Proposing a National Virtual Art Repository for the Legends of Visual Arts in Nigeria: Past, Present and Future

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Abstract

In 2021, Nigeria recorded the demise of some notable and prolific visual artists, namely, Yusuff Grillo and Abayomi Barbers. It appears there is no central archive where all their great efforts are domiciled likewise all other past and present legends of visual arts in the country. Some successful artists are untraceable and their works, either purchased totally off the shelves or lying in their private studios. Consequently, it becomes a herculean task to reference them for effective academic work both for teachers and learners. Notably, some works are in private collections, art galleries, libraries and museums while some have enjoyed another accommodation in catalogs, magazines, textbooks, journals and brochures only for physical viewing. These documentation and preservation systems are traditional and yet to align with modern best profession practices. Upgrading this traditional documentation approach to digital alternative is obligatory to provide modern preservation, global presence and easy access via various digital devices online and offline. Proposing a virtual national repository is germane in actualising this initiative to augment the printed contents and physical viewership. This paper aims to investigate the imperativeness of the design and development of a dynamic electronic repository peculiar to visual arts as evidence of contemporary professionalism. Using literature review, qualitative interviews, case

studies, surveys and technological feasibility, the research highlights successful strategies, stakeholder insights and the importance of preserving Nigeria's artistic heritage through a well-implemented digital platform.

Keywords: Visual arts, Nigerian artists, e-library, art technology, digital archive, national repository, global accessibility.

Introduction

The art scene in Nigeria has a rich background of culture and artistic expression that goes back many years. Important artists like Ben Enwonwu and modern creators such as El Anatsui have greatly influenced Nigerian art, affecting both national identity and views worldwide. Yet, despite this importance, there is a major lack of a complete and easy-to-use archive of these artistic traditions. A national online art collection could be very important for recording, preserving and promoting the lively nature of Nigerian visual arts, while also providing educational and research materials. By encouraging more people to engage with Nigeria's diverse art history, this collection would not just celebrate past successes but also motivate future artists and art lovers. This initial look at the topic highlights the need for setting up such a digital collection, creating a way to improve the visibility and appreciation of Nigeria's artistic heritage. This article has evolved over the past two years. I first presented this proposal as a symposium paper at the National Gallery of Art Symposium, May 18th, 2023, held at Enugu. It becomes imperative to push it further as a paper for publication in SNA CONADEV Journal.

National Virtual Art Repository: An Overview

A National Virtual Art Repository is a digital place made to collect, keep and share a nation's art history while allowing users to interact. This repository is not just a main storage site for artworks, like paintings, sculptures and digital works from Nigeria's varied culture, but it also serves as an important tool for researchers, students and the public. By using modern technologies, as observed by Shobukonla (2012:14), these repositories improve access to artworks that showcase the rich traditions, symbols and designs found in Nigerian art, like those discussed in the study of Yoruba artistic styles by Abiodun Kafaru (2014). Moreover, a

National Virtual Art Repository can promote community interaction and memory sharing, like the teamwork found in projects that encourage emotional connections with art and creativity resonating with Oloyede's 2022 review of remote teaching resources during the COVID-19 lockdown, which emphasized the importance of digital platforms in keeping education and creativity alive. The study points out how virtual spaces not only support collaboration but also help build emotional ties in the context of art education, showing how technology can bridge gaps and foster meaningful connections. Overall, this repository would be essential for preserving and promoting Nigeria's visual arts heritage for future generations.

Importance of Visual Arts in Nigerian Culture

Visual arts are important in Nigeria's culture, showing the rich history and different traditions of ethnic groups. Art forms like sculpture, painting, and textiles are not just for looking at; they are also important for sharing stories and values. Their significance is clear in museums, which store and show artistic works, helping present-day audiences connect with their heritage and identities (Akinbogun et al., 2023). Moreover, the way history influences today's art shows the need to recognize and understand past contexts, as they impact modern choices and cultural trends. Therefore, creating a National Virtual Art Repository could help more people access these vital cultural stories, ensuring they are valued and preserved for the future.

