

Alkebulan Symphony: Arts, Crafts and Culture in Architecture

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Abstract

This paper examines the interconnection between the art, craft, culture and architecture of Africa. In doing this, it gives a brief explanation of African art, craft, architecture and culture. It also examines the manifestation of culture in African architecture and the role of art in architecture. The study adopts qualitative research design, using historical and descriptive approaches. It equally relies on secondary sources of data collection. In the course of research, it was discovered that art, craft, culture and architecture are inseparable, because they complement one another. Also, culture manifests in various ways in the architecture of Africa through kinship, religion, ornamentation, among others. It was further observed that art has inspired many architectural pieces in Africa. The study concludes by suggesting various ways of applying African craftsmanship in architecture to create a postcolonial identity.

Keywords: Africa, art, craft, culture, architecture

Introduction

The term ‘Alkebulan’ means ‘the garden of Eden’ or ‘mother of mankind’, and it was used by Moors, Nubians, Namidians, Carthaginians and Ethiopians to name Africa, which suggests the local origin of the term. This also implies that the term predates the advent of colonialism in Africa. It should be noted that the study does not advocate for the replacement of the term ‘Africa’ with ‘Alkebulan’, but the researchers only prefer to use the term in this study. However, according to Vanessa (2022), “the term Africa emerged in the late 17th century A.D and initially, it was only used to refer to the northern part of the continent, which had already been colonised by Europeans”. This suggests colonial origin of the term ‘Africa’, although it has generated a lot of debates and since the focus of this paper is not to unravel the origin of the term, but to examine the nexus between art, craft, architecture and art.

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Africa is a vast continent that is greatly endowed with both human and material resources. It has a very rich culture that manifests in every facet of life. The people of Africa have a diverse culture that reflects their diversity, and this forms part of the interesting aspect of their lives. At the same time, it makes their culture to be interesting and appealing, rather than being monolithic and boring. African culture is so distinct from that of Euro-American people, which made the earliest European explorers to misjudge African culture and described it as primitive and barbaric culture. Two reasons could be adduced to this misjudgment: the first was that, the Europeans used their knowledge of culture to compare that of Africa, but they discovered that there were lots of differences that they could not understand. They quickly concluded and described it as primitive and barbaric culture. The second reason was the Eurocentric behaviour of the Europeans of that time, which was borne out of racism (Said, 2003). For instance, in religious studies, it has been variously quoted that Emil Ludwig, a German philosopher once remarked that, “How can the untutored African conceive of God? How can this be? Deity is a philosophical concept which savage are incapable of framing”. Looking at Emil Ludwig’s remark, one can conclude that it has a racial connotation, which was an attempt like other Eurocentric European scholars to denigrate Africans.

The paper is however centred on art, craft, culture and architecture in Africa. In African Studies, when talking about Africa, we mostly refer to sub-Saharan Africa, which include East Africa, West Africa, Central Africa and Southern Africa. North African countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco are normally excluded from the scope of African Studies because they belong to a different tradition. North African countries are normally included in Islamic, Middle East, Mediterranean or Oriental Studies. Adepegba (1999) corroborates this by stating that,

The adjective ‘African’ in cultural studies commonly refers to a section of the continent occupied by a particular race and not the entire geographical entity from which the adjective derives. Culturally, the adjective applies to only the countries directly south of the Sahara together with Sudan and Ethiopia, somehow east of them that are all inhabited by black population.

Be that as it may, this paper examines the connection between art, craft, culture and architecture of sub-Saharan Africa. Tetteh (2010) succinctly summarises the interconnection between architecture and art by stating that, “African Architecture incorporates African Art in designs of traditional buildings for decorative purposes, medium to ward off evil spirits, and as means of communication to other people, e.g. lions at entrances, stools etc., to show status in society.”

