
| RESEARCH ARTICLE**Harnessing Fine Art as a Viable Mechanism for Economic and Health Enhancements in Nigeria****Ajayi, Olayemi T¹** ✉ and **Adeleye, Adekunle J²**^{1,2}*Department of Art and Design, The Federal Polytechnic Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria***Corresponding Author:** Ajayi, Olayemi T, **E-mail:** olayemi.ajayi@federalpolyilaro.edu.ng

| ABSTRACT

The built environment is tamed with varying health and economic challenges that, if left unattended, could endanger lives and properties dwelling within it. However, the said challenges are all inevitable as a result of the ever-increasing global population and the dissimilar challenges that come with it. Consequently, there is a need to unearth more alternatives through which the wellness of lives in the built environment and the economy they depend on can be improved in order to inhibit the fast-rising deplorable health conditions that are threatening the built environment. Fine art in all its entirety goes beyond artworks being crafted primarily for visual appeal or creative expression; fine art, especially drawing and painting, is imbued with economic and health-enhancing feats. This study uncovers, through the use of interviews and the authors' experiences and observations, how fine art facets (portrait drawing) and painting can positively improve a man's psychological and mental wellness. The few selected interview respondents shared their various experiences culled from their individual interactions with the work of art. The paper recommended, among others, that portrait drawing and painting should be further patronized, practiced, and embraced as they have a way of enhancing psychological and mental wellness in the built environment with economic advantages. The study concludes that drawing fosters interpersonal relationships as well as cultural exchange. It recommends that drawing and painting be encouraged at early stages of education and adopted as part of the vocational skills for enhancing entrepreneurship studies.

| KEYWORDS

Art and Science, Environmental art, Contemporary Art, Cultural Exchange, Psychology

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1. Introduction

The announcement of the subsidy removal in Nigeria on May 29th, 2023 (Okeh, 2023), alongside the introduction of the student loan act signed with the intent of introducing proper tuition fees in public tertiary institutions, especially Federal schools, in Nigeria (Okeke, 2023), are all signaling the economic brouhaha embattling Nigeria (Wangare and Simwa, 2023), all of which call for a speedy intervention and possible alternatives to economic stability. Similarly, the economic challenges come with other related problems such as environmental degradation, the inadequacy of infrastructure, et al.; hence, it will be detrimental to be slipshod about, among others, the environmental degradation and possible pathogenic hazards, which are frightening challenges and could endanger the built environment like that of the recently experienced COVID-19 pandemic.

There is no gainsaying that the above-mentioned circumstances are inevitable, a sequel to the world's rapidly growing population, which has steadily increased from about one billion in 1800 to approximately 8 billion in 2023 (Woldometer, 2023), and with the forecast that the world's populace will hit 9.7 billion in 2050 (United Nations, 2019), the built environment globally will become vulnerable and a dumpsite for all forms of global diseases, pandemics, and other environmental hazards. For example, in Nigeria, from 1960 up until 2021, the population increase has been consistently not less than 2.5% yearly, except in the years 1977–1979, when the population increase was 3.04%, 3.02%, and 3.08%, respectively (Macrotrends.net, 2021). Meanwhile, Nigeria's population is estimated to experience an upsurge, hitting about 440 million by 2050. (USAID, 2020).

Consequently, with the forecasted increase in population in the years to come, many possible diseases, viruses, and pandemics are predictably foreseeable.

