

13. RECYCLING ART AND THE NIGERIAN ECONOMY

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Abstract: *Using recycled materials to create beautiful artworks has become a bulging trend especially in modern times. Many Nigerian artists now rely on this medium to create award winning art works that also provide them regular income in the process. This paper focuses on the meaning of recycling and analysis of its relevance to modern art. It emphasizes the degree of value its usage has added to the enhancement and acceptance of indigenous art works in Nigeria. In addition, it enables the researcher to enumerate the economic benefits of adopting recycled materials for the creation of artworks by the indigenous artists, government, and the society in general. It further suggests ways of improving on its usage. Finally, the paper suggests ways of ameliorating government's efforts in making waste recycling business more lucrative especially to artists who use them as their medium of creation.*

Key words: *Recycling, Art, upcycling, down-cycling*

1. Introduction

As the popular adage goes: The snow-white and appetizing pap ironically comes from the unattractive black pot. The case of recycled trash which is later used as materials to produce eye-popping artworks could be likened to this scenario. In the past, the conventional cycle for waste management was to transfer trash from our homes to the dumpsite and for it to be left there to perish. However, as times goes on, even taking trash to dumpsite became a problem for people, particularly those in major cities like Lagos, Enugu, and Kano etc.

Due to population implosion in these states and the lackadaisical attitude of residents coupled with poor government policies on waste issues, roadsides and even some major highways soon became littered with refuse dumped about in a careless manner. Moreover, necessary skills and orientation needed by the waste management boards of states in question to combat this malaise were not just available thereby prompting the situation to degenerate further, creating a national embarrassment in the process.



A road in Lagos littered with waste Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021

Of all the states bedeviled by this menace, Lagos' situation was the most appalling considering its prestigious status as a former federal capital and the

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economic power of West Africa. Fast forward to the present, the once dirty cities of Lagos have since transformed into a cynosure of all eyes in terms of neatness and orderliness.

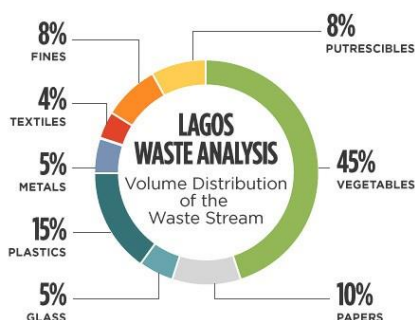


Photo Credit: CNN International Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021

This feat was not attained by magic but by sheer determination of successive governments in the states who stay focused on their blueprint that Lagos must metamorphose into a mega city in all ramifications, neatness inclusive. As at today, Lagos is evidently and commendably living up to its popular slogan: *Eko o ni baje* (Lagos will not spoil). This successful waste management method would not have been possible if the state had not embraced the latest recycling technology which has become a trend in other major cities of the world alike. Other states in Nigeria also experiencing waste management disaster have since borrowed a leaf from the Lagos state government and the exercise has become a win-win situation all the way for governments, waste management agencies, the citizenry and other stakeholders involved.

Along the line, apart from manufacturing companies who now have access to cheaper raw materials courtesy of recycling technology, artists too have discovered that some discarded items previously regarded as objects of no value could be recycled into art materials for the creation of beautiful art pieces. Al-Banna (2019) in her published research, Environment, Recycling, Urban Development stated that “Art and recycling goes together. Eco-artists are, nowadays, transforming old, recycled, and reused objects into amazing pieces of contemporary art.”

What is Recycled Art?

Przybylek (2020), “Recycled art is a creative work that is made from discarded materials that once had another purpose. This includes anything from old plastic toys and vehicle tires to scraps of cloth and building supplies. Artists who make recycled art take those materials and make them into something new.



Fish made from abandoned metals (Photo Credit: tomorrow's world today) Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021