The terms art, craft, culture and architecture are intertwined and none of them can be seen in isolation of the others. Moreover, the connections between these fields reflect in the end products, buildings. It is not rare to see buildings where their builders incorporate the elements of visual art, crafts and culture into them in order to perform a certain function, which ranges

from aesthetics to socio-cultural functions. The combination of art, craft, culture and architecture dates back to prehistoric period when paintings and engravings were done on the rock shelters in Africa and the Europe, although these paintings and engravings were done for magical purposes and sympathetic rituals (Brentjes and Willet in Alawode and Muhammad, 2024). What is important is that the caves, which sheltered the early men were painted and engraved on. This attests to the ancientness of the interconnection between art and architecture. Even in Ancient Rome and Greece, great tilework and murals were made on government buildings and churches, before being adapted by the respective citizens (Mojo Stumper Associates, 2024).

Traditional African art has an influence on the architecture of the continent, and this is expressed through architectural elements like doors, walls, columns, fenestration, roofs, finishes, furniture and furnishings, among others. The forms, spaces, materials and architectural features of buildings in Africa also portray the culture, history and art of Africans. The transition in the cultures and arts of Africans over the years has also reflected in their architecture. The construction technology and finishes used for buildings can be related to the works of arts and crafts of Africans (Tetteh, 2010). From the foregoing it can be observed that art and architecture are inseparable, they are interwoven. However, art and architecture can be fused together in a project through the additive and integrated methods. The additive method can be achieved by incorporating the artwork into a completed architectural work. One can take into consideration during the planning stages where to add the artworks and the type of artworks to be added whether mural or sculpture, or any other form of art. The second approach which is integrated method can be done right from the early stage of the work by incorporating basic features of visual arts into an architectural edifice. It is against this background that, this paper investigates, examines and documents the role of art in architecture and how contemporary architects can incorporate the African craftsmanship into their architectural practices to create a postcolonial identity.

Methodology

This paper is qualitative in nature and relies on historical and descriptive approaches for its analysis. Historical approach was adopted to unravel how art, craft and culture have been incorporated into the architecture of Africa over the time, while descriptive approach was adopted to describe the cultural and artistic elements incorporated into African architecture. The study relies on secondary source of data collection which includes relevant textbooks, journal articles in both hard and electronic copies, among others.

African Art and Craft

The demarcation between art and craft is blurred and not quite obvious because most of the works classified as crafts still fall within the purview of art, and this has made some art scholars to conclude that describing some African artworks as craft has ethnocentric connotation.

However, the term 'art' is a derivation got from the Latin word *ars*, which means skill. This implies a skill acquired to carry out a certain task. It maintains its original meaning when used to connote different human activities that involve creativity. For instance, the art of writing, the art of drawing, the art of dancing, among others. In its broadest sense, art encompasses all creative disciplines such as literature, poetry, drama, music, dance and visual arts. Harris (2006) assails that, art refers to artefacts, processes, skills, and effects entailed in production of visual art representations within a wide variety of media and materials. Looking at the definition offered by Harris, one can see that it is quite explicit and broad, and at the same time, it contains both the processes and products.

When talking about African art, however, we are invariably talking about the work of art executed by Africans, which its theme or illustration is about Africa. It may be executed in Africa or diaspora, but its executor must be an African. African art can be broadly classified into two, namely, traditional and modern or contemporary African art. Traditional African art refers to the original art style and all artistic output of Africans prior to contact with the West. This means that traditional African art refers to all artworks executed by Africans and for Africans. This type of art was executed before the contact between Africans and the West. The tools and media were sought from Africa and also, the patrons of this very type of art were Africans. Traditional African artists are informally trained and they adhere resolutely to the inherited indigenous art styles, idioms and techniques of their forbear.

Tetteh (2010) observes that traditional African arts have certain qualities which contribute to their aesthetics and these qualities also influence the aesthetics of African architecture. Tetteh states further that these qualities are mostly expressed abstractly in African works of art and architecture, and they often form the basis for judging a good African work from a bad one. The scholar lists elements of the African aesthetics as thus, resemblance to a human being, luminosity, self-composure, youthfulness and clarity of form and detail, complexity of composition, balance and symmetry, smoothness of finish.