Considering how the world was previously under the spell of the global pandemic known as Coronavirus, which lasted for over a year and claimed precisely 3,782,490 lives globally as of June 12, 2021 (World Health Organization, 2021), The increase in global population can also be felt, especially in Nigeria, which is ranked as the 7th country with the highest population in the world with over 210 million people (United Nations, 2019). Meanwhile, the US Census Bureau (2021) is indexing Nigeria as the 6th country with the highest population globally, with an estimate of about 219 million people. Hence, the reoccurring increase in Nigeria's population would further expose its built environment to dissimilar health and other life-threatening challenges, such as degradation of the built environment, inflation, unemployment, viruses and diseases, pathogenic pandemics, et al. (Rinkesh, 2021; Ihekweasu, 2010). Similarly, Nigeria is at present reported to be liable to various maladies that have claimed lives over the years, including malaria, stroke, road accidents, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis, among others, as there is no reconnaissance system to track and contain any outbreak of deadly diseases, chemical infections, bioterrorism, et al. (Menizibeya, 2011). The above-mentioned narratives about the deplorable status quo of Nigeria's health care system could further be understood from how an estimated sum of two thousand naira was budgeted for the health care of each of the over 200 million Nigerians in 2020, with 44.50 Billion naira budgeted for health care enhancements in 2020 (Joshua, 2019).

Furthermore, in understanding the depth of the abysmal health challenges in Nigeria, several studies ranging from that of UNICEF, which statistically declared Nigeria to be home to a huge percentage of under-5 year old child death rates as a result of various deadly diseases, which is 70% responsible for claiming the lives of over one million below-5 year old child death rates; alongside another statistical submission from WHO declaring Nigeria to have been the country with the 2nd highest child death rates in 2023 (WHO, 2023; Adebowale-Tambe, 2023); not exempting the study analyzed by the global burden of disease reporting the incessant rates of avoidable child deaths in Nigeria (Tumba, 2020); Disappointingly, all of the studies have proven and condemned the awful health care status quo of the country; little wonder why Lagos, Nigeria, is currently ranked as one of the 10 least livable cities in the world (Joanna, 2018; Fernandez, 2022). In clear terms, as a result of the health challenges that the country is being exposed to through the sequential rule of corrupt and inept political leaders in the country and the predictably foreseeable environmental degradation that may arise from future population increases, the pressing need to look for effective alternatives for health enhancements vis-à-vis economic improvement schemes cannot be overemphasized.

Therefore, in order to address the aforementioned urgent needs and how it has become necessary for everyone to be on deck, the authors intend to contribute their fair share by looking through the wealth of positive tidings connected with art and imagining the potential of a few aspects of art, specifically illustrations and paintings, to improve health and act as efficient alternatives or methods. This study, therefore, came into being, and the authors' deployed both primary and secondary sources of data collection, ranging from books, global reports, authors' observations, and structured and unstructured interviews, with the intent to engage many a person on interview grounds who has a piece of artwork at home or work and would be able to share an individual's experiences regarding how the artworks do make individuals feel and the account of personal interactions with such artwork(s) either at home or at work. His study also recounts many submissions from random professionals, notable personalities, and renowned agencies that have one thing or another to profess as far as their interactions with artworks are concerned and the health enhancements and economic empowerment they have been able to extract from the selected facets of art.

2. Concept of Drawing and Painting

As old as humankind, the history of painting and drawing can be traced back to the years 30,000–10,000 BC during the cave period. This can be said to date back to the upper Paleolithic era when walls of caves, bones, rocks, et al., recorded many scenes that occurred during the era through drawings, etchings (graphics), paintings, et al. The majority of the religiously undertoned drawings, paintings, etches, et al., executed during the cave age, were said to be executed with a naturalistic style in art, which is equivalent to the technique required for both portrait drawing and painting. And these paintings on cave walls were found almost universally, ranging from Asia to Europe to Africa, among others (Ajayi, 2006; Beginner's School, 2017).

Art is a broad discipline (Ajayi and Seyi-Gbangbayau, 2019) under which drawing and painting are mined. Drawing is a form of art that refers to the dexterity of an artist or artisan who is capable of expressing inner thoughts, feelings, etc., through the movement of lines from one point to another to depict a facet of his or her inner feelings. Drawing is broad enough to contain the coloring part of the sketches or strokes, which could lead to a painting.

The thin line between drawing and painting is the use of media for each of the two independent forms of art. Drawing, also known as sketching, is a branch of fine art where inner feelings and/or visual compositions are expressed on a surface using marks, charcoal, graphite, pen and ink, coloring pencils, and crayon, among other media (Hutter, 2020). Painting requires brushes and a substantial amount of oil- or water-based paint. The majority of different forms of art usually begin with sketches, drawings, outlines, drafting, etc., which can either be achieved through the use of pencil, pen, or direct use of brush et al., just as indicated in Plates 2.0 and 2.1 below, which show how a colorfully painted portrait began with strokes of the pencil.