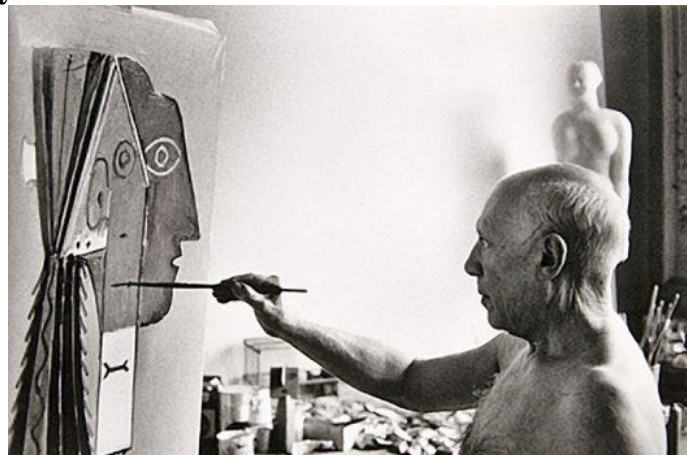
You might sometimes see it called 'junk art,' but that term is a bit limiting. Something that is being recycled isn't necessarily junk. Przybylek (2020) went further by saying that “at its heart, recycled art is about repurposing and reusing materials. There's no limit to what kinds of materials can be used. Recycled art can be large or small. It can be two dimensional or three dimensional.”

Tomorrow's world today (2018), defined recycled art as “specific type of creative work made from discarded materials. So, this could be anything from old plastic toys to tires to cans or scraps of cloth. Artists who specialize in recycled art will literally turn our trash into treasure- fit to be exhibited for hundreds or even thousands of viewers.”

In the same vein, Padula (2021) in her article: Thoughts on Recycled Art believed that Recycled art “is usually recognized as the use of garbage and found objects in the process of creating art. This process is categorized by the artist's interaction with a material already potent in symbolic meaning, prompting the artist to embed a certain message of social critique. In its essence, Recycled Art is conceptual and political.”

The collective message that could be deduced from the above quotes is that recycled materials' availability and usages are limitless. Moreover, they create an ocean of inspiration for artists who make use of them by boosting their level of creativity. Przybylek (2020) also said “There's no limit to what kinds of materials can be used. Recycled art can be large or small. It can be two dimensional or three dimensional.”

2. History of Recycled Art



Picasso working in his studio(Photo credit: Pinterest) Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021

Przybylek (2021) in her analysis of how recycled art came to be reported that “the idea of reusing old materials to make art isn't new. Early American settlers used bits of fabric from flour sacks and old clothing to make patchwork quilts.” She said further that “during World War I, soldiers in the trenches sometimes took artillery shells and carved images on them to make artwork. In both cases, people used available scraps from objects that had served another purpose to create new, original works of art.”

However, history recorded the 20th century as the era of notable emergence of recycled art and artists that brought the idea to prominence. Around 1912, Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) invented an art style called collage, a process of combining bits of paper, photos, newsprints, and small objects to form a new image. He also created

sculptures from bits of wood and other scavenged materials.



Iranlade Adeyemi's recycled artwork depicting environmental pollution (Photo Credit: Vanguard) Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021

Some of the artists who followed in Picasso's footsteps are Marcel Duchamp, who lived from 1887 to 1968, Robert Rauschenberg (1925 - 2008) and American sculptor John Chamberlain (1927 - 2011). While Duchamp made use of found objects like bicycle tires, wooden furniture, and even a ceramic urinal from a bathroom in his sculptures, Rauschenberg on the other hand created large artworks that gained the term assemblages because they incorporated found objects like tires, street signs, and taxidermy animals and juxtaposed them with painted surfaces and bold splashes of color.



The Fact File art group Retrieved: Nov 10, 2021

Duchamp was a member of an art movement called Dada. History has it that the movement was thrown up by the horrors of World War I. Dada was regarded as art that tasked the viewer's expectations and questioned ideas about art itself. Duchamp's idea was that art could be deemed "art" by the artist's will. To him, it shouldn't be a confined method that borders only on the making of an elaborate oil painting, or a sculpture carved from marble. Chamberlain also established his own style by using twisted automobile parts to make towering sculptures. He referred to the materials he worked with and transformed into colorful, bold artwork as 'junk'.

To the delight of art lovers in the country, artists in Nigeria have also proven beyond reasonable doubt that they too are not left behind in the recycled art revolution. In its 13th August 2021 Arts, Literary Review, The Sun News paper, one of the foremost tabloids in Nigeria published an article by Akubuiro (2021) titled 8 artists set to rescue earth with Fact File. The writer listed the names of 8 indigenous Nigerian artists who are said to be lifting art of recycled objects higher. The artists

are Ernest Nkwocha, Yusuf Durodola, Lateef Olajumoke, Tayo Olayode, Olanrewaju Tejuoso, Samson Akinnire, Abu Momogima, and Uzoma Samuel Anyawu. According to Akubuiro, the artists group exhibition, Fact File, which opens on Sunday, August 22, showing till September 12, 2021, at Thought Pyramid Art Centre, Ikoyi, Lagos, is a creative contribution to the challenge of rescuing the earth from poor waste management.