Traditional African arts are utilitarian in nature, which has made art scholars to assert that traditional African 'art is art for life' not 'art for art sake'. Art for life means the art that is functional and utilitarian in nature. This type of art is not executed for a mere admiration, but it serves a purpose, it is tied to the life and culture of its producer (Pogson, 1999). Examples include carved door panels, house poles, walking staff, chairs, stools, etc. The major problem with African art is anonymity, that is, their authors are unknown, which has made art scholars to name these works after the community where they were found such as Esie soap stone images, Ife art, Benin art, Igbo Ukwu art, Tada figures, among others.

Contemporary or modern African art on the other hand, refers to art that emerged due to the contact between Africa and the West. This form of art started around 15th century A.D and the earliest work of art that shows European influence is Afro-Portuguese art. Although modern African art cannot be totally divorced from the African traditional art, because it was built on the already existing traditional art structure. Kasfir (1999) buttresses this by stating that,

In reality, contemporary art in Africa has built through a process bricolage upon the already existing structures and scenarios on which the older, precolonial and colonial genres of African art were made. It is in this structural sense, and the habits and attitudes of artists towards making art, rather than in any adherence to a particular style, medium, technique or thematic range, that is recognizably ‘African’.

Moreover, some art scholars have used the following expressions: modern African art, contemporary African art, 20th century art of Africa, postcolonial African art, new African art to refer to the art that emerged due to contact between Africa and the West. Some scholars have also used the terms interchangeably. Egonwa (2011) has made some conceptual classifications by describing modern African art as all artistic expressions which use an application of modernist (Euro-American) subject matter, techniques and media. This definition refers to the works of formal trained artists. Contemporary art on the other hand, refers to all artistic expressions currently existing in Africa. Egonwa states further that modern African art took place between 1900 and 1960. Looking at the time frame assigned to modern art, one can see that it falls within the period when Aina Onabolu (1882-1963) pioneered the practice and teaching of Fine Art in Nigerian schools. Contemporary art on the other hand is basically about 20th century African art, and 1960 till date has been assigned to it. This art includes all artistic expressions currently existing in Africa.

Crafts on the other hand refer to handicrafts or handcrafts. It is the creation of decorative or functional objects by hands. Nowadays, some craft objects are created with mechanized (power) devices and hand tools. A craft is a skill that involves practical arts. Etymologically, craft is a derivative word from the Greek word, ‘techne’ which means technology. From this, one can infer that local craft means the skill of a particular people because it includes both the art and technology of a given culture. Examples of crafts include basketry, pottery, wood carving, fabric dyeing, metal works, leather works, cloth weaving, among others.

African Architecture

According to Harris (2006), architecture has both neutral and evaluative senses, and within the neutral sense, it means a building with an accessible inside and an outside. This has to do with the material structure made by humans for habitation. Harris states further that, evaluative sense of architecture refers to those buildings considered to exhibit the highest qualities: the best or most important. The scholar goes ahead and cites Nicolaus Pevsner who refers to ‘a bicycle shed as a building’ and ‘a cathedral as a piece of architecture’. Looking at this instance, two things are discernable from it and the first thing is the effort, finance and time put together to construct a structure. The effort required in constructing a bicycle shed is not up to the effort put in place to construct a cathedral, because it may take several years to construct a cathedral while a bicycle shed can only be constructed within few days with a few number of workers. The second discernable thing from the instance given by Harris is the association of

status and value with the intended social use of the structure. For instance, cathedrals are just like royal palaces and houses of parliament which are built, financed and overseen by, and for the most powerful and richest groups in society, while a bicycle shed is only constructed for its rider. In a nutshell, Harris' neutral and evaluative senses of architecture are just to differentiate between a building and an architectural piece, and according to him, a building does not require much effort and finance like an architectural structure.