Plate. 1.0: A pencil sketch of a baby's portrait.
Source: Ajayi, O. T.'s commissioned work 2021.



Plate. 1.1: Painting of a baby's portrait

2.1 Concept of Art

Art is a multidisciplinary and multifaceted vocational sphere with dissimilar branches touching through painting, drawing, and graphics, just to mention a few (Iriwieri, 2009; Ajayi & Seyi-Gbagbagbayau, 2020; Seyi-Gbangbayau & Ajayi, 2019). Drawing manifests itself as a facet of art that exposes artists and artisans to being able to record a portion of their either visible or imaginative thoughts, feelings, emotions, etc., interpreted visually on a plane or any other surface through the use of pens, pencils, sharp-edged objects, nails, needles, *et al.* (Ajayi, 2006; Heller, 2023). Similarly, Painting is a branch of visual art that can be compared to drawing except that the use of various kinds of light and/or heavy pigments of colors is used to realistically, impressionistically, or, in other cases, expressionistically interpret various forms of visual and imaginary compositions (Rayne, 1981; Ajayi, 2006). In the same vein, far from the general layman's understanding of art as a process of drawing, painting, and seeing crazily dressed exponents of art to identify as artists (Makanju, 2006), the primary similarity between drawing, painting, and other craftworks categorized under art is that they are both produced from the depth of thought and usually, they are meant to influence viewers by way of positively stirring their emotions, thoughts, mood, stimuli, etc., which can bring about mental wellness and psychological improvement in alignment with the submission of Picasso Pablo: "Art washes away from the soul, the dust of everyday life."

There is no gainsaying that an artwork undergoes execution in the hands of the creative catalyst in diverse ways. However, more often than not, the execution of every thought-provoking artwork usually commences with deep thinking, and sometimes, for many artists, from the authors' individual experience and observations, through consistent looks at empty canvasses, walls, flat surfaces, objects, moving objects, nature, et cetera, inspiration may flow, and that marks the beginning of thought-provoking masterpieces. In Aristotle's terms, "the aim of art is not to represent the outward appearance of things but their inward significance". The assertion goes a long way toward validating the attributes inherent in art to channel expressions of emotional feelings culled from day-to-day experience and environmental and/or socioeconomic impacts on the artist (Ajayi, 2017; Ajayi, 2021). Art is nourished with varieties of the context surrounding deep thinking and meditation, which have a way of boosting the creativity and mental wellness of every deep thinking artist, with the consequential impacts reflecting on viewers of such artists' artworks; perhaps one of the reasons why art exhibitions have always been sought-after for many people. Far from entertainment, viewing works of art has a way of reflecting mysteries that cannot be understood at a glance and/or mere viewing. Hence, this usually creates curiosity in viewers to know the interpretation of artworks that appear connotative and incomprehensible to them. Meanwhile, to raise curiosity is to ask seemingly thought-provoking question(s), with the possibility of having a huge opportunity to know or learn more; hence, in knowing more, the mind is sharpened, and with a sharpened mind, people have the chance of performing productively, which will inadvertently influence the built environment positively.

2.2 The Specificity of Art and its Therapeutic Feats

No matter if one gets involved in the visual arts directly or just views them, they have the ability to inspire. But expressing oneself artistically may also be beneficial to one's physical and emotional well-being. People who find it difficult to verbally communicate their thoughts and feelings can use art therapy, a type of psychotherapy. It is about discovering healing in the process of creating and enjoying art, not about the final product. Research has found a number of benefits to art and art therapy for both physical and mental health. For instance, studies on cancer patients have shown that guided, four-hour creative art

