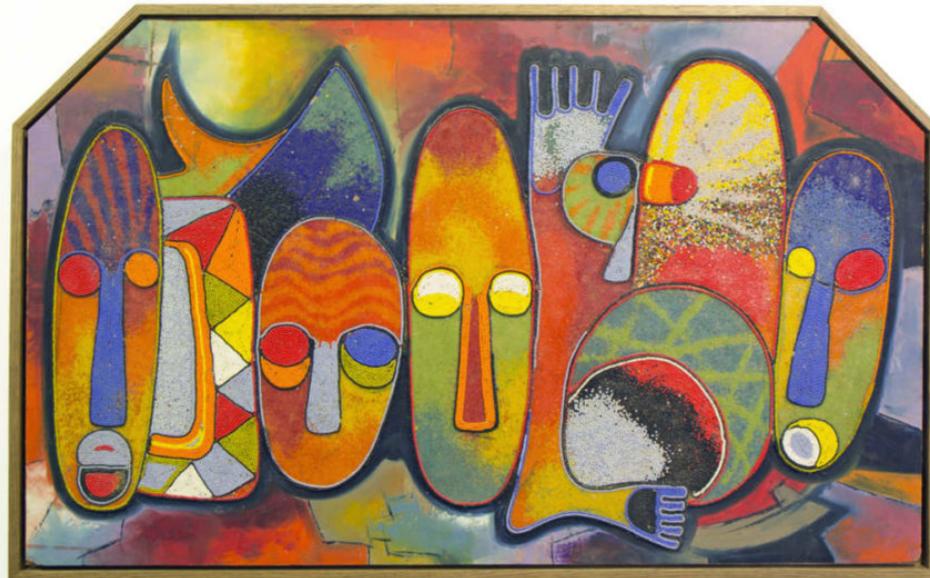




Revue

How COVID-19 changed face of creative industry

By Gregory Austin
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and Tajudeen Sowole
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Mixed media painting by Jimoh Buraimoh scheduled for TAFETA Gallery booth at postponed Art Dubai 2020

As people self-quarantine, conferences, workshops and shows put on hold, daily routines are quickly shifting as the world responds to Coronavirus.





How COVID-19 Has Pummelled Artists

Kehinde Sanwo, a former Vice President, Guild of Professional Fine Artists of Nigeria (GFA) noted that while most businesses would surely be affected by the Covid-19 lockdown, different sectors of the economy have divergent stories to tell.

He was emphatic that the art industry is not immune to the adverse effects expected from the lockdown.

As regards productivity, Sanwo, a full-time studio professional argued, “artists, generally, have low or lack of risk of contracting the virus because naturally, we operate even better on ‘lockdown’ mode.” Most artists, he explained, “naturally stay indoor for days working.”

Few days ahead of the directive on a limited number of congregating given by Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos, Alexis Galleries, Victoria Island was scheduled to open a group show, which was immediately postponed indefinitely.

Director at Alexis, Patry Chidiac Mastrogiannis, said the lockdown has done more damage beyond affecting the galleries’ business. “Affecting? It has killed our business,” she disclosed. “We are closed for the past two weeks?”

Gabriel Jideonwor, an artist and proprietor of Vivid Exclusive Art Gallery said his scheduled art trip to Europe has been put on hold. “As an artist, I am supposed to exhibit in an art fair in Europe, but it’s been postponed all because of covid-19.”

For his gallery business, he has two issues to contend with.”As an art gallery owner I can’t sell art at the moment in order to promote my artists,” he lamented, adding, “even

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choreographer. “We have had to call off all theatrical performances that we had

rehearsed for. All efforts put into creating content was in vain, but we can’t blame the directives, it’s for our own good.”

According to Yusuf, “nobody is putting up any theatrical performances again due to the social distancing regulations. We had to cancel a performance we intended staging titled, COVID-19. This performance was aimed at educating and sensitising the public of the deadly virus and to take necessary precaution. But unfortunately, the effort of the director in creating such a didactic performance and the effort of the artistes to deliver the piece was in vain.”

Yusuf noted that the pandemic has really affected his earnings, as all booked events are now cancelled. “I had to refund back to the clients all money paid.”