The view of Harris is sharply different from that of Kalilu (2013) who basically sees an architecture as a house, and he bases his argument on ethnographical view. According to Kalilu (2013), "My extensive research on the architecture of Nigerian peoples, reveals that the concept of the house is based on two paradoxically opposed but related and interactive realms: the transcendence and the physical, against which their forms are to be understood." What Kalilu means here is that a house means a home, that is, a dwelling place and at the same time, it means the great beyond because if somebody passes on, Yoruba will euphemistically say, he has gone home. According to Yoruba cosmogony, everybody comes from heaven and we must surely return to heaven, and based on this axiom, heaven is always regarded as our home (house).

Architecture is the art of building or the art of enclosing space in a functional and pleasing way. Men purposely build houses for shelter and protection against climate, the animals and uncongenial humans. The essence of architecture is to provide a space that permits the easy performance of primary functions of life. Architectural design on the other hand, involves certain basic concerns, which include convenient arrangement and flow of space, illumination from outside and within, protection from the weather, continuous interior climate control and efficient use of fuel, financial and political status of the owner and religion. Roofs, walls, floors, doors and windows are all designed in the light of these requirements as well as to suit the owner and the location.

African traditional architecture is designed to respond to society's needs and also, to be sensitive to its environment (Tetteh, 2010). It equally accommodates the diversity in climatic conditions, regions, peoples and traditions. Kalilu (2013) corroborates this by stating that, "the forms of the house are diffused, not just along ethnic line, but, more along socio-cultural and ecological lines, which respectively dictated availability of materials and shaped their forms." Willet (2002) broadly classifies traditional African architecture into two and his classification was based on the materials, thus, we have impermanent and permanent homes. According to Willet, the windbreakers used as shelters by the Bushmen are constructed with leaves. The builders of impermanent homes take advantage of abundant materials in the environment and construct structures that would not prevent their builders from following the games. Other nomadic people in more hostile environment, where nature has been less liberal with building supplies, have had recourse to tents which can be collapsed and taken to a new site. These are particularly suitable for pastoralists who can use one or more of their herd as a pack-animal.

Anderson (in Tetteh, 2010) corroborates the view of Willet by stating that,

The designs of buildings that were found across Africa ranged from the windbreakers used as shelters by the Bushmen; the simple round beehive huts made of flexible branches and covered with leaves, made by the Pygmies, to the circular huts with conical roofs called home by the agricultural peoples that live on the grasslands.

Looking at the explanations given by these scholars, one can infer that the choice of materials by the builders has much to do with the occupation of the dwellers of the homes because those who live in homes built with impermanent materials are hunters or pastoralists who move from one place to another. On the homes built with permanent materials, mostly clay and stones, these types of buildings are common among the sedentary people who practise farming.

Willet (2002) further observes that there are two types of granaries in northern part of Nigeria; one is incorporated into the main building, while the other one is not incorporated into the main building but stands as an independent structure where the owners store their grains. He identifies rectangular houses with a ridge-pole in the forest region of Africa, and this is possible due to availability of timbers. These types of houses are commonly painted, while the BaKuba cover them with decorative woven matting. In swampy areas, houses of this type are built on piles. Sometimes, square houses with pyramidal roofs are found in the grasslands.

Adepegba (1995) also classifies African architecture into two, which include dwelling houses and shrines for religious purposes. He states further that elaborate structures are hardly put up for religious purposes. Certain shrines especially those of individual and family deities, are often under individual's roofs. The shrines of lineage, clan or community deities are sometimes separately built or situated in a grove, and, such separately built shrines are invariably in miniature form of dwelling houses. Kalilu (2013) observes that,

The majority of the houses in the northern part of the country are round or oval while those in the southern part are usually rectangular in plan. The rectangular plan is not as diffuse in the north. The round and oval-plans are also not diffuse in the south. Apart from the ecological factors, the diffuse nature of the house forms indicates possible artistic and other forms of interactions among the various people.

