

GENERATING VISUAL ARTISTIC INSPIRATIONS AMONG THE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS OF ART AND DESIGN IN NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA: A SURVEY

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Introduction

A lack of inspiration for artists could be quite frustrating and discouraging. Some artists abandon their works due to they do not know the next step to take. Most artists are inspired by a whole lot of things, for instance, the environment they find themselves in, culture, nature, some objects, borrowed culture, other art and designs, and many others. Some artists are identified with a peculiar style. Some artists derive inspiration while they are sleeping; in their dreams, one never knows when creative ideas will come into someone's mind. At times, while in an unusual place, an idea could flash into someone's mind; this is called a "hunch". Therefore, artists are advised to always keep or carry their drawing instruments wherever they are because this idea that suddenly comes up, is easily forgotten but if it is sketched immediately, later the artist could develop it further to what he/she desires. Jones (2023), buttresses this statement by mentioning that artistic inspirations have a way of striking at random times. Early in the morning and late at night. No one knows exactly where it comes from but every creative knows the feeling.

According to Forgeard (2022), "art inspiration is everywhere, within us and before us. We may not always be aware that we are inspired by something as an idea affects perception and memory and therefore usually goes unnoticed."

Since inspirations are what art beginners and professionals crave, it has become pertinent to find out various ways in which an artist can generate them in case of an art block. Some artists still find it difficult to generate ideas when given a task that is the reason why this study has become imperative. Therefore, this study found out various ways designers/artists could be inspired whenever they are faced with some assignments or jobs, revealed some ways by which artists can develop conceptual and perceptual ideas and expressions through critical reasoning by engaging in various ways of visual artistic inspirations to enable the artists to view the world through various lenses and contexts. By engaging in those suggested ways, this study is of the view that they will boost lost confidence, curiosity, imagination, and also enable them to create a personal style through engagement in various visual artistic inspirations when they've run out of ideas.

Objective of the study

1. To examine the approaches of generating visual artistic inspirations among the first year students of arts and design in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Research question

1. In what ways can the approaches of generating visual artistic inspirations among the first-year students of the Department of Fine and Applied arts in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka be determined?

Theoretical framework

The Semiotics theory, developed by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, delves into the use of signs and symbols in artistic communication and examines how meaning is created and interpreted. Associated with artists like Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian, Constructivism focuses on the idea of art as a construction or composition, often involving abstract forms and non-representational elements. Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory explores how unconscious thoughts and desires may manifest in visual artistic inspirations.

Methodology

This is survey research. It utilized a closed-ended questionnaire and observations as the research instruments. The first-year students in the Department of fine and applied arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka were the respondents. They are 105 in number. This served as a sufficient sample. A hundred questionnaires were shared to them in the class and ninety-five were returned. They comprise of 46 females and 51 males. The data collected were presented in the table below in percentages for proper analysis with the formula:

$$\frac{\text{Frequency}}{\text{Total number of students}} * \frac{100}{1} = \text{percentage}$$

Table 1: ways of generating inspirations for visual artistic inspirations among the first-year students of the Department of Fine and Applied arts in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

S/N	ITEM	No of responses	Total no of participants	Percentage%
1	I get inspired by attending art exhibitions, shows and workshops.	5	95	5.26%
2	I am inspired by looking at other people's works in the class.	13	95	13.68%
3	I get inspired by reading art books to find out what other artists and designers have done.	20	95	21.0%
4	I am inspired when I sleep or rest also observations.	10	95	10.5%
5	I get inspiration by visiting art museums and galleries.	5	95	5.26%
6	The natural environment always has a way of sparking visual art inspiration on me.	5	95	5.26%
7	I consult the media for inspiration. For instance, through watching some categories of films, reading some newspapers, magazines, catalogues, brochures, posters, television adverts, music, and video games	5	95	5.26%
8	I employ some visual discovery engine to generate some inspiration. For instance, Pinterest.	20	95	21.0%
9	I keep a record of ideas in a sketchbook so that when I feel low on original ideas, I can consult it.	10	95	10.5%
10	I study my favourite artists' Work to get inspired.	5	95	5.26%

11	I am inspired by human life experiences and fiction.	-	95	0%
12	To generate ideas for inspiration, I visit some places following different routes I used to follow.	-	95	0%
13	I get inspired while working on some old artworks and projects that I abandoned.	2	95	2.10%
	Total	100	95	100.00% approx.

