, wall decoration and mat, basket and fabric weaving. Banjo notes further that their level of involvement became noticeable during the second half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The influence of formal training in visual art on these women cannot be overemphasized. Majority of them were beneficiaries of Aina Onabolu agitation to include art into the Nigerian educational curriculum.

With the above statement one observe that female artists do not feel inferior to their male counterparts in the art profession. Many female artists have achieved great things by contributing to the growth of modern Nigerian arts through their works. For example at a

time in Nigeria, Mrs. Chris Funke Ifeta (now a Doctor) emerged as the President of the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA).

Many people are of the opinion that there are specific areas of the art where females could excel. These areas include graphics, textile, ceramics, painting and art education. Sculpture has always been a great challenge to females in the field of visual arts, this could have resulted from the nature of the course. Among all the branches of art, sculpture is more rigorous, simply because it requires more mental, creative and physical skills for its execution.

Sculpture involves cutting and fabricating metal, wood carving, casting as well as moulding. These sculptural techniques involve carrying heavy objects. Most importantly, it is time consuming than the other visual arts which perhaps discouraged and reduced the population of female artists in the practice. Hence, we have very few women in that area of visual arts. However, despite all the aforementioned tasks involved in sculpture, some women have been able to cross these professional hurdles. To be mentioned in this regard are Dr. Funke I feta, a first class graduate (sculpture) from the famous Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria; Princess Elizabeth Olowu also a graduate of the University of Benin (UNIBEN); Yemi Ajewole-Alade a graduate of the Polytechnic, Ibadan and Yetunde Ogundana a graduate of Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo.

Nwanze (2007) cited in Banjo (2015), lists notable female Nigerian artists to include Veronica Afigbo Ekpe, Otigbo Ekpei, Afi Ekong, Rosemary K Akede, Chinyere Ndubuisi, Vera N Nwajokoh and Theresa Lucky Akinwande. Banjo concludes that the efforts made by these creative women for years have contributed greatly to the number of female Nigerians that practice visual art today. They served as eye openers to the members of the public on creative thinking, feelings, and mood of the artist.

Apart from the names mentioned above by Nwanze, a good number of female artists have emerged in the Nigeria artistic scene and performing wonders. They include; Dr. Chris Funke Ifeta (sculptor and painter) of the Department of Creative Arts, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun State; Dr. Ronke Adesanya (painter) of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan; Mrs. Akinlami, (textile designer) Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo; Lara Ige (painter) at Yaba College of Technology, Yaba, Lagos and Dr. Mrs. Ayodele Otunaya, (textile designer) at Federal College of Education, Osiele, Abeokuta. Others are Lovina Onwupa Nee Onoche (textile designer) at the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, Ngozi Omeje (Ceramist) at the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Dr. Princess Peju Layiwola, a renowned and erudite artist/founder of Women and Youth (Wy) Art Foundation and also a lecturer in the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, Akoka to mention a few.

### **Background and Contributions of Peju Layiwola to art propagation**

Peju Layiwola an Associate Professor of art is one of Nigeria's leading female artists. She was born in 1967 in Benin City, the capital of the present Edo State in the south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria, to Babatunde and Elizabeth Olowu. She is the granddaughter of Oba Akenzua II. She said she inherited her artistic talents from her mother who is also an accomplished artist. Peju Layiwola attended Emotan Nursery and Primary School in Benin, Edo State between 1970 and 1977, and later gained admission to St. Maria Goretti College for her Secondary Education, which she completed at Federal Government Girls College, Benin City. (TASUED Cenvos 2013 Entrepreneurship Day Brochure)

Taye Oseiza (2011) informs that Peju Layiwola grew up to be a passionate lover of art and has made tremendous efforts and contributions to this cause. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Applied Arts from the University of Benin, a Master of Arts (M.A.) and a Doctor of

Philosophy (Ph.D) in Art History from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. She was once a lecturer at the University of Benin and the University of Ibadan, and currently teaches art at the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, Akoka. As an erudite and practicing artist, she has participated in several art exhibitions, attended art workshops among which is the Agbaha-Otor Harmattan Workshop where she featured as a facilitator on regular basis. Peju Layiwola has also received several awards both locally and internationally.



**Plate 1: Portrait of Dr. Peju Layiwola**  
© Women and Youth Art Magazine, 2011

Peju Layiwola founded the Women and Youth (Wy) Art Foundation in 2004. She had always nursed the dream to pass on her talents to the younger generations, - something she has been able to accomplish through the platform of the Art Foundation. Today she sits on

the board of this organization and has lived to witness her dream blossom. The Wy Art Foundation was set up to equip women and youth with necessary skills as a means of empowering them economically. Through the annual hands-on workshops, the foundation pull a large number of people particularly youths from far and near to Lagos for training in goldsmithing, millinery, bead-work, gemstone faceting, wirework, and other professional areas of jewellery production. They also teach tie-dye, ceramics, crafts, baking and sugar craft as well as a broad range of other art activities thereby creating a future for the Nigerian youths. Besides these workshops, the Wy Art Foundation introduced the first educational DVD on art in Nigeria.



**Plate 2: Dr. Peju Layiwola Serving as Facilitator of Bronze Casting and Jewelry at Agbarha – Otor Harmattan**

**Workshop**

© Agbarha – Otor 2002 Rhythms of the Forces



**Plate 3: Dr. Peju Layiwola displaying one of the knitted bags produced by participants at one of the Wy Art Foundation**

workshops

© Women and Youth Art Magazine, 2011



**Plate 4: School children (participants) and a facilitator at one of the**

Wy Art

**Foundation workshops © Women and Youth Art Magazine,**

**2011**



**Plate 5: Women participants and a facilitator at one of the Wy  
Art  
Magazine, 2011  
Foundation workshops © Women and Youth Art**



**Plate: 6 Children participants working on beads at one of  
the Wy Art**

**Foundation workshops © Women and Youth Art**

**Magazine, 2011**



**Plate: 7 Kids (participants) and facilitator at one of the Wy**

**Art**

**Foundation workshops © Women and Youth Art**

**Magazine, 2011**



**Plate 8: A girl participant working on the throwing wheel at one of the Wy**

**Art**

**Foundation workshops © Women and Youth Art Magazine, 2011**



## **Conclusion**

This paper has examined the trends in the growth and development of art education in Nigeria. It observes that for about six decades now, specifically since around 1960s, art education has witnessed various revolutionary trends. From the singular effort made by Aina Onabolu at propagating modern art in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, to the contributions of K.C. Murray and other expatriates like Father Kevin Carroll and his Oye-Ekiti workshop, Ulli Beire and the Mbari Mbayo movement and workshop in Ibadan and Osogbo respectively. The trends also include the establishment of formal art schools, particularly tertiary institutions with art departments which actually provided avenues or opportunity for female children to be educated, and the activities of the graduates of the Zaria art school among who is Professor Bruce Onapbrakpeya, the founder of Agbaha-Otor Harmattan Workshop.

This trend has forced art educators to have a rethink about the aims of teaching art, teaching strategies and intellectual content of art courses for a specific group(s). This strategy is evident in the workshop programme of the Wy art foundation which was established by Dr. Peju Layiwola to teach or expose women and youths to various vocational skills. “An idle hand the bible says is the devils workshop”, Ecclesiastes 10:18 says “By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through”. Peju Layiwola’s decision to focus on women and youth development has contributed greatly to the development of vocational skills and creative talents in them through which she has helped to reduce unemployment in the society. Through the Wy art foundation workshop, women and youths have been kept busy and make them self reliant, become employer of labour, thereby contributing to the growth of Nigeria economy.

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