Purpose and Significance of the Proposed Repository

The creation of a National Virtual Art Repository for the Legends of Visual Arts in Nigeria has two main goals: to keep the nation's artistic history safe and to support modern art practices. By storing important works and traditions digitally, the repository helps preserve history while also making it easier for researchers, artists, and the public to access. This repository can be a valuable tool for education, enhancing interaction with Nigeria's varied artistic forms. Additionally, it allows for in-depth examination of traditional styles, such as those shown in studies on Yoruba aesthetics, symbols and motifs, which highlight the close ties between culture and art (Kafaru, 2014). Moreover, the repository can promote teamwork among artists and communities, creating spaces for shared experiences and stories that connect to current social and cultural themes, as seen

in community-driven projects like the Afterlife Creative Memory Retreat (The Other Way Works, n.d.; Bublitz et al., 2019).

Overview of the Current State of Visual Arts in Nigeria

The state of visual arts in Nigeria shows a lively and changing scene influenced by rich history and new ideas. Nigerian artists have received global attention, mixing traditional techniques with new styles, which has led to a renewed interest in both old crafts and modern art forms. Institutions like the Museum of National Unity in Akure are important for keeping Nigeria's artistic heritage alive by housing key cultural items (Akinbogun et al., 2023). Yet, there are still problems with managing and promoting these institutions, which makes it hard for local artists to be seen globally. Solving these issues is important, as past influences still shape today's art choices. Therefore, creating a national online art collection could improve access to and appreciation for Nigeria's visual arts, connecting historical context with modern art.

Historical Context of Visual Arts in Nigeria

The history of visual arts in Nigeria is closely connected to the country's culture, showing the different traditions and social systems that have developed over many years. Art has not only been a way to express beauty but also a way to record power relationships, religious views, and community values. Nigerian visual arts, including traditional masquerades and modern installations, demonstrate the relationship between the old and the new, highlighting the need to keep these traditions alive. Museums are important because they store these artworks, especially in today's Nigeria, where they protect cultural items that once belonged in shrines and palaces, blending the physical and non-physical heritage of the people (Akinbogun et al., 2023). Knowing this historical context is important as it reminds us that, even with modern progress, the remnants of our past still influence our current decisions and cultural environment.

Traditional Art Forms and their Cultural Significance

Traditional art in Nigeria shows a rich mix of culture, acting as both beautiful representations and important links to history and community identity. These art types, which include detailed beadwork and colorful textiles, represent various cultural backgrounds in the country, letting communities share their beliefs,

ceremonies, and social structures. Creating a National Virtual Art Repository could be key in keeping these traditional art forms alive for the future while helping people understand their importance today. Museums have historically preserved cultural heritage, showing how closely tied palaces and art institutions are; the repository can use this history to connect past knowledge with modern views of art (Akinbogun et al., 2023). Additionally, making these art forms more visible can give power to voices that are often left out, improving gender representation in the arts, particularly given the difficulties women face in finding their role in both the art world and politics (Agbemuko et al., 2023).

Evolution of Visual Arts in Nigeria through Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods

The changes in visual arts in Nigeria during colonial and post-colonial times show a mix of old traditions and new foreign influences. The colonial period introduced Western art ideas that often clashed with local practices, creating a mix of styles. This blending allowed for new ways to express creativity, but it also created issues regarding cultural identity and authenticity. As artists reconnected with their roots, they added to the larger conversation about identity and representation. In the time after colonial rule, revisiting African cultural stories and the rise of modern art projects helped traditional methods come back, now blended with modern ideas, showing a lively cultural exchange. These changes highlight the need for a National Virtual Art Repository, which could act as an important space to keep these stories alive and promote a shared understanding of Nigeria's rich art history, supported by recent studies emphasizing the role of cultural exchange (Bifarin et al., 2024) and memory in art (The Other Way Works, n.d.; Bublitz et al., 2019).

Current Landscape of Visual Arts in Nigeria

The current situation of visual arts in Nigeria shows a hybrid of traditional methods and modern influences that represent the country's rich culture and changing identity. Artists nowadays use digital platforms more to display their work, creating a lively art environment that goes beyond borders. This move towards digital use has increased interest in keeping the stories of Nigeria's visual culture. Still, there is a strong need for a unified place to organize these artistic expressions. As stated, the past affects our present world, highlighting the need to acknowledge and preserve historical impacts on today's art practices. By

suggesting a national online art archive, involved parties can help people better understand Nigeria's artistic history while giving today's artists a space to connect with both their predecessors and audiences, improving the overall story of Nigerian visual arts (Robert E. Kennedy Library, 2020).