Source: researchers, 2024

Table 1 shows the respondents' responses to ways of generating inspirations for visual artistic inspiration among the first-year students of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The table shows that the students are inspired in various ways, 5.26% get inspired by attending art exhibitions, shows and workshops, 13.68% get inspired by looking at other people's works in the class, 21.0% get inspired by reading art books to find out what other artists and designers have done, 10.5% are inspired when they sleep or rest and through also observations, 5.26% get inspiration by visiting art museums and galleries, 5.26% are inspired by the natural environment they find themselves, 5.26% consult the media for inspiration, 21.0% employ some visual discovery engine like the social media to generate some inspiration, 10.5% keep records of ideas in their sketchbooks, 5.26% study their favourite artists' work to get inspired, 0% are inspired by human life experiences and fiction, 0% visit some places following different routes used before, 2.10% are inspired while working on some old artworks and projects they abandoned.

Based on the results presented in the table, the majority of the students are inspired by consulting art books to find out what other artists and designers have done and also utilize social media. Some of them look at their classmates' work for inspiration, while some have their sketchpads for their ideas, few of them get inspired by attending some art exhibitions to view some displayed, visiting the museums and galleries, and by the natural environment they live in, and by studying their favourite artists' work to get inspired, fewer students get inspired while working on some old artworks and projects they abandoned while none are inspired by human life experiences and fiction, and visits to some places following different routes they have used before.

Results and Discussions

Approaches to generating inspirations in art and design

This study is of the view that to expose some ways by which imagination and creativity could be achieved, various ways of generating visual inspiration revealed by the student artists should be discussed for a clearer understanding.

First and foremost, this study opines that an artist should make it a point of duty to be addicted to the practice of art every day in that manner, it helps one to develop a frame of mind which is creative. It also makes an artist to be more focused, well-organized, self-controlled, and highly committed. The saying, which is "practice makes perfect" helps an artist practice often and in practicing daily, he/she can detect some mistakes which are often taken note of and corrected. It has been observed that artists that practice drawing every day, make good draughts men. By

exploring some new media daily, many ideas are created from some mistakes, personal styles in art and new techniques could even be formed from some mistakes. When artists practice art making daily, they are ready to deliver assignments on time and are not afraid of art block.

