Sociological Commentary Through Visual Art: An Analysis Of Composition X

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ABSTRACT
The contemporary art practice has brought us into an era of visual art innovation, today artist are producing paintings in different styles, use of materials and forms, space and shapes in the area of painting. This probably could be with the desire by the artist to leave his/her stamp of personality and ideas on his/her art, so as to have much in common with their contemporaries. Through these paintings created, the art assumes a life of it self and exist for its own sake. Usually, the creations of the artworks are for the purpose of making commentaries that range from socio-political, economic, religious, environmental issues. The installation work titled “Composition X” seeks to make a sociological comment on the abducted Chibok girls. The creation of this particular work made us develop a new ‘image’ of art similar to the image we hold in our minds of the social phenomena. Also, the composition is a work and homes integrated into the lives of family members of Chibok girls and the live of man in general. Such work created has raised visual and emotional difficulties to experienced person who have acquired certain conventional pattern of looking at works of art. The composition is a combination of languages and image that is successful to the artist. This form of art seeks to inform the public on an idea.

Keywords: Chibok girls, visual art, Sambisa forest, Composition X

INTRODUCTION
Today’s artists are continuously inspired by that search for experience with the intention of becoming better, more sensitive and more insightful. In Nigeria, there has been a growing exposure of Nigerian artists who are not teachers and researchers in tertiary institutions who have brought more ideas and slides, often coming up with their new experiences as a result of artistic dialogue with other artists. The works created usually spur questions that are constantly asked. Buhari (2002) is of the opinion that, when such works and installations and other forms of media are presented, border virtues of its ephemeral state to sustain its ideas and impact on human mind. The creation of such works titled composition ‘X’ affirms to the liberation of art beyond 2-D boundary. Art has asserted itself from within its very self. The art assumes a life of it self and exist for its own sake. Also, the reference part as picture is set to end. Composition X is an artwork that is an event or an invitation to share experience and knowledge created by the artists in life attempt to make a sociological commentary on the Chibok girls incidence, using organic vestige as a medium of expression in the visual arts. The work is an invitation to an explorative dialogue on an issue of human concern. Also, the work evokes such experience through the manipulation of ideas, materials, techniques/style used to constitute the content of the work. The work compositor X focuses on the predicament of our generations, which has to live in unstructured situation.
Analysis of Composition X

Davis (2014) states that “in the English language, the letter x is often used to signify the unknown—X marks the spot, X-rays, and Mr. X, for example.” The artwork titled X looks at the unknown fate that resulted after the abduction of the Chibok girls. April 14th 2016 marked the second anniversary of the abduction as reported by Faul (2016). From onset, the abduction has exposed distrust and lack of seriousness of the leadership in tackling the problem. The then serving President, Jonathan didn’t believe the girls were abducted as reported in an interview given by former president Obasanjo said, “the President did not believe that those girls were abducted for almost 18 days, (faceofagulu 2014). Till today some people are still in doubt as to whether any girl was actually kidnapped. According to an article posted by Dimokokorkus (2016) “The governor of Ekiti state, Ayo Fayose, has alleged that the abduction of the Chibok girls in 2014 was ”mere political fabrication” that was meant to oust the then president, Goodluck Jonathan.”

The installation is titled “X” because there are a lot of unknown issues in the abduction tragedy. Initially the number of abducted girls could not even be ascertained. As different reports of varied numbers of 234, 274 and 315 were reported. Meanwhile according to Agba (2014) the report of the presidential committee stated that, “A total number of 276 students were thus abducted. As of today, 57 of the abducted students have been reunited with their families after escaping…. Sadly, 219 students remain unaccounted for.” While the Christian Association of Nigeria revealed a list of missing Government Girls State School Chibok (178) female students, who have been abducted and held captive by the members of the Boko
Haram Islamic sect since April 14-15, 2014, (Ejiofor, 2015). For the purpose of this research the list of 178 girls released by C.A.N. would be utilised. Another unknown circumstance to contend with is that, are the abducted girls still alive? Or has their number dwindled further? A glimmer of hope was seen in a recent video titled “Proof of life” dated 25th December 2015. Therein fifteen of the abducted girls where seen alive answering questions of their names and places of abduction, (Busari, Elbagir and knoops, 2016).