Similarly, in an article dated September 6, 2021 and published by a Nigerian notable newspaper, Vanguard, Osa Amadi wrote as follows: “Recycling researcher, Festus Iranlade Adeyemi, in his solo art exhibition titled “Waste Panorama”, showing from September 14-24, 2021 at Martin Hall Gallery, Loughborough University, U.K, applies polystyrene’s derivatives such as plastics, serviette-tissue, used receipts, cartons, newspapers, and sacks as what the artist describes as “colours for creative construction.”

Iranlade Adeyemi is on academic sojourn with focus on Recycling Exhibition (a PhD Candidate) at School of Design and Creative Arts, Loughborough University, UK. There is no doubt that recycled art in Nigeria is like a rain that started with a drizzle but ended up as heavy showers. “This exhibition explores the challenges of waste management. Waste, as a throwaway or single used article, causes problems in the global environment,” Adeyemi explains in his Artist Statement.

Though, many view recycling art as a medium whose impact is still at a developing stage in Nigeria but through the efforts of the likes of Fact File art group, Iranlade Adeyemi and many yet to be discovered as artists, the obvious signs are there that it will eventually soak through our collective fabric of art appreciation at the long run.

Recycled Materials as Artists’ Source of Inspiration

No one starts building a house without first constructing the idea of how he wants it to look like in his mind. But before he does so, something must have given him the inspiration of what he will eventually transform to reality. It could be an idea borrowed from nature, other buildings around or even objects in the office or at home.



Monkeys created with tire by Ernest Nkwocha (Photo credit: Humans of Africa) Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021

As the saying goes, the shape of the gourd dictates where the rope is tied to it. Likewise, artists too get their inspirations mostly dictated by the recycled objects available to them for art creation. Nkwocha (2021), a renowned recycled artist and a member of the Fact File, a rising art group said in an article published on Humans of Africa, Akorfa Searyoh. (2020) that “Sometimes some of the tyres give me ideas on what to work on. Especially when I do not know what to do. There was a

crocodile I did. I was moved by the tyre I saw. The texture of the tyre reminds me of the texture of a crocodile's back.”

Many artists search for inspirations that surround them while others express their feelings in the artwork. Artists use recycled or reused objects to make attractive pieces of contemporary art and literally turn everyday trash into creative treasures. Some create compositions from recycled plastic bags or themed works for art galleries, while others create entire theme parks with trash, and even furniture from recycled materials.

An article by Artists Network Staff titled: Art Mediums, Mixed Media stated that “an artist's imagination spins into high gear when working with recycled and repurposed items. In the hands of a mixed-media artist, rusty gears, an old book, or plastic mesh have the potential to become much more than what they were intended for.”

The Two Methods of Recycling: Downcycling and Upcycling

Iberdrola (2021), explains that “society generates an enormous amount of waste. As a result, recycling has become an essential action to protect the environment.



A recycling factory (Photo credit: Waste management world) Retrieved: oct 28, 2021.

Within this area, two approaches have emerged, down cycling and up cycling. In the former, the destructive cycle is slowed down, but the resulting objects lose quality because of the process, while in the latter they acquire value, thanks to the creative intervention.” In many industrialized countries like America, United Kingdom and China, waste recycling is a huge money generating venture that occupies an enviable portion of their economy chart. In such places, waste like plastics, metals etc. are recycled and used as raw materials to produce new items.



Parties generate a lot of waste in Nigeria (Photo credit: The Guardian Newspaper) Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021

In Nigeria, dumping sites and junkyards are not the only places of visitation for

artists scavenging for materials to create artworks. A lot of ceremonies (weddings, housewarming ceremonies, child naming, chieftaincy award etc.) take place regularly especially on weekends across the country with huge amount of money expended on foods, drinks and sundries which will eventually give birth to large volumes of waste like plastic plates and spoons, empty bottles and bottle covers, bones, serviettes, clothing items etc. Determined and inspiration-driven artists can visit such venues at the end of the occasion to gather materials for their artworks. By doing so, they help to reduce the threat of environmental disaster that could emanate from waste mismanagement in society and have access to free materials for their work. It is a win-win situation and in the long run the concept of upcycling is achieved.