This study found that Inspiration could be generated by studying African art and motif symbols that are venerated by Africans. Africa is the second largest continent in the world. It is made up of 54 countries (United Nations statistics) and approximately 1.1 billion people live there. An estimated number of 2, 000 different languages are spoken in Africa (World Population Prospects, 2022) meaning that there are also 2,000 different cultures with Indigenous art, folklore, and design concepts which an artist can draw inspiration from. The African continent boasts of uncountable diverse motif symbols and patterns which convey lots of deep meaning to the owners and the onlookers. These motif symbols have been utilized by many artists from different sections, be it textile artists, painters, ceramists, sculptors, or graphic artists. These indigenous motifs are quite loaded with some hidden information that echoes Africanism. They also have characteristics that showcase their roots when utilized in artworks. The abstract art (masks, headdresses, sculptural pieces, etc.) and geometric and symbolic patterns (Indigenous symbolic motifs used in body and wall painting, woven into textiles, jewellery, mats, paper, ceramic vessels, etc.) represent the cultural beliefs and history. The way they are arranged also is a pointer to the wealth of knowledge that they showcase. Nigeria, for instance, is a society of about 250 distinct groups that comprise creative individuals and diversified cultural backgrounds which offer an immense opportunity to study different types of traditional designs and art as stated by Alau (2006) in Chudi-Duru (2011). One of those groups is the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria who practised Uli traditional painting. In Nigeria, there are lots of indigenous motif symbols used by different tribes. They have been able to distinguish themselves based on their traditional motifs. Some examples are the Hausa tribe that utilizes theirs on embroidered clothes and caps, one could also find them inscribed on their calabashes, leather purses, puffs, mats, and as wall decorations. The Yoruba have some symbolic motifs which have been adapted as design motifs in adire production, embroidery on agbada, carved doors and other objects. The Igbo symbolic motifs have also inspired lots of artists in this recent dispensation. For instance, some artists are inspired by the traditional painting symbolic motifs of the Igbo in South-eastern Nigeria. They derive inspiration from them to produce their artworks which include mixed media art, printed fabrics, rugs, mixed media wearable art, and many others. Other tribes like the Egbira, Fulani, Shua Arabs, Beri-Beri, Igala, Tiv, Idoma, Urhobo, Itshekiri, Nupe, Efik, Ibibio, Anang, Kanuri, Ijaw, Mambilla, Wagga, Isoko, Jukun, Izon, Kajuru, Gwari, Bassa, Kaje, Kalabari to mention but a few also have numerous symbolic motifs which artists can generate inspirations from. Some mixed media wearable art inspired by Uli traditional motifs of the Igbo is placed on plate 1.



Plate 1: some mixed media wearable art inspired by Uli traditional motifs of the Igbo.

Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2023)

It also found out that visits to Museums and galleries could also generate visual artistic inspiration.

They can inspire artists in many ways in that artists visit them to see and study the works of other artists (Chudi-duru 2019). In this manner, it could help them to come up with specific styles and develop them. It also allows them to display their artworks alongside other artists and also improve interactions with other artists. She further mentioned that various museums in various parts of the world have helped many scholars in their research. Many artists, designers, anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, and others have also benefited from the artefacts kept in the museums. In Nigeria, there are about 46 national museums spread across the country. For instance: National museums Lagos, Benin-city, Kaduna, Owerri, Igbo-ukwu, Abuja, Abeokuta, Akure, Asaba, Damaturu, Jos, Esie Museum, Gidan Makama Museum Kano, Kanta Museum, National Gallery of modern art, Lagos, Oron museum, Owo museum, Uli Beier museum, long juju shrine of Arochukwu, National museum of colonial history, Aba, War museum Umuahia, Slave history museum Calabar, Marina resort, Centre for black and African art and civilization Lagos, Rock art interpretive center, Birnin Kudu, National museums of unity, Ibadan, Enugu, Minna and many others that are not owned by the government (Chudi-Duru 2019). If one is wondering how to get inspired to create new artworks, this study is of the view that spending time with other people's finished art, viewing artefacts from other cultures, or learning new concepts can all spark new ideas. If the museum is far away, a virtual tour can be given a trial. Either way, viewing pieces of art by someone or ones already known and appreciated can put one in a different conviction and way of thinking. Another find is attending a series of exhibitions, workshops in art, seminars, and other art shows. This also helps to generate some ideas of inspiration. According to Tranter (2020),

art historians, artists, as well as contemporary critics of art have always found art exhibitions as a way to discuss and learn more about a particular art form. When one attends any art exhibition, there is a chance for him/her to meet several personalities. There are different types of people one gets to meet at exhibitions, which include curators, art historians, artists, as well as art critics. These are people that can help one establish a fulfilling career. If one happens to ask expert artists from an art exhibition, one gets to know that displaying their artwork is what got them recognition and helped develop a broad network. Each artist is unique on their own. For instance; moulding a cup from clay, the way you create that cup might be similar to someone else's. However, it will never be the same. This is because each brain and heart is hardwired to think in a unique pattern. Even though an art exhibition has the same theme, there will be different variations for the same. While one might perceive the theme in one's way, others might not represent it in the way you have. This gives one a chance to look at the subject from a different viewpoint. In essence, one gets to learn new things from popular as well as budding artists. This study observed that most visitors as well as visiting artists at art exhibitions are there to learn something new. This could be an amazing chance for an artist to motivate people in favour of his/her cause. For instance, if the theme of the exhibition is "stop child violence" to be represented through artwork. This will instigate people to speak up more against such awful instances. They will be able to relate to the pain associated with the theme. Regardless of the theme, art exhibitions help motivate people through pictorial representations of pain, happiness, sorrow, glee, jealousy, and others. Any visiting artist could draw inspiration by going through all the works exhibited and this could help if such a topic or a similar topic is encountered.