The media used for the artwork are the Eucalyptus trees, ropes, bougainvillea flower, paper, paints and permanent ink markers. Eucalyptus trees are commonly known as Gum tree having about 500 species native to Australia, they are fast growing and can reach heights 90 metres (Britannica 2016). Bush cuts as they are locally known are used in making scaffolds for the local construction industry and as poles for mounting electric cables. Ropes made from Raffia palm leaves are used to bind the joints together for aesthetic and allegorical reasons. Bougainvillea flower is used to strew the floor, finally traditional material such as paper and paints were employed to enhance the commentary.

The materials utilised for this undertaking were linked to some works from the exploratory stages of the research. An example such medium is the eucalyptus tree that has some semblance to the broomsticks used in exploratory stages of this research, although the eucalyptus looks more like an enlarged broomstick. While the bougainvillea flower is utilised in the installation and other previous works to metaphorically represent the Chibok girls, due to certain similarities shared by both as being a means for procreation, beauty and frailty.

Ideology

The artwork is a large composition of X’s, which are created by the gum trees various points of intersection as perceived in fig.1. These X’s represents the various unknowns that are associated with the abducted Chibok girls’ narrative. Mentioning Sambisa forest will fixate the viewers mind on it, closing the possibilities of other narratives, but possibly a walk through the installation does enthuse the thought of Sambisa forest. This also adds to list of unknowns, are the girls still held captive at Sambisa forest? Questions seem to be asked whichever way one gazes in the artwork. Screams of unknown fate, unknown health, and unknown future, unknown dead or alive, unknown and unknown tends to permeate the viewers mind. X is a reminder of the forgotten souls of the abducted girls alive suffering or finally at peace.

It is quite difficult to write one hundred and seventy eight names, not because it is strenuous but due to the knowledge that these are the names of young innocent girls snatched away from life and forced into captivity. As a father whom has a daughter named Maryam, I became more distraught every time I encountered the name Mary, Maryam or Mairama, (Fig. 3) this I endured eleven times. No parent would want to imagine the horrific situation of these girls to happen to his ward. No parent would forget or forgive. If so then why should we as a country forget?
Each name is a life, a person, a girl with hopes and dreams. Each name is written differently as an attempt to give character and highlight their differences of the girls as individuals, the papers on which the names are written is also cut in different sizes and shapes to enhance their peculiarity. Some names are etched on the concrete to express permanence in our remembrance and prayer while others written on the wood and paper to serve as a passive reminder that will wither away with the effects of time.

Some names are graphically written like Mwa Mawn Pogu (fig.4) and Ruth Bitrus (fig.5) to epitomise the girls with their appearance before the abduction in a joyous and celebrative mood. While in a sombre mood walking through composition X raises your gaze to view their pictures, their beautiful faces (fig.6 Naomi Adamu and fig.7 Esther Ayuba) stained with blood never to be the same again. Other names have already begun to fade as dust begins to cover them just like the girls have faded from some memories and are forgotten.

The ropes that are tied at each intersection point of the eucalyptus not only gives strength to the joints but also are synonymous with binding, captivity hence slavery. Therefore the ropes here are symbolic of the subjugation of these girls into forceful marriages and conversion of religion by the Boko Haram sect, after all the Quran 2:256 states “There is no compulsion in
religion”. The use of the colour red to write the names on the timbers is to signify peril, death and the blood spilled as seen in fig. 8. While the white paper connotes purity, Maifa Dama name is written on the white paper with drops of red paint suggestive of the blemishes after abduction, the reaping and loss of innocence.

![Fig.8](image1)

Once a hostage is taken the abductee discards all the human attributes associated with the hostage and she is left to mercy of the kidnappers. Her humanity is trampled upon without fear of reprisal as she is enslaved and remanded to a future Unknown. Fig.9 is representational of this situation as the white paper represents innocence being trampled by the timber, which represents oppression. The flourishing flower is supposed to be hanging on the tree until it has fulfilled its nature and served its purpose, then it falls off to degenerate serving as manure to soil. The scattered blooming bougainvillea flowers has not served its purpose it was yanked from the tree and scattered carelessly as if without purpose. Their purpose in this composition is to emphasize the robbed life of the kidnapped Chibok girls; they may not fulfil their purpose of living life, as it should be.

Composition X takes into cognizance the environment within which it’s located. The location became part of the thought process that guided the arrangement of the eucalyptus tree. Offering support at the top and base, doing away with any need for digging to keep the eucalyptus trees steady. Meanwhile on the concrete floor there is a mixture of dust with aged
engine oil deposit providing the ideal dirty forsaken look desired for the background of the installation. Some of the names written with spray paints have begun to fade due to sediments on the floor and sand that keeps blowing. If the arrangement were to be dismantled and moved elsewhere it will surely not be the same and the narrative will have to vary.