Be that as it may, he believes that as an artist, “this period has given me the ability to prepare new works. It doesn’t keep me idle. I have been developing new works of art.”

For Williams Isioma, Coordinating Chairman, Guild of Theatre Arts Drummers – GOTHAD, “I had to cancel my ongoing workshop, which was sponsored by the Korean Cultural Centre Nigeria and other private shows that require an audience, and other rehearsals that could help us in the future.”

He added, “I like earning too, but I also have to stay safe in order for us to have a future, I’ll advise everyone to stay home too unless you need to get foodstuffs or drugs from the store.”

The GOTHAD chairman said artistes should learn from this pandemic. He said, “right now, art associations should have been coming to support members during the

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ground.”

Ifeanyi Eziukwu, a theatre director, said he has not had any performance since the lockdown. “I had to postpone my shows twice and hoping the one for May 3 will hold.”

He said, “this period has forced me to have a critical look at my work as an artist and look for ways to improve and make them better after the pandemic. I have been reading a lot about theatre and performances in this period, as well as creating a relationship with my patrons.”

For Omololu Sodiya, an award-winning actor, “before now, it was as if we were begging people to see our shows. It is worse now because they have good reasons not to even step out.”

Sodiya said, “we’ll have to learn how to save and have side hustle because anything can happen at any time. It’s all happening like a flash.”

Prospect, Challenges Of Virtual Window For Art Market

Although artists have already begun to adapt to the changes and bring their practices online, there are many unknown that they will face in the coming days. Just because in-person gatherings are not happening doesn’t mean that you can’t view art and keep up on openings. In response to event closures, institutions and individuals are getting creative about how their work is shared with the world.

PEN America’s role in this crisis includes mobilising to assist writers hard hit by the cancellation of events, closure of bookstores, and economic contraction, recognising that many of their livelihoods were precarious, to begin with. Knowing that books are the ultimate vessels for human connection across distance, the organisation has

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we're creating reading lists curated by writers and poets, staff, and friends to keep folks occupied during this uncertain time. And we're working to unveil new digital platforms to host events and readings online so that we can move our innovative public programming directly to you, our friends and supporters.”

In Hong Kong the art world is coming together to live stream gallery visits and artist talks online.

Hong Kong art dealers have been experimenting with digital marketing since the coronavirus crisis began, and their new strategies are starting to bear fruit. But beyond the purely commercial aspect, several players in Hong Kong's cultural ecosystem have joined forces in March to launch the non-profit organisation Art Power HK, an online platform publicising events and exhibitions with the objective of boosting their resilience and disseminating the cultural news of one of the world's most dynamic artistic capitals.

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While European countries are imposing partial or complete lockdown with all cultural events, exhibitions, fairs, auctions etc. either cancelled or postponed, Phillips announced on March 18 that its Hong Kong spring sales will be held as planned from May 29 to June 2 at the JW Marriott Hotel.

Likewise, in Shanghai, the MadeIn Gallery has announced it is reopening as the Chinese authorities have managed to stabilise the Covid-19 epidemic in the city.

Art Basel Hong Kong was the first major art event to announce its cancellation due to COVID-19 (in January 2020). The fair's organizers reacted quickly by setting up a digital fair, so that exhibitors could present, free of charge, the works they intended to



various has called for a pooling of galleries to create a common sales platform .

While it's no secret that social media makes art accessible to a wider audience, in the days of social distancing ahead it could not ring more true. Instagram and Facebook allow you to show your work, your process, connect with fans and express your identity as an artist from the comfort of your studio. It's never too late to get started!

Selling art via the Internet is not a new thing. However, the strong interest generated in virtual dispensing of art, in the past one month, suggests the possibility of new dawn ahead in the global art market.

Within a spate of one month, Art Basel, Hong Kong edition; Art Dubai, UAE; 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair, New York edition; Art Brussels, Belgium; Art Cologne, Germany; Frieze, New York, among others either postponed to few months into the year or shifted till next year.

For some of the events such as Art Basel, Hong Kong and Art Dubai postponement also came with the virtual options. For examples, Art Basel streamed over 200 galleries, just as Art Dubai showed over 500 art pieces online.