Plate 2: An artist/designer in an art exhibition to derive some inspiration and interact with fellow artists. Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2022)



Plate 3: Society of Nigerian Art Exhibition in Awka, Anambra State. Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2022)



Plate 4: An artist showcasing her work in an art exhibition. Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2023)

There are various art societies in the Nigerian community where artists can become members and actively participate in their events. Some states have their own chapters of the Society of Nigerian Artists apart from the larger umbrella of the national chapter which professional artists belong to like the Imo State group of artists and many others. Some art groups in various art institutions comprise students and ex-students. These groups usually host some events in the form of art workshops, symposiums, exhibitions, art competitions, and others which could inspire both the exhibiting artists and visiting artists. Some groups of artists could also come

together to form some exhibiting artists groups for instance the AKA group of artists and other like groups. One can also join an online free art group. The person can chat with like-minded people who share their passion for art. One can ask some questions and seek some suggestions on some difficult areas he/she is encountering, discover new artists whose artwork they are interested in, and they can also get art supply recommendations. One's artwork can be shown to other artists to learn how to get constructive criticism. All of these benefits can help to generate visual artistic inspiration. One might also get an idea of how other artists deal with art block when they feel uninspired.

The wisdom of not being afraid of failure should be imbibed by artists. This study found out that some artists are afraid of making some mistakes which they consider as failure. There's a saying that goes this way, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that count"-Winston Churchill. But how does this wisdom apply to artists? Another is this, "Do not be embarrassed by your failures, learn from them and start again"-Richard Branson. When applied to artists and creative minds, it means to keep creating artwork no matter how many times you fail. You see, many artists are afraid to make mistakes or produce "ugly" art because they feel as though the art is not good enough. From observations, artists have a way of concentrating on perfection forgetting that everyone has their own style. That mistake could end up being one's style. Therefore, the best way is to embrace studio exploration by making mistakes and learning from them. It is advised that artists and designers try new art materials that are new to them or more so they can also experiment with new mediums and techniques. For instance, a painter who is used to watercolour painting could also utilize oils in his/her art experiments if failure is encountered, the person keeps on trying, and in trying the person is inspired by the new approaches employed. Another textile artist could also try painting her works to produce new ideas. Artists should cultivate the habit of learning something new, they should try a new skill or method, and this is also one of the ways to find new sources of inspiration. Sometimes as the case might be, one might look outside of the field of artistic expression to find sources of inspiration. New techniques in art require some lessons or courses from a specialist to have a clearer and better understanding. For instance, a textile artist who wants to try something new in synergizing textiles and sculpture must undergo some lessons in that section of the art to produce a thought-provoking artwork. As an alternative, the artist/designer should also listen to a podcast.

The study found out that the natural environment always has a way of sparking visual art inspiration although the students did not tick it. But nature is the ultimate artist. It has been observed that there is a lot to learn from nature as some artists find inspiration in their neighbourhoods, towns, cities, zoos, amusement or recreational parks, waterfalls, wildlife parks, art gardens, children's parks, rivers, beaches, anthills, plantations and grasslands, animals, sky, botanical gardens, farmlands, mountains, valleys, and many others. Apart from the fresh air and sunlight which are very necessary for human health, a change of scenery or environment may rekindle one's inspiration because of looking at new sights. When on an outing, smartphones or cameras could be employed to capture photos that one can use as art references when he/she gets home. They could also be transferred to a computer and kept in a folder to build a library of references. According to Zang (2020), the natural scenes found in Plateau State in Nigeria are full of limitless beauty. During the rainy season and harmattan season, one can never cease to ever pause and truly admire the vivid colours of the changing leaves or the flowers that bloom during the time of harmattan. Beautiful Sceneries of natural beauty are found in Nigeria as a whole. There are the Zuma rocks, grasslands in South-Eastern Nigeria, rivers, jungles, beaches, falls, deserts, and others, each of which has its distinctive composition and characteristics that set it apart from

