

**TOWARDS ACCEPTABLE RESEARCH METHODS FOR A STANDARD
BIOGRAPHICAL ART HISTORY THESIS: THE EXAMPLE OF PHD ART HISTORY
THESIS TITLED CREATIVE INDIVIDUALISM AND PROFESSIONALISM: A STUDY
OF PAINTINGS OF TOBENNA OKWUOSA**

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Abstract

Experience has shown that the formation of an acceptable Research Method for Standard Biographical Thesis has been a stiff academic work for most Nigerian Research Students. This problem extends to the Fine and Applied Arts students and it is severe on the Post-graduate Art History students a reason for which a lot of their theses are not found on the biography of Nigerian artists. Of the truth, a standard art history thesis on a Nigerian artist or artists would have shown the components of research methods as containing the real and sufficient information about data collection for the biographical art history thesis. It would have also shown the most appropriate research design for the study, and the method of analyzing data collected from fieldwork. The researcher therefore was motivated by the students' inability to form suitable research methods for a standard biographical art history thesis to address the issue of "Towards Acceptable Research Methods for a Standard Biographical Art History Thesis". The objective of this study is to examine the research methods of a standard biographical art history thesis via the research methods of the PhD art history thesis titled "Creative Individualism and Professionalism: A Study of Paintings of Tobenna Okwuosa". The aim of the study is to establish the research methods of the PhD biographical art history thesis on Tobenna Okwuosa with the view of achieving the acceptable research methods for a standard biographical art history thesis. The findings are based on biographical survey of qualitative research methods and research questions which test the objective of the study. It adopts the historical survey technique which relies on primary and secondary source for the search of basic data. It was established that the components of the research methods of the PhD art history thesis titled Creative Individualism and Professionalism: A Study of Paintings of Tobenna Okwuosa contains the proper and adequate research methods needed for the formation of standard biographical art history thesis. Those components of research method include; Methodology, Method of Data Analysis, and Organization of the Study. Therefore the research method of the PhD thesis cited above has been established as the lead to the formation of acceptable research methods for standard biographical art history thesis.

Keywords: Tertiary Education, Acceptable Research Methods, Standard Biographical Art History Thesis, Nigerian Research Students, Tobenna Okwuosa.

Introduction

The difficulty in the formation of apt research methods for standard biographical art history thesis swayed the thought of leading the art history students to understanding how acceptable

research methods are formed in biographical art history thesis. The components of the research methods of the earlier cited PhD art history thesis for this study would have guided the art history students on how to form the research methods of a biographical art history thesis. The difficulty of forming acceptable research methods as standard biographical art history thesis evokes the feelings of the supply of inadequate and haphazard documentation of the hardworking Nigerian artists on the art history students. The problem becomes more compounding when the art history students cannot successfully complete a biographical fieldwork on Nigeria artist(s) for their biographical art history thesis at graduation.

The researcher therefore was stimulated by the quest for forming acceptable research methods for a biographical art history thesis. Towards acceptable research methods for a standard biographical art history thesis is a very significant aspect of study in biographical study of Nigerian artists. It consists of the merging of words to convey the meaning of the concept. These words are discussed separately in conceptual clarification, and as a leading concept it is described as the act of enabling art history students to form suitable research methods for standard biographical art history thesis. The PhD Art History Thesis titled *Creative Individualism and Professionalism: A Study of Paintings of Tobenna Okwuosa* was used for this study. This enabled the researcher to achieve the aim of the study.

Conceptual Clarification

Towards is described in Webster's Dictionary as tending to result in or likely to achieve something. Towards as used in this study is the act of enabling art history students to form research methods that are good enough for biographical art history thesis. The word "Acceptable Research Methods" are merged words used as a word in this study. "Acceptable" in BBC English Dictionary means an action or situation that is generally approved. Research in the same dictionary is work that involves studying something and trying to discover facts about it. While Methods are ways of doing things, (Hornby, 2010)

Standard Biographical Art History Theses as used in this study are also merged words that convey the meaning of a concept. However, Standard is a level of quality that is thought to be acceptable (BBC), but described for the purpose of this study as the acceptable quality of thesis for further use. Biographical Art History Thesis is an intellectual artist's documentation of the works of other artists for reference purposes. Therefore, Standard Biographical Art History Thesis simply refers to the acceptable documentation of the life and works of an artist or artists for further academic work. Showing the Research Methods of the PhD Art History Thesis titled *Creative Individualism and Professionalism: A Study of Paintings of Tobenna Okwuosa* as the lead to the Formation of Acceptable Research Methods for Standard Biographical Art History Thesis.

