



ACADEMIC AND CAREER GUIDANCE IN VISUAL ART

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Introduction

The objective of this presentation is not to lament on how visual art as a course of study or as a profession is looked down upon by the society. Neither is it to refute some vague assumption that the ‘academically nobodies’ are those who pursue visual art in schools. The objective of this presentation is to establish the relevance of Visual Art both as a field of study and a professional practice, especially in this period of so much economic uncertainties.

The assumption that some school authorities, teachers, parents and even some guidance counselors have a negative attitude toward visual art has a history. This viewpoint was first expressed by leading art educators some thirty years ago (Gill, 1987). In 1965, Silverman and Lanier found that many art teachers were finding a disproportionate number of emotionally disturbed youths assigned to their elective classes. The students appeared in the art class because their counselor believed that participation in visual art activities would somehow help to resolve or alleviate their emotional problems (Silverman and Lanier, 1965).

In this regard, counselors were supported in this view by their observation of what they considered typical art-class practices. As time went on however, academicians started misinterpreting visual art, the easy-going, happy, manipulation-of-materials programme, as being one in which a permissive climate prevailed (Silverman and Lanier, 1965).

What is being experienced in Ghana today is therefore a spillover of the consequences of a woeful misconstrued assumption which, in reality should lift up the image of the noble subject higher rather than bringing it down. Like every bad thing which finds its way into our part of the world, Ghanaians have taken this wrongful assertion so seriously that it is having a dire consequence on many important disciplines because of their relatedness and dependency on visual art activities.



Reports abound in situations where heads and school counselors encourage low achievers to enroll on visual art programmes and discourage brilliant students from pursuing the course, even when they have a great deal of interest. As Chapman (1982) observed, Visual Art is recommended as a suitable elective for unruly students or those who are not enthusiastic about academic work.

But today, the truth or otherwise in this assertion cannot be contentious anymore, and for which reason every debate on it should be considered unnecessary. There is substantial evidence that high-quality education in the arts provides students with opportunities to develop a number of capacities that are not well addressed in other areas of the curriculum, such as visual-spatial abilities, self-reflection, and experimentation (NAEA, 2015).

Besides, many people, including prominent world leaders and educationists are beginning to recognize that any action meant to downplay the arts in any way is misguided. Immediately after his election, Barack Obama stated on his campaign website:

In addition to giving our children the science and math skills they need to compete in the new global context, we should also encourage the ability to think creatively that comes from a meaningful arts education. Unfortunately, many school districts are cutting instructional time for art and music education. Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe that the arts should be a central part of effective teaching and learning (BarackObama.com, cited in (NAEA, 2015).

Our responsibility as teachers, therefore, is to provide students with the necessary support that will assist them in clarifying their academic, career and life goals, developing plans to achieve your goals, and evaluating their own progress through career guidance. This developmental process will empower students to think critically, explore available options, and take personal responsibility for decision-making with the guidance of teachers and academic counselors (AAO, 2015).

In our particular situation therefore, academic guidance should involve helping you as visual art students to understand the aims of your chosen programmes, the culture and ethos of learning, the available educational options and the paths that could be taken so that you can draw your own roadmaps to achieve your goals and monitor your own progress (AAO, 2015).

Today, Visual Art courses at the university level offer students a well-rounded programme of visual art practices and critical theory (comparable to any academic programme), within a stimulating and challenging academic environment. These courses lead to further



studies in art practices such as a Master of Science, Master of Fine Arts, Master of Philosophy, Master of Professional Studies and many more.