The materials for traditional architecture include wood, clay, mud, stone, grass, leaves, raffia, cane, bamboo, etc. Fletcher (1963) observes that geographical (geological) location of a place that includes natural products such as timber, brick, clay and stone, largely determine the character of the architecture of a country. The view of Fletcher is correct if one examines the way stones were used in ancient Egypt for building and embellishment of their architectural structures which were possible due to availability of abundant stones in Egypt.

Manifestations of Culture in African Architecture

African architecture cannot be removed from the culture of Africans because architecture is a product of culture. Culture is a very broad term which permeates all facets of life of Africans. Tylor (in Alawode, 2010) sees culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”. This definition serves as a foundation for cultural anthropology, and one can infer from it that everybody has culture which he or she acquires by being a member of a society. However, culture is divided into two: material and non-material culture. According to Tamara (2015), material culture stems from the philosophy of materialism, which teaches that the universe is made up of only physical matter, and only physical matter exists and influences society and its values. She states further that the concept of material culture covers the physical expressions of culture, such as technology, architecture and art. Material culture includes those physical things that have particular significance to specific groups and can include objects like tools, pots, buildings, among others. Non-material culture goes hand in hand with idealism. The philosophy of idealism teaches that the world as it is seen is only one reality and that an ideal world actually exists (Tamara, 2015). In this wise, human beings are constantly being shaped by spiritual influences and their own intellect, not just by material. Non-material culture includes principles of social organisation and social institutions, mythology, philosophy, literature (both written and oral), and science.

From the foregoing, one can see that architecture falls under material culture. However, culture manifests in African architecture through kinship, religion, ornamentation, among others. According to Ayisi (1980), “kinship refers to a particular category of relationships which exist between two individuals, or a group of individuals. These are relationships which may have their roots in genealogy, or may be effected through marriage or adoption”. Prussin (in Tetteh, 2010) sheds more light on the importance of kinship in determining a certain architecture by stating that, “members of one clan would live in a defined territory, with family units close by. These kinships were defined by the physical nearness of the buildings.” This has a significant effect on African traditional architecture, especially among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria. People who are born of the same father usually live in a large compound with an open courtyard and their compound is mostly fenced because of security. At times they build next to each other for the purpose of being identified together. Kalilu (2013) stresses this point by observing that, “architecture is about organisation of space, which in Nigerian peoples’ thought defines identity and identification achieved through birth, ancestral origin, residence or socio-economic and spiritual factors. The house, which encloses space for shelter confirms this identity.”

Culture also manifests in religious architecture. Adepegba (1995) observes that in traditional African settings, individual shrines are incorporated into the main dwellings while community shrines are built as independent structures. The builders of such structures normally attach some items of charms, cowries, animal horns and bones, among other things either to fortify them or to enhance their potency. Most at times, the doors and house posts of the shrines are

normally decorated with different scenes that contain some sacrificial animals loved by each deity. It is not only peculiar to traditional religion alone, the orthodox religions, Islam and Christianity also have their unique ways of manifesting their respective cultures. For instance, mosques are mostly built with their Qibla normally facing Mecca, and on top of them attached star and crescent built on dome, while churches normally have crosses on top of them. Some mosques are usually decorated with geometrical and floral designs, Muslims do not decorate their mosques with figural images because Islam abhors them. In many churches, however, biblical stories are depicted on them with beautiful colours.

Looking at the picture in Fig. 1, one can see different geometrical and floral designs depicted with bright colours of yellow ochre, light and deep green. The designs are done with attractive colours in realistic form.



Fig. 1. An Architecture of a Mosque in the Northern part of Nigeria. Retrieved on December 4, 2024 from <https://www.northernnigerianarchitecture.com/>

Religions still have effects on the architectures of their adherents. For instance, people of the north have a special way of building their houses. Despite the fact that north is normally hot during the dry season, they still build their houses with small windows, large compound and mostly fenced with mud bricks which are annually retouched so as to prevent collapse. Also, a room that is facing a small outer outlet is normally set aside for their adult male children to stay. This practice is enshrined in Islamic culture.