therapy sessions using drawings improved participants' psychological well-being by lowering negative emotions and boosting positive ones. A concept that goes beyond the conventional understanding of art, which is the practice of capturing motionless or moving items from visual or fictitious compositions, is "art is life." The book *Art is Life* goes on to discuss the significance of art in creating fortunes out of misfortunes, joy out of gloom, happiness out of despair, and practical richness out of trash. These are all examples of how art can have therapeutic effects in addition to its visual representation of a composition. That is to say, the curiosity and/or satiating entertainment acquired from examining artworks provide mental and psychological benefits in addition to aesthetic ones. The advantages of art therapy include a decrease in challenges and discomfort, an increase in cognitive capacities, enhancement of self-worth, and improvement of psychological and social skills, according to Psychiatry.org (2020). According to the establishment, spoken communication does not relate to the soul, body, and mind in the same way that art does.

Moreover, another apparatus in the art that evokes emotion in men is color. Colors could primarily evoke emotions and prompt men to action without necessarily adding any caption, perhaps as a result of experience, literacy exposure, and the level of knowledge individuals have. For example, in some societies, colors have different meanings. The only almost universally known interpretation of colors is that of the ones for traffic light indications, where it is almost universal to believe that red, yellow, and green are symbolic traffic control indicators that all mean stop, ready, and go, respectively. Colors evoke diverse meanings for societies depending on cultures, traditions, religious beliefs, and norms guarding each of the societies in the built environment globally. The reason why black is used to mourn in many societies while to other societies, the same color could mean security, love, et cetera. Similarly, the color wheel is another universally unified color chart that reflects the combination of the primary and secondary colors and/or sometimes also includes the intermediate colors, depending on the intent of the tutor explaining the color wheel.

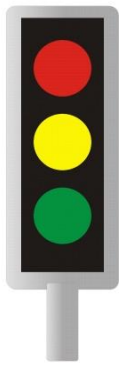


Plate 2: Traffic light.
Digital Painting by Ajayi, O. T.



Plate 3: Colour Wheel Source:
Digital Painting by Ajayi, O. T.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The emotionalism theory, which Lubomir Tomaszewski, a prominent sculptor and Professor Emeritus of Design at the University of Bridgeport in Connecticut, first proposed in 1994 (PlumXmetrics, 2000), informs this study. He stirred up the Emotionalism movement. Emotionalism theory is a theory of aesthetics and criticism of art that focuses on the expressive aspects. According to this theory, the most important feature of a piece of art is its capacity to clearly express moods, sentiments, and concepts. A work of art must provoke an emotional response from the spectator, according to emotionalist critics.

Therefore, in tandem with the study, which examines how the patrons, otherwise known as artwork owners and creators, feel about the artworks they buy and/or create, This study validates the position of the emotionalism theory that the reactions of the audience or bearer of artworks, not exempting the art creations, are significant for health improvements. Sequel to the facts about the various moods and expressions

3. Methodology

As a sequel to the exploratory context of this study as well as the robust experience of the authors, an unstructured interview was adopted and conducted to further imbue this research. Meanwhile, various submissions from several literature and academic resources validated a sample size of 5–50 interviewees as appropriate for qualitative research using in-depth interviews (Dworkin, 2012). Hence, in the course of carrying out this research, an in-depth dialogue was staged by the researchers with six (6) interviewees on different occasions. The interviewees were randomly chosen from non-art-related disciplines. Having constructively been sure of the fact that the interviewees have at least one artwork at home, in the office, or both, the interview did contain items that included their interactions and/or relatable experiences with artwork(s) within their reach. The interviewees

were carefully chosen from those whose professions are not art-inclined in order to have their truest submissions of the dissimilar ways the work(s) of art within their reach have or have been interacting with them. They were interviewed about how the work of art was procured, either through a gift from a third party or a direct purchase. With the hope that the exposition of this will create a lacuna for future research. They were interrogated on how affordable the acquired art work is or, if given, how much they think the work of art should cost. They were also asked if the purchased artwork is hung at home or in the office. They were also interviewed on their individual preferences, whether they loved to see the artwork hung at home, in the office, or both. The interview also made the interviewees account for the type of artwork and what interests them most about the artwork(s); either color, frame, texture, packaging, or craftsmanship. They were also made to give accurate responses regarding how the work of art normally makes them feel whenever they consciously or subconsciously gaze at it. The interviewees also gave an account of whether the artwork has ever made them switch moods—from being moody or melancholically stained to being enlivened or vice versa—just by seeing the artwork(s).