The production of installation is a physical realization of the intellectual notion and once this has been achieved and the work has lived out its life then it can be left to be remembered in our minds (Schaefer 1994). Composition X is an ephemeral work with some components more tenuous than others. Bougainvillea flowers wilts and dries up quickly that is why they had to be picked on the morning of the presentation. While the pictures are printed on cardboard paper with an inkjet printer, which smears, when it comes into contact with water.

**Sociological Relevance**

The creation of the work title ‘X’ by Mustapha is seen as a work of art with effect on people as a process which can be observed all through history. The home represent as aspect of universal phenomenon of human society in action. As such, the work is open to sociological examination. For example the work can speak of sociology of art. The sociological study of symbolic forms among others, has resulted into development of the science of communication. This is something that has made us look at art as a medium of a certain importance in interpersonal and intergroup relations. Morris (2016) posits ‘The sociology of knowledge, looks at ideas; ideologies and all the substantial foundations of thought and feeling’. Manifested in Mustapha’s composition is a substantial foundation of thought and feeling, for the work appears as a social force having effect on society. The work made us develop a new “image” of art, similar to the image we hold in our minds of this social phenomena. The composition ‘X’ can also be seen as a work and homes integrated into the lives of family members of the Chibok girls and the live of man in general.

It is evident that the relationship between the work discussed and the society is an uneasy one. One may get disturbed about the loneliness of the artist and the functional isolation of the artwork ‘X’. The concept of beauty in the work refers to a certain harmony and proportion of forms and the space occupied by the work. Beauty as perceived by the public show aesthetic in experience, their sensibility is undeveloped. Such form of modern art created by Mustapha raised visual and emotional difficulties to experienced persons who have acquired certain conventional pattern of looking at work of art. Another difficulty is that of social psychological nature Mustapha’s work symbolize a reversal of a “natural” approach to things as practical in everyday life; the artist does not look “from the inside to the outside”, but he expresses his inner reactions to the public. He focuses on the predicament of our generation that has to live in an “unstructured situation”, forcing us to find our orientation within
ourselves to be lost within is a disturbing situation. The work ‘X’ is a work that communicates with the viewers. The viewer looks at it and “gets something out of it”. The viewer’s participation is essential to make the work complete its message. Hence the dialogue between the work and the viewer is the basic social interaction process.

CONCLUSION
The work created is conceptual art did not lead to the development of a clearly delineated philosophy of art that might be called “conceptualism”. It is therefore inadequate for serving as a philosophical foundation of art education. The art is related to the goals of the avant-garde. Leuthold (1999) posits that such work is a historical phenomenon rather than fully developed philosophy of art. Mustapha’s art work titled “X” does not constitute a philosophy of art in the same way that expression, institutional, or formalist theory does, because it does not distinguish art from non art, or clearly establish basis for aesthetic value in art.

The authors shares Leuthold view, the emphasis on idea in conceptual art indicates that conceptual art is best understood within the framework of the existing philosophy of art referred to as instrumentalism as didacticism, depending on one’s frame of reference. Mustapha’s creation invites the beholder to be reflective, to be awake of how language shapes our thought. The composition titled ‘X’ is a combination of languages and image that is successful to the artist. The composition titled ‘X’ that depended on a combination of text and visual expression for ideological purpose made the work to be related to other instrumentalist art forms such as political cartoon, advertisement, and photo essay among others. This form of art seeks to inform the public on an idea. Conceptual art like Mustapha’s work rely similarly upon a combination of linguistic concept and visual idea to get the idea across. Also, an art that does not include text in a piece is often dependent upon the written word to enable the viewer to have better understanding of the piece.

The emergence of such work created by Mustapha grew out of historical adoption and reaction to proceeding art movements. These reactions include an anti-skill; anti-object, anti-gallery, orientation, a rejection of the commercialization of art; and a feeling that old concepts and art forms no longer suffice.

The practice of such work that is conceptual art have educational implications students should not be asked to produce objects, master traditional artistic skills or exhibits in spaces defined as art spaces. Also, a problem that may crop up is. How do we make judgment about the quality if the expression of artistic ideas in this persuasive rhetoric/aesthetic?

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