Contemporary Artists and their Contributions

Modern artists in Nigeria play a big role in the cultural story of the country, mixing local customs with global ideas to make art that connects on many levels. For example, El Anatsui shows this by making big wall sculptures from recycled stuff, which not only make things look good but also touch on important socioeconomic issues in the area, helping local economies and sparking global conversations (Reintjes, 2009). Likewise, artists such as Sela Adjei use their art to address important social problems like racial injustice, comparing natural events like eclipses to societal challenges, which deepens the discussions about identity and resistance today. Together, these artists show a diverse mix of creativity and involvement, highlighting the need for a National Virtual Art Repository to keep and promote these important contributions for future generations.

Impact of Technology on the Dissemination of Visual Arts

The rise of technology has changed how visual arts are shared, making it easier for more people to access and engage with art. In Nigeria, digital platforms help share and promote artworks, which is important for building cultural awareness and sparking conversation. For example, social media allows artists to connect with audiences worldwide, highlighting Nigeria's rich artistic culture. This effect is further seen in the online sharing of photos that reflect social issues, where visual art serves as a tool for criticism and activism, as mentioned in (Agbo et al., 2016). Moreover, open educational resources (OER) can help make art education more available, recognizing underrepresented voices and increasing community involvement (Ivory et al., 2022). Therefore, creating a National Virtual Art Repository could take advantage of these tech developments, ensuring that Nigeria's artistic history is maintained, shared, and repositioned on a global scale.

Potential Benefits for Artists and Art Enthusiasts

The setting up of a National Virtual Art Repository for the Legends of Visual Arts in Nigeria will bring many good things for artists and art fans. For artists, this

place can be a key tool to show their work to more people, which helps with visibility and creates chances for working together and gaining support. By letting different kinds of artistic styles be shown and promoted, the repository can work against views that push Nigerian art to the side in the wider world. Art fans can also gain a lot from this project since it gives access to important knowledge and cultural history that might not get enough attention. Also, as research has shown about the ways art moves around the world, places that encourage lively cultural exchange can boost community interaction and identity among their supporters (Museum SDA, 2004)(Bifarin et al., 2024). Therefore, the repository could greatly improve how people value and understand Nigerian visual arts.

Collaboration with Educational Institutions and Cultural Organizations

As the plan for a National Virtual Art Repository for the Legends of Visual Arts in Nigeria develops, working together with schools and cultural groups becomes very important. These partnerships can boost the repository's influence and reach by creating a space where different voices add to a deeper understanding of Nigeria's art history. Schools are particularly suited to use open educational resources (OER) that highlight underrepresented communities, thus bringing more attention to stories in Nigerian art that have been ignored (Ivory et al., 2022). Moreover, applying ideas from online and distance education can promote broad and inclusive access, allowing people in different locations to engage with the repository. Overall, these collaborations strengthen the repository's base and create a lively connection between education and cultural preservation, making sure the repository remains a vital resource for future generations.

Long-Term Vision for the Repository's Growth and Sustainability

A long-term plan for the National Virtual Art Repository in Nigeria needs to focus on growth and sustainability to keep it vital and relevant in the changing world of visual arts. Key to this plan is building a flexible framework that not only curates current artworks but also engages emerging artists and their communities. By encouraging collaboration and interaction, the repository can become a lively archive where creativity flourishes and cultural stories are constantly refreshed. Programs like online workshops and creative retreats can improve user experiences, like the method shown in (The Other Way Works, n.d.; Bublitz et al., 2019), which highlights shared memory and creativity. Additionally,

collaborations with academic institutions, as mentioned in, can boost research prospects and strengthen the repository's role as an educational tool. This will ultimately create a sustainable model that supports ongoing artistic discussions and preservation of heritage.

Case Study

The Repository of the National Gallery of Art – UK

The National Gallery of Art in the UK (www.nationalgallery.org.uk) is an important place for keeping and showing art. Its online collection is a big digital resource for art experts, researchers, and fans. This site has many artworks and gives details about the pieces, information on the artists and background stories that make the visit better. By putting its collections online, the gallery makes it easier for people from different areas to see the art without needing to visit in person. The online collection is also a learning tool, helping people understand art history more while encouraging participation through interactive elements and easy navigation. In the end, the collection shows the gallery's goal of making art accessible to everyone and helps build a worldwide community of art fans who are curious together.