The Meaning of Upcycled

Upcycling therefore refers largely to the recycling method where wastes like metals, abandoned home furniture, old newspapers, bottles etc. are used in accordance with artists' inspiration to create artworks. Iberdrola (2021) opined that “The concept, therefore, goes beyond the conventional recycling of materials by creating objects that exceed the economic, cultural and social value of the original product.”

A good example of such works of art are Picasso's collage that are made from the combination of some of the already mentioned waste materials above. It is believed that the idea about upcycling was brought to life by William McDonough and Michael Braungart in 2002 when they defined upcycling in their book *Cradle to Cradle*.

Examples of Recycled Artworks



*A crocodile designed with discarded electronic components.
(Photo Credit: tomorrows world today) Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021*



Sea turtle searching for deep data, 2010 | Credit photo: Copyright © artist Steven Rodrig. Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021



A wall hanging designed with aluminum waste (Photo Credit: tomorrowstoday) Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021



Bottle cap fish (Photo Credit: iheartcraftythings) Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021



A lion made from pieces of firewood (Photo Credit: WhatsApp image) Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021



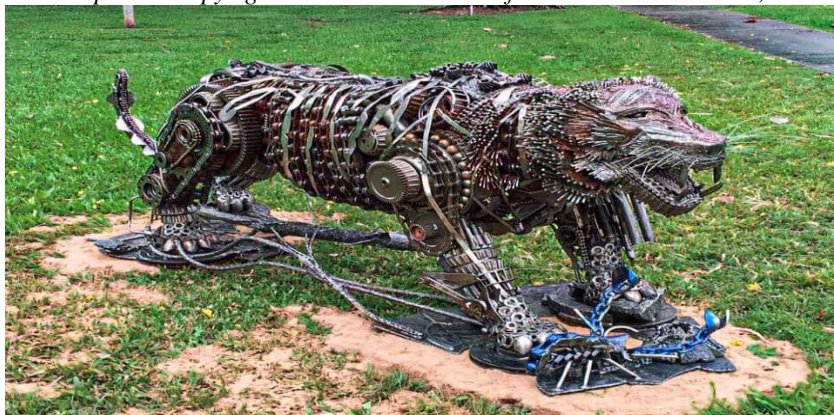
A mat made from used straws created by Joke Akinrujomu, 2020 (Photo Credit: Department of Design and Fine Arts, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, EkitiState, Nigeria)



Flower vases made from bottles and shredded papers created by Joke Akinrujumu, 2020 (Photo Credit: Department of Designs and Fine Arts, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria)



Credit photo: Copyright © artist Robert Bradford. Retrieved: Nov 13, 2021



Kali 2017 | Credit photo: Copyright © artist Barefooted Welder



Mariah Carey | Credit photo: Copyright © artist Jason Mercier, Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021



Bob Marley | Credit photo: Copyright © artist Erika Iris Simmons, Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021



Yusuf Durodola's recycled artwork made from plastic and rubber materials.
(Photo Credit: iBand Magazine) Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021



A barking dog (Photo Credit: iicdcenter) Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021



(Photo Credit: hanging with Mrs hulsey Retrieved: Nov 14, 2021)

3. How Recycling has Enhanced the Usage and Acceptance of Indigenous Arts Works in Nigeria

In the past, Nigerian art revolves around the conventional mediums like bead making, sculpting, drawing, painting, ceramics, textile etc. Understandably, people embraced them since they are after all the offshoot of their culture and tradition. Moreover, satisfaction is relative. If you cannot see beyond what is available, you tend to believe that what you have presently is the best. But the human mind and senses are progressive, always pushing the borderline of impossibilities; inquisitive, demanding, eyeing the horizon and, seeking new ideas. For humans, yesterday's celebrated innovations are today's items for the junkyard.

However, as the creative world evolved and people became tired of the regular artworks, artists started ruminating on how to break the barriers of innovation. Their only way of achieving this is to think outside of the box. One of their voyages to the land of discoveries brought about what is regarded today as recycling art. It is an understatement that recycled art has injected a renewed energy into the life of a once struggling industry especially in Nigeria. In fact, the trend has greatly enhanced the value and acceptance of indigenous artwork both home and abroad.