4. Synopsis of Submissions from the Interview

The interview schedule, which was virtually premised, relied solely on the above mentioned interview items to inform the following responses:

Table 1: Synopsis of the in-depth (open-ended interview)

S/N	Interview Item	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3	Interviewee 4	Interviewee 5	Interviewee 6
1.	Relationship with artworks	I see artwork every day at home and office	I have only one artwork at home	I have only one artwork in my office	I have only one artwork at home	I have only one artwork at home	I have only one artwork at home
2.	Artwork Acquisition	I acquired one while the other through gift	Through gift	Through gift	Done by my child	Through gift	Through gift
3.	Worth of artwork acquired	1. ₦10,000 (\$12.88) 2. ₦15,000 (\$19.32)	Suggestively, ₦20,000 (\$25.76)	Assumption: ₦10,000 (\$12.88)	Assumption: ₦10,000 (\$12.88)	Suggestively: ₦15,000 (\$19.32)	Assumed: ₦20,000 (\$25.76) N/\$ rate as of July 2023
4.	Preferred Artwork Placement	Both office and home	Home	Office	Home	Home	Home
5.	Type of artwork	1 Portrait (pencil)	Colourful portrait	Pencil Portrait	Pencil Portrait	Landscape painting	Abstract painting
6.	Point of attraction	Seeing my beautifully drawn portrait majorly	The use of multiple cool colours	My smile and resemblance captured by the drawing	The use of my favourite portrait and the rendition	I love beautiful landscapes	The colourful rendition of the piece
7.	Emotional interaction with the artwork	I get wowed seeing my portrait and relieved seeing the landscape painting	I get easily enlivened seeing the colourful artwork	I feel merrier	I have a sense of fulfillment	I feel relieved seeing the calmness of the cool colours used for the landscape painting.	The warm colours usually enliven me. Maybe because orange is my favourite colour

8.	Is mood swings caused by artwork?	Yes, mood swings from stressed to being relieved	Yes. Being enlivened from fatigue to smile	Yes. Regardless of the stress, seeing my portrait, relief oozes	Yes. I totally agree there is usually mood swing	Yes. The piece causes mood swing for me	Yes. More often than not
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From the synopsis of the in-depth interviews analyzed in Table 1, various inferences could be deduced. Firstly, the interview revealed that having an artwork hung in either an office or home for decoration purposes is craved by learned individuals, as all the interviewees admitted to their cravings to have their closets or offices improved with artwork.

Secondly, the interview also revealed that 66% (4 out of 6) of the interviewees got at least one artwork in their possession through gifting, while another one got the artwork (a portrait drawing) through the artistic skill of a biological child, while the remaining approximately 17% (1 out of 6) procured it from artists or art collectors.

Thirdly, 50% of the interviewees (3 out of 6) estimated the artwork they have in their possession to be N10, 000 (\$12.88) each; 33% (2 out of 6) respondents of the in-depth interview estimated the artwork in their possession to be N20, 000 (\$25.76), while 17% (1 out of 6) estimated the artwork in their possession to be N15, 000 (\$19.32).

Fourthly, 66% of the respondents prefer to have artwork at home rather than in offices. While 17% (1 out of 6) prefers having artwork at both home and office, the last 17% (1 out of 6) prefer having artwork in the office.

Fifthly, 50% (3 out of 6) of the interviewees revealed that they only have pencil portraits as artworks in their possessions, while the other 50% (3 out of 6) interviewees have colorful portraits, landscape paintings, and abstract paintings, respectively.

Sixthly, 50% of the interviewees (3 out of 6) get attracted to a piece of work that captures them in a hyper realistic manner; while 33% (2 out of 6) respondents of the in-depth interview attested that they have a special interest in colourful and similarly, 17% (1 out of 6) get fascinated by landscape artworks.