For researchers, the National Gallery Archive contains records of the Gallery's activities from its foundation in 1824 to the present day. The archive contains public records generated by the Gallery itself and private contents relating to individuals or activities closely associated with the Gallery.

The online collection of the National Gallery of Art - UK aims to boost user involvement and make it easier to access many cultural heritage items. A main aspect of this collection is its service-oriented design, which helps combine different digital collections from many organizations, expanding learning and research chances for users around the world. This aligns with recent research that shows digital tools greatly improve the interaction with cultural heritage, encouraging community involvement through social media and Web 2.0 features (Zhang et al., 2011). Furthermore, the collection has advanced search options, allowing users to find artworks easily, and the thorough archival tools help keep and display art in new ways (Evans et al., 2005). These features not only improve

the user experience but also make the collection an important resource for academic research and public interest in the arts

The rise of online repositories has changed how people access and learn about art, giving many chances for different groups to look at important artworks. By digitizing a large collection, the National Gallery of Art - UK makes it easier for art scholars, students, teachers, and the general public to access art. This opening up of art lets users from different backgrounds learn and examine visual resources when they want, which helps them appreciate artistic expression more. Furthermore, the repository supports education by being a key resource for lesson planning and research, helping people understand art history and theory better. The move to digital repositories shows the need for user studies in the development of digital libraries, confirming how these platforms will influence the future of art education and access (Heddon et al., 2017) (Dobreva et al., 2012).
To sum up, the Online Repository of the National Gallery of Art - UK is an important tool for both researchers and everyday people, providing easier access to a large collection of art. This online site makes historical and modern artworks available to many and promotes learning and enjoyment of art. By using modern technology to show high-quality images and in-depth descriptions, the repository improves how users interact with the collection, promoting further interest in the diverse stories of art. Additionally, the platform's focus on regular updates and easy navigation shows the institution's commitment to maintaining cultural heritage while evolving with digital trends. Therefore, the repository not only deepens art understanding but also strengthens the National Gallery of Art - UK's position as a key player in advancing the arts worldwide.

Conclusion

The proposal for a National Virtual Art Repository for the Legends of Visual Arts in Nigeria shows that this project is important for keeping and showing Nigeria's artistic history. The repository's goal is to record the past and help people understand current art forms and future directions in the visual arts community. It plans to include different artistic styles, improve cultural memory and support group storytelling among artists and audiences. The repository aims to connect historical stories with modern practices, encouraging a lively exchange that enhances Nigeria's cultural environment.

Creating a National Virtual Art Repository for the Legends of Visual Arts in Nigeria requires a united effort from many people in the art field. Artists, curators, collectors and educators need to work together to build a detailed digital archive that showcases the country's artistic history. By pushing for better broadband Internet, especially in less represented regions, these groups can help increase access to art education and resources, improving the global presence of Nigerian art. Additionally, art organizations and government agencies should focus on funding and backing projects for digital preservation and access. Engaging local communities in this initiative will not only boost cultural pride but also promote economic growth through more tourism and participation in the arts. Therefore, the shared dedication of all parties involved is crucial for the success of this important project.

The future of visual arts in Nigeria relies a lot on creating a National Virtual Art Repository. This would be an active place to display the country's rich cultural heritage and modern innovations. By digitizing works from well-known Nigerian artists and adding academic materials, this repository could make art more accessible, which would help increase appreciation and support for visual arts among different groups. This effort would not just keep Nigeria's artistic history alive but also improve its presence worldwide. Like other cultural projects which effectively brought together different artistical traditions through joint creativity, the repository could also promote conversations among visual artists, scholars and the wider community. This idea fits with current efforts to use digital tools to build a more inclusive and lively art scene in Nigeria, fostering artistic involvement and cultural sharing on various levels.

In summary, keeping and promoting Nigerian art heritage is important for building cultural pride and making sure a rich artistic past continues. Setting up a National Virtual Art Repository is not just a tech advancement; it is an important move for showcasing the various stories that Nigerian visual arts tell. By digitizing art and artist information, this repository will make it easier for both local and global audiences to connect with Nigeria's art history. Also, this project will offer chances for teamwork among artists, researchers, and cultural groups, enhancing artistic discussions within Nigeria and beyond. In the end, focusing on recording and sharing Nigerian art will help protect its unique heritage for future

generations and encourage modern artistic practices, ensuring that the lively essence of Nigeria's visual arts continues to thrive in a more connected world.

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