Research Methods

3.1 Methodology

Methodology is the general sketch made to guide the process of achieving success in a study. Dawson (2002) also describes it as the general principles or philosophy and methods that guide a given research. These methods determine the means of data collection, sometimes establishes a specific result. Campbell (2001), notes that methodology does not define specific method even though much attention is paid to the nature and kinds of

processes to be followed to attain an objective. He believes that methodology constitutes a constructive generic framework that can be broken down into sub-processes.

Historical survey research technique was utilized in this study that focused on creative individualism and professionalism: A study of the paintings of Tobenna Okwuosa. This technique is a descriptive process that gives the researcher the opportunity to analyze past events and developments in relation to the present concept. The purpose of the historical survey research is to help collect, verify and synthesize evidences from the past to establish facts that could defend or refute a hypothesis. Crotty (1998), notes that the historical survey technique involves a careful study and analysis of data about past events, their development and experiences. He believes that the purpose is to gain a clearer understanding of the impact of the past on the present and future events related to life process. This idea above agrees with the focus of this study which the aim is to establish creative professionalism in the individualistic art productions of Tobenna Okwuosa with the view of providing an insightful biography of the artist.

Biographical study in its various guises is to collect and interpret the lives of others as part of human understanding, (Brain Roberts). The study focused on creative professionalism in the individualistic paintings of Tobenna Okwuosa. It was proper to adopt the biographical study because; it granted the researcher the opportunity to assess the quality of Tobenna's work through the facts and events of his life experience. The method also enabled the researcher to obtain the needed first-hand data from the fieldwork. The researcher examined the paintings of Tobenna between 1996 and 2016 covering the period of twenty years. The study was based on the painting unit of fine and applied arts. It is expected that the result of this research will make some impact on the creative art works of other professional artists in Nigeria.

The historical survey research technique that the research adopts relies heavily on the available data from the Primary and Secondary Sources. The primary sources are the first hand information from the observation of Tobenna's work processes in his studio to understand his style, theme, technique, and materials of work, including informal and unstructured interviews on Tobenna's professional career using tape recorder and writing devices during the conversation. Unstructured interview refers to the interview technique of encouraging the respondents to express their thoughts and ideas freely without much restrictions placed on the respondents answer. The technique is flexible because the order of prepared questions could be altered to suit the respondent. The interviewer may probe some answers in greater depth to enable him achieve the needed respondent answers. (Ajoku, 2006)

Secondary sources are the reports of the examination of his works from catalogue, exhibition commentaries, and publications, and library studies of other Nigerian arts and artists, including internet surfing. The qualitative research method was most appropriate for the biographical study of the Nigerian artist because the artist's works are good enough to be examined of their qualities. They are consistent enough to be differentiated and cannot be predicted as a story. The creative paintings are made in periods, styles, philosophies, and themes to reflect important events or changes that occurred within certain periods in Nigeria. Tobenna's creative theme cut across many African and Western culture and with

varied physical and non-physical visual elements. The work consists of iconographic images and themes executed in abstract and semi abstract forms that need to be understood by people through clarification.

The qualitative research method was also adopted for the study because it will be able to accommodate the interplay of diverse perspectives within the traditional ethnographic studies, and personal life experiences of the collection of extensive narrative data over an extended period of time in natural setting to gain insights into the research problem. Unlike the quantitative research that utilizes a linear sequence of design steps, there is considerable variation on how the qualitative research technique is organized. Every qualitative research has a flexible process that supports or forms the basis of the argument. It is advantageous using qualitative research in this study because it gives the researcher the opportunity to investigate issues with open-ended questions and probing that gives participants the opportunity of responding in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses, as quantitative methods do. This helped the researcher to obtain the realistic data about the facts and events of Tobenna's life experience as an artist through conversation which cannot be possible with the numerical data and statistical analysis. The method also enabled the researcher to observe and work with Tobenna as he produced some of his paintings; this also created a descriptive capability based on primary and unstructured data collection process.