Seventhly, the whole six respondents attested to being wowed and relieved, enlivened, merrier, and develop a sense of fulfillment interacting with their respective artwork(s).

Finally, from the open-ended questions used for the in-depth interviews, 6 out of 6 of the respondents attested to the fact that seeing a piece of artwork prompts mood swings in them.

5. Discussions

The study’s findings and results demonstrated that artworks in the form of drawings and paintings, particularly those with vibrant colors, are a viable means of improving people’s appearance, health, and well-being. Similarly, the study discovered that gazing at artworks can improve the health of some individuals, particularly if the artworks are portraits, as it did for the interviewed respondents. The study’s findings also revealed that artwork should be considered more as a means of gifting or surprising someone close to one’s heart, otherwise known as loved ones. While conducting the research, it was discovered that drawn or colorfully painted portraits have euphoric effects on people and may captivate the recipient of such a work of art.

Similarly, the benefits of art as a therapeutic tool do not only improve the health of those who view the artworks; creating art, whether by artists or anyone else participating in the process, can also improve the health of such a person. This study culled from Renee (2020), supports this claim: “Participants provided saliva samples to assess cortisol levels before and after 45 minutes of art making. Participants also provided written responses about their experiences at the end of the session. Results indicate that art making resulted in a statistically significant lowering of cortisol levels.”

On the flip side of the coin, inferences from the interviews also inform the need for freelance artists who make art for art’s sake to understand that there is certainly an existing market for their works, especially if the focus is on portrait paintings and/or landscape paintings. Hence, this is one of the areas students can tap into to make ends meet while still in school.

In the same vein, as a result of the inadequate health care provision in Nigeria, since it has been established in this study that creating artwork has a way of influencing the artist or artisan therapeutically, it behooves that the study of art be inoculated into primary education, secondary education, and as part of entrepreneurship schemes for the tertiary scholars in order to improve the healthy living of the fast-rising population in the country and every other built environment. Also, with the ridiculous amount of money the interviewees suggested, it could also be deduced that there is a low index of people knowing the worth of artworks, and this alone has opened up a research gap on various pragmatic approaches that could make people value art more

than they currently do. The sustainability of any economy of a nation lies in the wellness and health of the citizens that make up such a nation; hence, it is imperative that the focus be shifted to various mechanisms through which the populace can be accessible to healthy living. Hence, with the inferences fetched from the interview, it has been established that art is a viable mechanism that can be used to enhance people's health, as this is essential to the economic sustainability of any nation.

6. Conclusion/Recommendations

This study has further reestablished the possibility of art being a viable mechanism for enhancing health in the built environment. Therefore, in order to alleviate the impact of apathetic healthcare provision in the built environment, it is imperative that the government and other global health agencies step up to find other health improvement substitutes for swift adoption in the built environment. This will help to address the appalling health care provision that currently constitutes the norm in Nigeria and across other African countries. This study has thus been able to support the positive effects of artistic efforts as a vehicle for health enhancement. In the meantime, for a nation like Nigeria, which is at present possibly on the cusp of overpopulation, it is necessary to implement any workable solutions as soon as possible that could potentially boost or improve the overall well-being of its over 210 million citizens. Based on the framework formulated in this investigation, artistic creations are not only a feasible health enhancement apparatus but also heal some diseases. Consequently, it is high time school management also used the creation of simple artworks or crafts as a form of exercise for the pupils, students, or scholars in their establishments. Engaging in the art of producing artwork will further imbue the midweek exercise the pupils are exposed to in sports. The works of art produced from the artistic exercises could potentially be used to decorate various classrooms, as that will help the pupils that create such artworks be motivated to do more, and from being motivated, they get healthier. Also, it is imperative to note that a piece of artwork is potentially a worthy gift to be considered when considering gifting our loved ones; hence, it behooves people to consider the purchase of artwork, especially when considering gifting someone who is just recuperating from one ailment or another.

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