Graduate programmes to consider after first degree in visual art include the following:

- Art and Design Education
- Arts and Cultural Management
- Art Therapy and Creativity Development
- Design Management
- Digital Arts
- Communications Design
- Package Design
- Industrial Design
- Interior Design
- History of Art
- Museums and Digital Culture
- Animation & Interactive Media,
- Cinematic Arts
- Graphic Design
- Painting
- Ceramics
- Textiles
- Photography
- Print Media

Probably the most abiding of all the reasons for studying visual art and considering it as a subject of choice is that, no student, after any level (whether certificate, diploma, first degree, second degree or PhD) has a place in Unemployed Graduates Association of Ghana (UGAG) unless such graduates opt to join for personal reasons. But again, students need to avail themselves to programmes that will assist them in making and implementing informed educational and occupational choices through career guidance sessions. These programmes will help students to develop the requisite competencies in self-knowledge, educational and occupational exploration and career planning (OCTAE, 2015).



One useful knowledge that should set you in motion towards realizing your career dreams is that, visual art programmes in all academic institutions target first and foremost at the development of creative potentials. Visual Art as a course of study focuses on a balanced education that emphasizes both studio and academic coursework with great sensitivity to the future of graduate employability. Throughout its study, students are inspired to find and create opportunities to showcase their talents and to participate in the wider world of work. Visual art therefore does not only targets academic laurels and paper qualifications, but indeed provides a cornerstone upon which a vast array of potential careers can be built (UBC, 2015).

The relevance in the study of visual art also resides in the fact that the programme trains graduate who understand, manage and produce the visuals in today's world. Indeed, everything manufactured—from websites to earthen bowls and everything in between—has at some time been touched by the hand, mind, or eye of a creative person. Consequently, job prospects in the fields of Art, Applied Art, Art History, Art Education and Design are better than they have ever been. As observed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics:

- The revolution in electronic communications, multimedia and entertainment has created a growing need for highly skilled artists and designers.
- The explosion of electronic media and popular culture has created parallel growth and demand for the traditional visual and performing arts disciplines.
- Employment of visual artists is expected to grow faster than average for all occupations over the next decade.
- Demand for graphic artists should remain strong as producers of information, goods, and services put increasing emphasis on visual appeal in product design, advertising, marketing, and entertainment (Tyler School of Art, 2014).

Major Careers

Though the list of careers outlined below may not be exhaustive, they may provide you with a fair knowledge on some of the possibilities available to you in the world of work.

Art Education

Art Education graduates can work in the Basic schools, Junior High Schools, colleges of education, Cultural Centers, Art Galleries, Museums and Monument Board, kindergartens and nurseries. Specific career areas include the following:



- Art Teacher
- Art Critic/Writer
- Arts Administrator
- Artist-in-Residence/Artist-in-the-Schools
- Freelance Instructor
- Curatorial Consultant
- Publishing Proofreader
- Arts Organization Consultant
- Art Historian, Art Law Specialist
- Restorer, Conservator
- Corporate, Museum, University Curator
- Archivist
- Teacher of Art and Recreation

Painting, Textiles, Ceramics, Sculpture, Jewelry, Basketry, Leatherwork

There are vast career opportunities for visual art graduates who specialize in any of the eight major visual art disciplines mentioned above. Sectors to be considered include Educational Institutions, Museums, Galleries and Industries. Specific careers areas include the following:

- Teacher
- Administrator
- Industry Consultant
- Artist-in-Schools
- Commercial Serigraphy
- Commercial Silk screener
- Costume Designer
- Makeup Artist
- Gallery Owner/Administrator
- Print Studio Owner
- Model Maker
- Muralist



- Painter
- Sculptor
- Printmaker
- Portrait Painter
- Set Designer
- Scientific Illustrator
- Technical Illustrator

Graphic Design, Illustration, Photography

Visual Art graduates who identify themselves with any of the above activities could be on their way to locating themselves Graphic design professions such as Advertising, Television/Film, Corporate and Mass-Media. Specific careers in these disciplines include the following:

- Art Director
- Production Designer
- Book Illustrator
- Fashion Designer
- Fashion Illustrator
- Cartoonist
- Technical/Production Illustrator
- Exhibitions Designer
- Freelance Photographer
- Font Designer
- Graphic Designer - Advertising, Corporate, Publishing
- TV/Film, Entertainment
- Multi-media specialist
- Visual effect animator
- Computer Animator
- 3D Animator
- Game Designer
- Package Designer



- Product Designer
- Photo/Computer/Digital Lab Technician
- Photographer
- Cinematographer
- Urban Graphics Designer (display, signs, billboards)
- Interior Designer
- Web Designer
- Webmaster

Starting an Art Business – Why do it?