This study specifically undertakes a critical study of creative professionalism and the individualism in the art productions of Tobenna Okwuosa. Therefore the researcher must be careful enough to select and adopt the appropriate pragmatic strategies that would help generate the needed information from the field. This is because; a wrong research design usually ends with back region responses and unacceptable research conclusions.

As such this research employs in-depth interviews because of the nature of the fieldwork. The fieldwork seeks to ascertain the professionalism in the creative paintings of Tobenna Okwuosa, if judged from the perspective of Period, Style, Philosophy and Theme of production. Though the in-depth interviews technique is most demanding because it required the researcher phrased open-ended questions about Tobenna's creative painting, engaged in the collection and storage of field notes, including the analysis of the field data. The entire process of the interview took the researcher more than three years of intensive work because Tobenna had scheduled days of work in his studio and this made the researcher to work on appointments. With the in-depth interviews technique, the researcher understood Tobenna's Style, Theme, Technique and Materials of Work. He equally perused at Tobenna's Publications, Catalogues, and exhibition Commentaries, and studied books on Nigerian arts and Artists, and sourced agreeable theories from the internet.

The unstructured interview technique was used in the collection of data. This method of interviewing involves the direct interaction between the researcher and the respondent. The interview technique helped to broaden the data base. No formal structured research questions or protocol was used in obtaining information even though the researcher may have had some written questions as guide to his areas of focus when administering the interview. The researcher was free to direct and he directed the conversation to any perspective of his interest because he explored on a broad topic. The choice of the unstructured interview technique was necessary because the subject of the study "Tobenna

Okwuosa" was chosen purposively. The nature of this study of "Creative Individualism and Professionalism: A study of the paintings of Tobenna Okwuosa" went a long way to establish the most appropriate research design, and the method of analyzing data collected from the fieldwork.

To ensure the validity of the research process, the qualitative analysis was used in analyzing data. The purposive selection technique was deliberately used by the researcher to enable him establish accurate information on current status and trend of the subject matter. The data were tactically collected without bias. The informal unstructured interview questions were repeatedly asked and there was consistency in the responses. There was credibility of results of the interviews because the responses agree with the research questions. The research is dependable enough because the review of related literature and theories used in solving the problem of the research were relevant, and logical to the study. The research is also conformable because all the instruments used in getting a dependable result, and conclusion of the study may be used for further research studies, especially in the field of creative art.

3.2 Method of Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis described as the combination of research principles using unstructured forms of data collection, verbal description and explanations rather than quantitative measurement and statistical analysis, was identified as the appropriate research technique for the subject of this research. It enabled the researcher to seek to understand the interpretations and reality in the changes of Tobenna's creative forms. This idea agrees with the opinion of Nieuwenhuis (2010) that qualitative data analysis is usually based on an interpretative philosophy that aims at examining meaningful and symbolic content of qualitative data.

This implies that every qualitative researcher is free to interpret a specific phenomenon in his own perception of the phenomenon in terms of documentation. In this study, the data gathered from the fieldwork were subjected to biographical, style, formal, contextual and iconological analysis in descriptive summaries and other related observations. Statements upholding or rejected various research questions are stated under each of the research questions. The respondent responds determined the result of the investigation.

Biographical Analysis collects and analyses a person's whole life, or portion of a life through the in-depth and unstructured interview or sometimes reinforced by semi-structured interview or personal documents. It is a way of viewing social life in procedural terms, rather than static terms. The information can come from "oral history, memoranda and other materials". Its aim is to produce rich descriptions of persons or "conceptualize structural types of action" which means to understand the action logics or how persons and structures are interlinked.

This method can be used to understand an individual's life within its social context (Miller 2003, p.15). This study seeks to provide the professionalism in the individualistic painting forms of Tobenna Okwuosa. The researcher therefore applies the biographical narrative approach which takes the idea of story to examine the creative issue of professionalism in the paintings of Tobenna Okwuosa.