On the earlier scheduled day opening of March 25, Art Dubai launched its online. A statement from the organisers said the Art Dubai 2020 Online “showcases more than 500 artworks by participating galleries across all fair sections, with some presenting works specifically from their 2020 booth, while others have works from extended artist roster.” Participants included Rele Gallery and Arthouse-The Space, both based in Lagos.



After Sotheby's Lagos viewing on Thursday, March 12, the auction sales, which was scheduled for its London base could not hold physically, except virtually.

While the level of audience responses for the art fairs are not yet known, results in commercial values for the auction houses have been released.

Some of them seemed to suggest that the virtual options have prospects. Yes, traditionally, online bidding for auction was common, but getting the entire sales on virtual platform brought new challenges.

At the end of Sotheby's March auction of Modern and Contemporary African art in London, a total £2,359,375 was declared. Apart from viewing by appointments, ahead of the auction, the actual sales were held virtually and via phone bidding.

Some art galleries, which were scheduled to show at few of the cancelled fairs in March also chose the virtual options, independently. TAFETA Gallery, based in London, but represents many African artists was to show at quite a number of cancelled or postponed art fairs across the world.

Ayo Adeyinka, director at TAFETA Gallery, during a chat last week said cancellation and postponement of quite a number of art fairs were disappointing, he, however, added, "We completely understand the position of the fairs."

And should the covid-19 crisis continues, how sustainable is the virtual window being applied as an option? "It is way too early to even begin to discuss the sustainability of a more virtual business environment," Adeyinka whose gallery represents quite a number of Nigerian artists said, "TAFETA for example only launched an online viewing room this week (early April), and it'll take a few shows to review any meaningful data."



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At the peak of the covid-19 crisis last month, KH Gallery had virtual opening for some of the artists scheduled for the cancelled art fairs. The experience of the founder and director is more practical in virtual art exhibition.

“We filmed it on Instagram, and took lots of photographs to present them to clients,” stated Kristin Hjellegjerde. “We have a full digital walk-through option as well.”

How exactly was collectors’ response to virtual viewing and marketing? “They enjoyed it, but can never replace a real viewing,” said Hjellegjerde whose gallery was scheduled to show works of Lagos-based artist, Gerald Chukwuma, at the cancelled 1:54 art fair, New York.

Looking ahead and getting prepared for a possible continue lockdown of cities should covid-19 escalates, Hjellegjerde said: “We will work on a more personal approach! I think the space to show is essential to the career of the artists to make a full series of work, among others. Art appreciation, she argued, “is about feeling it,” physically.

Shortly before the lockdown of Lagos and Ogun states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, quite a number of art exhibitions in the country’s commercial city hub were postponed.

Ovie Omatsola, curator at Thought Pyramid Art Centre seemed to have prepared for an opening of limited audience congregating for Next of Kin 2020 exhibition, to be assisted by the virtual window.

Shortly after postponing Next of Kin 2020, Omatsola said “audience visits to the gallery via appointments and assisted by virtual” might be the option should the Lagos State



Mujidat Abdulkareem

Gregory Austin Nwakunor, Omiko Awa and Tajudeen Sowole, a thumbs up for you all but the fact is: Not only is covid-19 changing the face of Art Creative Industry disappointedly but also changing the faces of other industries. The only remedy for businesses is digital marketing. It is an indispensable strategy for entrepreneurs and company to embrace. This is work from home era

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If every age in history could be called by the greatest invention of that time, this would definitely be called as the Age of the Internet. The Internet has proliferated each and every aspect of our being, and indeed, it has given a whole new dimension to the way we live on the planet. Today, for each and every thing, whether it is just about buying a toothbrush to spreading global awareness about the growing hole in the ozone layer, people are using the Internet as their medium. And, the Internet has proved to be an unrelenting medium, unfalteringly providing people what they are looking for.

Of all these different purposes that the Internet world serves, there is one very important trend that has caught on of late. This is the trend of selling and buying things over the Internet. A whole parallel world has spawned up here, a world of online entrepreneurs, who are making money out of selling things over the Internet. The money that is transacted here is immense. That is obvious. With such a huge population in the online world, it is understandable that the businesses here are huge.

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