Ornamentation of architectural structures also manifests the culture of their inhabitants or what they use such buildings for. Majority of the people who live in northern Nigeria are Muslims and their religion, Islam abhors figural representations that is why they normally ornament their architectures with geometrical and floral motifs. Among the Igbo of Southeastern part of Nigeria, their houses are ornamented by smoothening the wet wall surface and painting

it with cow dung or rotten banana stems (Emusa, 2024). Not only these, Igbo still decorate their houses through bas-relief, insertions, colour mural painting, and the use of moulded and carved objects. Nsude (in Emusa, 2024) reports that, a variety of materials such as indigenous paints, plates, pieces of bottles, cowries, and clay were used in these decorative practices. However, Nsuede (in Emusa, 2024) classifies the motifs used in decorating Igbo buildings into three, which include *Uli* motifs, geometrical motifs, and motifs derived from natural objects. This classification is simplistically done because Igbo women are known to decorate their houses with linear designs called *Uli* symbols. They equally use basic shapes and designs from plants, flowers, fruits among other natural objects.

The architecture of Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria also reflects the decorative elements of their culture and its significance in the built environment. They ornament their architecture with patterns, symbols, motifs, carvings, metal works, pottery, beadworks among others. The walls of their buildings are also adorned with paintings and sculptural works which are of significant importance to them.



Fig 2. A Yoruba Wooden Door. Retrieved on December 4, 2024 from <https://www.yorubadoorpanel.com/>

The work in Fig. 2 is a door panel carved by a Yoruba artist and the work narrates different stories about royalty. From the sculptural scene, one can see men carrying boxes of money while two men are carrying their king. Also in the scene, there is an equestrian figure that is perceived to be their king. These different episodes narrate different stories about the enjoyment that kings in traditional Yorubaland settings enjoy. Therefore, the culture that manifests on this wooden panel is royalty.

The Role of African Arts and Crafts in Architecture

The difference that exists between art, craft and architecture is very slim if not blurred, because they complement each other. They have a deep connection that resonates with authenticity. Thet (2022) sheds more light on the interconnection between art and architecture by stating that,

Architecture is not only considered an art, but it is regarded as the ultimate form of art by many. It requires so many disciplines to design a structure, and most of those steps are intrinsically artistic in nature. Hierarchy-wise, it occupies the top slot as far as the arts are concerned, by a vast majority of the consuming audience.

From the above quotation, one can infer that the primary role of art is to complement architecture and makes it looks finished. For instance, carved woods which are mostly categorised as crafts or arts, can still be classified as architectural objects, because they are mostly used in architecture as doors, windows, house columns, among others. Adeyemi (2023) corroborates this by stating that,

Traditional African architecture and art have long been intertwined, with both fields influencing and complementing one another. Indigenous materials and construction techniques, such as earthen walls, thatched roofs, and wooden structural elements, have shaped the aesthetic and functional aspects of African buildings. Art has always been an integral part of traditional architecture, as evidenced by the use of sculptures, murals, and textiles in various building elements.

The interconnection between the three fields, art, architecture and culture goes beyond materials, one can see some architectural structures in the northern part of Nigeria, which are heavily decorated with different attractive designs. This buttresses the fact that art and architecture complement each other, because the decorations applied on the architectures give them finished appearance and also enhance their aesthetic visibility.

Art communicates power, authority and position in architecture. This can manifest in an architecture purposely designed and built for people in the position of authority and power like kings, chiefs and nobles. In African art, there are certain animals whose images cannot be incorporated into architectures ordinarily except for the architectures that are meant for people who acquire influence and authority to some certain extent, and such animals include elephants, lions, hippopotami, ostriches, boas, among others. If any or a combination of these animals are incorporated into African architecture, they symbolise authority, position and power of the occupants of the buildings, because these animals are kings in their respective territories. Another thing that symbolises position, authority and power of the occupant of a dwelling house in African context is the space occupied by that very structure, because a powerful king or an individual tends to occupy a very spacious building that communicates the acceptability of his power (Alawode, 2010). For instance, Alaafin of Oyo was known to be very powerful

during the precolonial era in Africa and Kalilu (2013) asserts that there was a time in the history of Oyo that merely hearing the word Oyo was capable of causing people to desert a place. This attests to the power and authority of Alaafin during the precolonial era, and looking at the space occupies by his palace also confirms his authority and power, and this is why he acquired the title of Alaafin (the owner of a large palace).