People who were once of the opinion that there is nothing new to be seen as far as artworks are concerned in Nigeria are now keeping dates with museums all over the country and abroad to see what the latest indigenous artists have to offer. What surprises such people mostly about recycling art is that items they have 'pronounced death sentence' on by banishing them to the dumpsite could come alive in such a fairy-tale manner in the hands of artists. Unlike their conception about conventional artworks in the past, which was basically focused on art appreciation alone, art lovers now believe buying recycled artworks is their own way of improving the economic situation of the country and contributing to the ongoing global campaign for the need to eradicate environmental pollution. Iberdrola (2021) opined that "The people who buy this type of art not only find the works attractive for their artistic value, but they are also motivated by contributing to the planet's welfare giving the materials a second life they would otherwise not have had."

Environmental Benefits of Recycled Art

The environmental benefits cannot be over emphasized. A lot of waste that would have constituted a major issue in society is converted through recycling to make beautiful art pieces. Iberdrola (2021) enumerates the environmental benefits of recycled art as "contribution to the use and extending the useful life of materials and, therefore, by reducing the amount of waste generated.

Economic Benefits of Recycled Materials to Artists, the Nigerian Government and the Public

Nigeria is a blessed country in terms of resources, population, and work force. Its population factor especially is a key driving force for the country's enviable position as the largest economy in Africa, but despite this, its full potential has not been realized due to huge administrative lapses. It is obvious that the country is trying to follow the footsteps of United States of America, USA a country that has successfully activated its potentials and population advantage to achieve economic success.

One of the greatest achievements of the US is its ingenuity of turning recycling business into an economic boosting vocation. An article published on general kinematics (2021) website reports that: “The U.S. Recycling Economic Information (REI) study reveals that the labor force for recycling and reuse establishments significantly outperforms that of mining and waste management. These green organizations generate nearly \$240 billion in annual revenue, further bolstered by employee spending and state, federal and local taxes. In South Carolina alone, more than 15,000 workers, \$1.5 billion in salaries and \$69 million in taxes hinge on the recycling industry. In California, recycling sustains 85,000 workers, \$4 billion in salaries and \$10 billion in goods and services. “This is indeed an enviable achievement.

It is understandable that Nigeria is not yet in the league of nations with fully developed recycling technology but target-oriented policies with good administrative network could fast-forward our success in that new economy sector. Moreover, government can provide logistic and architectural support needed for our indigenous artists to excel in the recycling art business. At the long run, government too will generate revenue through tax from the sale of those artworks, particularly, the ones exported outside the country.

Economic Benefits

1) Low Cost of Materials for Production

It reduces the cost of production for artworks greatly and in turn makes products extremely affordable to artwork buyers. In general kinematics of 2021. “A huge reason is savings. It’s cheaper to manufacture goods from recycled materials. One study shows that production using recycled aluminum can cut costs in half. That’s because much less energy is required to process recycled aluminum than to extract it raw. The savings cycled back to consumers, who can buy goods for less.”

2) Job Creation

Recycling creates a chain of reactions which in turn metamorphose into job creation. From the artist that needs materials for production to those who will help to scavenge for them and to commercial drivers who will do the transporting and finally, the museums and exhibition centers where the artworks would be displayed for sale, a circle of networking income has been established.

3) Sales boost of artworks locally and Internally

Once our indigenous artists can sustain and improve on their level of creativity, global awareness would be achieved and sales of such artworks both locally and externally will become a reliable source of revenue generation for stakeholders in the art industry, the government, and the public.

How Government can Encourage Artists to Embrace Recycling Art

Human beings naturally seek recognition and appreciation for their efforts. Recycling artists in Nigeria have done a lot by mopping up a lot of waste that could as well constitute a suffocating environmental debacle to the country. More so, a sizeable number of them have etched their names in the global hall of fame of creativity and brought unprecedented fame to the country in the process. Furthermore, their artworks have been a new source of revenue for the country. All these artists need to do more to be recognized. Government can create a national art award to be bestowed on those with exceptional performance. This will boost their

resume and encourage them to work harder.

Also, the Ministry of Education should compel academic institutions to adopt a new curriculum which should be drafted by the ministry featuring recycling art as a borrowed course for students of other disciplines and a must for art department students. If this policy could be enacted, Nigeria will soon be blessed with many graduates who will be well equipped and willing to join in the battle against environmental pollution.

4. Conclusions

Nigeria is obviously on the right part to success as far as recycling is concerned. But how long it will take to get there is the mammoth question begging for an answer. Can we put all the necessary templates on ground to achieve recycling stardom? Can the government enact the right policies and remove all the bureaucratic bottlenecks on the part to recycling policies' actualization? All these are burning questions that need to be answered by our determination to combat environmental pollution with recycling art.

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