the others. Sunsets, sunrises, and during the rainy season; the storms and the sky can all generate amazing skylines, which can be a tremendous source of inspiration for every stage of an art project, whether it is a tapestry, rug, textile print, dyed fabrics, ceramic art, sculptural pieces, posters, painting, drawing, or photograph. Little wonder Zang (2020), derived inspiration from the various natural scenes found in Plateau State to produce her tapestries. The pictures are placed below.



Plate 8: Complete weave of Awhum waterfalls (2020). Medium: Tapestry. Size: 76 cm by 97cm. Source: Zang, M.D (2022)



Plate 9: Village scene, “Comfort zone” (2014). Medium: Tapestry. Size: 72 cm by 52cm. Source: Zang, M.D (2016)

Another interesting way an artist could generate visual inspiration and styles as found in this study is also consulting the media. For instance, through watching some categories of films,

reading some newspapers, magazines, catalogues, brochures, posters, television adverts, music, and video games. These narratives have influenced the types of art some artists produce.

Some inspirations could also be generated by employing some visual discovery engine as found by this study. For instance Pinterest. Art inspiration on Pinterest can be found everywhere. It is right there on someone's palms (found in phones). It offers a rich wealth of uncountable artistic ideas which an artist can draw from. It boasts billions of pins of ideas to stimulate inspiration. All the ideas come with the methods and materials used in making them with very clear pictures. Most smartphones can easily achieve this. The study found out that one can create an account on Pinterest by following these step-by-step instructions:

1. Create a new account or log into an existing account
2. Create a new board and label it as "Art Inspiration" or any name that can be easily remembered by the artist.
3. Go to the search bar and type in the keywords of the subject matter of interest such as people, places, and things
4. Browse through the pins that pop up and start pinning all of the images of interest.
5. Search through many keywords to build a visual library of images
6. Refer back to the inspiration board anytime an extra push to start creating artwork again is needed.
7. Update the inspiration board every other month to make sure the images do not become stagnant and repetitive.

The study also revealed that Pinterest introduces new artists and their works and makes it possible for artists to showcase their work directly to the public. Furthermore, there are no reviewers or art critic comments on Pinterest. No select few determine who should be made visible and who shouldn't. Old masters works are found on Pinterest as well as newer artists. Someone could view another person's board and also get some inspiration from there. An artist on Pinterest could scroll through the Pinterest feed while catching the rest of the firm work and be inspired. An artist's works could be exposed to potential art collectors through Pinterest by sharing the artist's online portfolio.

This study found out that there are some old artworks and projects that have been abandoned, but when one is feeling sluggish and creatively uninspired, the person may take a look at some old artwork and projects perhaps one might be able to discover some imperfections and with some new knowledge, those artworks can be recreated more skillfully. When one recreates art, he/she usually takes risks or applies new techniques that were previously outside the skillset. By re-visiting the old artwork, one can reimagine the drawing or painting in new ways that reflect current artistic abilities. In likewise manner, an artist can also revisit a failed project or old ideas he/she never participated in by blending and incorporating them with some new ideas. This will enable the creative ingenuity in the artists' brain to be more active, and likely emerge with fresh and exciting ways to create thought-provoking artworks. For instance, an artist produced an art work in 2020 but was not contented with it, she abandoned it for two years and later came back to it and after working on it, it became more appreciated. The two works are placed in plates 10 and 11.