Art enhancing the efficacy of offerings offered in shrine presumes a religious edifice where some certain images are incorporated. There are certain images regarded as items of charms that are incorporated into traditional African architecture due to the demand of the users who are mostlytrado-medical practitioners. In some altars, sacrificial animals like dogs, goats, fowls, sheep, among others are depicted to enhance its therapeutic functions and the efficacy of prayers. In some instances, snail shells, cowries, animal horns, textile materials, animal skins among others are fused into the walls of religious buildings to ward off evil, fortify the structure or accelerate the efficacy of prayers offered in such buildings.

Art has the power to evoke emotions, stimulate creativity, and foster a sense of connection with the built environment (Roshan, 2023). In a nutshell, art enhances creativity. Art as a creative endeavour inspires architecture and enhances the skills of the architects in incorporating artistic elements into their architectural designs. Art and its techniques mostly serve as inspirations to the builders or architects of some certain structures. The forms and shapes of artworks and crafts often inspire some architectural pieces. The techniques and methods normally employed by artists in the execution of their works also serve as inspirations to many architects which in most cases has culminated into the adoption some of these techniques like carving or modeling in the architectural practices. The adoption of art techniques and methods is quite obvious in the architecture of the Great Djenne Mosque in Mali where architectural intricacies of visual arts origin are incorporated into this architectural master piece.



Fig. 3: Great Djenne Mosque in Mali, Retrieved on 16 November, 2024 from <https://momaa.org/>

From Fig. 3, it is obvious that art plays a significant role in shaping this architectural structure as one can observe the visual intricacies incorporated into it which are induced by the creativity inherent in visual arts. It is one of the largest mud-brick structures in the world and an archetypal example of Sudano-Sahelian architecture. The architectural structure is ornamented with wooden beams, which serve as scaffolding for the annual replastering of the mosque. Adeyemi (2023) pinpoints the connection between art and architectural materials used in building the Great Djenne Mosque by stating that, “the Great Mosque of Djenné in Mali, is built entirely of sun-dried mud bricks and covered with a plaster made of clay, sand, and rice husks. The mosque’s walls are adorned with intricate geometric patterns and timber beams, showcasing the close relationship between architecture and art in traditional African societies”.



Fig. 4: A Rock-Hewn Church in Lalibela, Ethiopia. Retrieved on November 16, 2024 from <https://momaa.org/>

The picture in Fig. 4 shows one of the rock hewn churches in the ancient town of Lalibela in Ethiopia. This is not only an architectural master piece but it also shows exquisite artistic craftsmanship. This church was carved from a solid rock, featuring intricate religious reliefs and frescoes on its interior walls, illustrating biblical scenes and figures. This is an integration of art and architecture to create an exquisite architectural structure. Carving is a technique domiciled in sculpture (a unit in Fine Arts), adopted when working with wood or stone, and that is the technique adopted by the builders of this church. This implies that this church was induced by an art technique which is carving.

Another exquisite architecture inspired by visual art creativity is the Rwanda Cricket Stadium designed by Light Earth Designs. This architectural piece was inspired by the traditional Rwandan basket weaving techniques. The stadium’s vaulted brick structures reference the region’s history and culture while also offer a sustainable and contextually appropriate construction method.



Fig. 5: Rwanda Cricket Stadium. Retrieved on November 16, 2024 from <https://momaa.org>

In the context of beyond sustainable architecture, art can be used to communicate the values and principles underlying sustainable design. It can serve as a medium to raise awareness about environmental issues and inspire individuals to embrace sustainable practices in their own lives.