Style analysis identifies factors that are consistent enough to be distinguishable and changeable enough to have a story. In art, forms which are the primary data for any study must be examined properly to ensure that certain characteristics of the forms are more or less stable as they appear in other product. It enables a researcher to characterize relationships among works of art made at the same time, or place, or by the same person or group. Writing the history of consistency and change of works of art depends on the availability of information outside the visual components of the work.

But with style analyses a credible historic account can be made with a small part of evidence of a whole. For instance, one signed and dated work may be enough to associate a type of production with a period of time in history, especially, the period important events or changes occurred. Style provides the most comprehensive structure for the history of art. In this study, Tobenna's works are consistent enough to be differentiated and unpredicted to have a story. So the researcher uses the style analysis to establish the chronology of his ideology of painting.

Formal analysis does not consider external influence in the works of artists for interpretation. It confines itself to the visual elements, or properties, or qualities such as colour, space, line, volume, mass, composition and other perceptual aspects within the work and the meanings that are derived from what confronts the senses. In this study, Tobenna's works contain elements of visual analysis for documentation. The researcher also used this method of documentation which provided insights into his creative ideology and established the chronology of his ideology of painting.

Contextual analysis sees works of art as generated from a particular aspect of need or condition of a person or events that must be clarified before it can be understood. It considers external influences in relationship to personal, social, or historical information that cannot be perceived by simply observing the work. Tobenna's works of art are consisting of tangible and intangible visual elements that need to be clarified. This method of analysis therefore affords the researcher the opportunity to examine Tobenna's creative ideology, and substantiate his creative ideology that is based on restoration of universal peace, and reformation of ideas to solve human problems.

Iconological analysis emphasizes identification, description classification and interpretation of forms, symbols and themes in visual arts. Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) advocates that it is a viable approach to studying the content and meanings of art works that is primarily aimed at classifying and establishing dates including other necessary fundamental knowledge concerning artworks. In this study, Tobenna's works are objects of visual communication that needs to be interpreted to the public. The researcher therefore applies this theory to confront the issue of identifying Tobenna's forms, and meaning

3.3 Organization of the Study

The entire thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one is the introductory part of the study which comprises the background to the study, statement of the problem, general objectives of the study, specific objectives of the study, research questions, significant of the study, scope of the study, and research method. Chapter two discusses literatures relevant

to the study with particular reference to artistic personality and the theoretical framework of the study which include psychoanalysis theory, and theory of professionalism. The chapter equally treats conceptual framework, and implication of the review. Chapter three dwells on research methods which include: methodology, method of data analysis, and organization of the study. Chapter four border on presentation, analysis, and findings.

It discusses the professionalism in Okwuosa's works including biography, the chronology of his works, his creative themes and ideology, creative philosophy, and ideology of art. It further shows Okwuosa's commitment to the art profession and his good skill in sculptures and portrait production, and the meanings from his creative works. Chapter five is summary, findings, conclusion, recommendation, and contribution to knowledge, areas of further studies, references, and appendixes.

Recommendations

Based on the study, it is recommended that:

- i) Art History Students should take advantage of this study and adopt the suggested Research Methods in their thesis in order to achieve the expected standard Biographical Art History Thesis.
- ii) Lecturers of Art History should engage Art History students in regular assignment of fieldwork on Nigerian Artists. This will expose the students to the most appropriate research design for biographical studies, and the method of analyzing data collected from fieldwork, thereby enabling them to be acquainted with the formation of acceptable research methods for biographical art history thesis.
- iii) The supervisors of biographical art history thesis should also take advantage of this study and ensure that the students' thesis meet the acceptable research methods expected of a standard biographical art history thesis.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the problem of achieving acceptable research methods in a biographical art history thesis. It establishes that this research provides the first information in this aspect of study. It discovered that most art history students cannot form suitable research methods for a biographical art history thesis, and that a good number of art history thesis in Nigerian art schools are not written on the biography of Nigerian artists. As such, the panacea to the identified problem of forming suitable research methods for standard biographical art history thesis is to educate the art history students, particularly those of the post graduate on how to form acceptable research methods for standard biographical art history thesis.

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