Plate 10: the first work (2019), Plate 11: the same artwork after working on it the second time. (2022) mixed media art. Medium: acrylics on tie-dyed canvas. Title: Excitement. Size: 2ft by 3ft. Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2019)

This study has observed that most people hardly concentrate in a scattered and untidy studio, classroom, or environment, and once it is like this the appetite for creativity is lost. It could also be a huge distraction for many people. It could also even be more stressful, discouraging, and confusing because there is too much visual information vying for one's attention. The environment one works in can ignite creativity, thus, the best thing to do is to tidy up and clean the workspace. Another find is that an artist could generate visual artistic inspiration from studying one's favourite artists' Work. It was observed that great masters of art had apprentices who learned the various techniques in which they produced their art. By so doing, they started producing artworks like their masters. They should find out what they love most about their unique art style. What stylistic elements interest them, and consider how they could adopt those techniques into their styles. Looking at other people's works of art is one of the most effective ways to derive inspiration for one's creations. Another finding of this study is that one could also follow artists from all over the world through social media sites (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social media handles). One could form the habit of reading about art in art journals, art exhibition brochures, magazines, and newspapers and also spend some time learning about the art pieces, and pay attention to what it is about them that stirs their imagination. With this knowledge, one will be able to find out the artistic elements and principles that inspire one's creations.

Human Life experiences and fiction can be a great source of inspiration for an artist, this was also found out by the artist. It is one of the ways one can bond with the people he/her is trying to reach out to. The artist could also transmit his/her life's events to the audience by painting them on a canvas, sculpting, moulding, carving, dyeing, printing, and using other techniques.

It found out that to generate ideas for inspiration, artists could visit some places following different routes they used to follow. For instance, while going to school, markets, supermarkets, restaurants, hotels, and other places. An unfamiliar scene may spark inspiration. An artist could also take a hike in one's area or surroundings or even in a neighbouring environment. The answer to a particular problem could come up while on that long walk for pleasure or exercise.

This study has observed that an artist should also make some time to rest. Rest is an essential part of the artistic cycle. One should not always be creating; time should be made for rest so that new ideas of inspiration can rise to the surface. Rest could be informed of a nap. It can also mean cooking, reading a book, watching favourite movies, baking, tending to one's garden, or any other thing that calms the brain. An artist should not also have too many things he/she is engaged in at the same time if not there might be enough time given to create. One should consider streamlining to increase inspiration efficiency.

It has also been observed that artists could try spending some minutes concentrating and carefully observing an object, especially some objects one wants to work on. That type of consciousness or meditation could help one get into a creative mood and derive some inspiration more easily.

This study has revealed that as an artist, one could keep a record of ideas in a sketchbook so that when one is feeling low on original ideas, some of these ideas could be reviewed to get inspired again. Childhood memories could also go a long way to enacting artistic inspiration. If one could remember what she/he did when they were younger, connecting with one's inner child can be a great way to get creative depending on the topic being worked on.

When an artist makes out time to teach someone else it also helps to spark up some creative ingenuity. Talking and demonstrating through painting, weaving, printing, drawing/ sketching, throwing, knitting, crocheting, carving, moulding, and others. In the process of teaching, the teacher might think of newer ways of approaching the work. Newer techniques might be discovered. As the person teaches, newer ideas might flash through his/her mind. Artists should be able to be in tune with the happenings around them. In that manner, some inspiration could also be generated.

Conclusion

A visual artist cannot do without being inspired. No matter what your medium of creativity is as a visual artist, one has to draw on inspiration at least sometimes to grow. Inspiration helps to generate new ideas and sparks this zeal and excitement to start working on a project without delay and disappointment. Various ways to generate inspiration for an artist have been extensively discussed in this chapter with the view to helping art students and professionals in their creative journey.

Exercises

1. What do you understand by visual art inspiration?
2. Mention various ways in which a visual artist/ designer could be inspired.
3. What does an artist stand to gain when inspired?
4. What is an art block?

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