Artistic elements such as sculptures, murals, and installations can be incorporated into the design of sustainable buildings and communities to create visually striking focal points. These artistic interventions can spur conversation that encourages dialogue and engagement with sustainability concepts. By integrating art into the architecture beyond sustainable architecture becomes a medium for storytelling, conveying messages of environmental stewardship and social responsibility.

Art increases the aesthetic and visual visibility of architectural pieces. Despite the fact that African art is utilitarian in nature, it also performs aesthetic functions. For instance, there are certain art objects which are used in the interior part of the building such as stools, chairs, cups, among others. These are objects that reflect the status and the position of the occupant of the architecture and at the same time, they enhance the aesthetic appearance of the building. Another example that is germane to this discussion is painting of an architectural piece. Architecture and painting are inseparable, they are intertwined, because if an architectural piece is painted, it appears finishing and complete. This will enhance the aesthetic appearance of such a building.

Applications of African Craftsmanship in Architecture

Contemporary Nigerian architects need to learn from their artist counterparts who had experimented with the local materials, styles, methods and techniques in creating their

postcolonial identities. Although in art, it was a determined effort that took place through rebellion in Zaria Art School in 1958. The students at Zaria Art School rebelled against their teachers who were predominantly Europeans and they were also spurred into rebellion because of the fact that the art they learnt alienated them from their culture (Oloidi, 2008), and this rebellion took the form of revisitation of tradition (Adepegba, 1995) and reinvention (Adesanya, 2007). Some architects like Charles Correa of India and Demas Nwoko of Nigeria have started pioneering works on this in order to create their postcolonial identity. Both architects integrated traditional motifs and materials into their designs to create buildings that were both modern and reflective of the continent's diverse cultures.

Other contemporary Nigerian architects need to build on the achievements made by both Correa and Demas to carve a niche for themselves as postcolonial architects. There are certain things that must be done if they must carve a niche for themselves as postcolonial architects. They need to decolonise their architectural practices through indigenisation. What this implies is to incorporate the African cultural elements into their architectural practices, and this can take place at design level or implementation level. At the design level means that when the drawing is being done, one can incorporate the African cultural elements into it, while at the implementation level, one can incorporate the African cultural elements into it, because this is when the drawing is being transformed into a building. However, before the incorporation of African cultural elements into their works, the contemporary Nigerian architects need to acquaint themselves with the history and culture of Africans, African signs, symbols and their meanings, among others. They can equally visit where they will learn about African culture like museums, libraries, art galleries, among others and ask the custodians different thought provoking questions about the cultural objects being kept.

Having familiarised themselves with African culture, they can now incorporate what they have learnt into their works, which can take the form of revisitation and adaptation of styles, techniques, materials, content, among others. At times, one can synthesize, appropriate, adapt, indigenise, among others to create a postcolonial identity. When one synthesizes, it will result into hybridity or hybridisation of styles, forms, techniques, and materials, because synthesis means merging of indigenous architectural forms, styles, materials, techniques and content with the Western ones. But when one appropriates, it means one has taken the ownership of a style, technique, form, material and content as his or hers which can be in form of indigenisation, that is, *Yorubalisation*, *Igboisation*, *Hausatisation* or otherwise. When this is done, they have succeeded in carving a niche for themselves as postcolonial architects.

Conclusion

It is obvious that African art, craft, culture and architecture are intertwined, inseparable and complement each other. Also, the collaboration between African artists and architects has produced a robust interdisciplinary exchange of ideas and techniques. This creative collaboration has equally brought about the evolvement of unique and innovative architectural

projects that showcase the rich artistic achievements of the past in contemporary time. It is the conclusion of this paper that, if African professionals in both art and architecture can further their collaboration, it will result into a robust practice that is devoid of external influences, and if there are external influences, they will be at minimal levels. This in turn will help contemporary Nigerian architects to create their postcolonial identities.

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