Many people getting into the creative design business are excited by great design and have an urge to sell their enthusiasm and skills. They also choose this industry for other positive reasons. Here are a few of the most common ones as outlined by Davies on Net. Workspace (2015):

i. Shared responsibility

Most artists get into business by starting out as ‘freelance’ artists working on their own to sell their skills. Successful freelancers often find they have so much work that they need a team around them to help. This is how many creative design agencies start. Having a team around you is very beneficial as it means you can share out responsibilities, reducing the pressure. And with a more diverse skill base, you’re able to focus on the area of the business that suits you most.

ii. Control

Increased control over the creative process is another popular reason for starting a design agency. This is very close to the heart of most creative people. You can make the key decisions which will make or break a project. You are the one who pulls the punches.



iii. Significant market

As mentioned earlier, art products and artefacts are needed in all spheres of life and so the market size is therefore considerably big, with every business or person with a product or service being a potential customer. Whether it is a startup company needing a logo design or a large corporate company looking for sculpture work, the artist's skills can be utilized. Working as an artist enables you to interact with companies in very diverse sectors – from healthcare to catering, retail to construction - making every day different. This keeps things very interesting on a day to day basis.

iv. Financial rewards

The visual art industry is potentially very lucrative, especially if your works are recognized as providing maximum value to clients. Most projects require considerable time and effort but this is worth it when the final payment comes in.

v. Job satisfaction

Seeing the designs or artifact you have produced on a website, in a magazine, on a billboard or in an exhibition – to be viewed by thousands of people – can be very rewarding. And seeing that smile on the client's face when they tell you their website enquiries have increased over 300 percent after you have implemented a new design strategy is fantastic.

vi. Quick and easy to set up

Like most service selling businesses, it is fairly cheap and easy to set up an art business. If you are starting on your own there are no large initial fees, and very few products to buy beyond what you have been using in school. You can establish yourself as a graphic designer with the very laptop computer you used whilst in school, and from your bedroom. With that computer, you can design anything from a call card to the biggest largest billboard you can think of. From your father's



backyard (or your landlord's backyard), you can set yourself up as a painter, sculptor, ceramist, jeweler, leatherworker, textile designer or weaver (Davies, 2015).

In effect, startup costs are generally minimal, and that alone should be a good enough reason for you to start a business in Art.

Conclusion

So, yes, it is hot, stormy and rough out there. But with discipline and just a little more effort (beyond what you are expressing in school), you could be on your way to taming the shrewd, calming the storms and neutralizing the heat.

All you need to do is to prepare to take advantage of all these opportunities while you are still students. Start building yourselves portfolios (if you have not started already) and keep updating it right from the first year in school. In this screen age, the most effective portfolio is the electronic one, which entails a catalogue of all your astounding works, archived on the internet or an electronic storage device. You should also keep a physical one to contain the real works where possible.

Identify and consider your personality and aptitude. Choosing a field of practice in visual art demands a close assessment of personal character and talent. Whether freelance or professional artist, you have to be a self-motivated, confident and organized person, who is capable of managing business and professional issues. You must be somebody who is capable of serving a good purpose with the creativity, excitement and good remuneration that comes with professional practices.

Above all, you should be mindful of the fact that your success as tomorrow's professional artist depends on your success as today's student artist. In agreement with McCoy's (2013) assertion, let us all remember that what we build tomorrow depends on what we reconstruct today. Complacency and overindulgence need to be put in absolute check as we make serious efforts toward exploring that big room in our creative house, which is the room for continuous improvement.



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