

Crossing Realities and the Socio-Cultural, Economic Impacts of Visual Arts in the Innovation and Development of Cultural Industries in Ivory Coast

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the socio-cultural realities, prejudices and stereotypes that frequently weigh on the field of Plastic Arts, the role and positive impact of visual artists in Ivory Coast for education, science, and the development of the cultural, artistic and economic industry. Although it has been present for centuries and academically confirmed several decades, art, particularly Plastic Arts, still evokes mixed feelings in Ivorian society between appreciation for its aesthetics on the one hand, and rejection of its controversial practice on the other. Thus, in view of all of the above, it is clear that the phenomenon of Plastic Arts in Ivory Coast is constantly reinventing itself and that it is no longer limited to a simple function of aesthetic expression but rather a discipline that significantly embodies the moral, educational, scientific, socio-cultural, economic and historical values of the country.

Keywords

Plastic Arts/Visual Arts, Art, Artists, Stereotype, Impacts, Socio-Cultural Development, Cultural Industry, Creativity, Innovation, Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire)

1. Introduction

A West African country known for its socio-cultural richness and artistic diversity, Ivory Coast is home to visual artists whose works stand as reflections of the socio-cultural realities that many of their fellow citizens and peers face on a daily basis, and they thus leave a significant impact on Ivorian society. These artists,

quite often from diverse backgrounds and with multiple perspectives, attempt to explore the Ivorian socio-cultural identity, but also the contemporary challenges that Ivorian society faces as well as the links between tradition and modernity that arise as an inexorably existential question in modern Ivory Coast.

Through their creativity and dedication to their work, Ivorian visual artists are now emerging as major players in the construction of collective identity, contributing to significantly shaping the country's cultural landscape.

However, despite their more than crucial role in forging the Ivorian socio-cultural landscape, these same artists are sidelined in Ivorian society, even almost vilified. We can observe here and there categorical refusals on the part of citizens of the country to hear about art, and especially plastic arts, even though a little attention paid to the subject would allow us to know that art is an incomparable vector of social success and cultural affirmation. For the unluckiest of those who then try to practice the plastic arts, whether casually or at a more professional level, abuse is suffered, both physical and psychological. This study then aims to explore the socio-cultural realities and the impact of visual artists of Ivory Coast in society while trying to carefully examine their historical context, as well as their inspiration, the artistic techniques and movements implemented during their existence and their interactions with society. We will thus try, as much as possible, to explore the different forms of artistic expression used by these creators and the challenges they face in a constantly changing environment that remains intrinsically conservative with regard to its culture and its view of art.

2. Historical and Syntactic Context on the Advent of New Plastic Forms in Ivory Coast

2.1. From Primitive Art to Contemporary Art in Ivory Coast

Cultures and different civilizations in Africa, especially in black Africa, have almost always given priority to the functional aspect of artistic creations to the detriment of the purely aesthetic vision, thus in the Ivorian pre-colonial civilization, artistic creations such as statuettes, masks and other representations of the beliefs of the time had the primary purpose of fulfilling a spiritual, religious, social, and/or political function. This is particularly the case for masks that were used during various ceremonies, especially those of a funerary nature. Moreover, for many researchers and art specialists, the notion of ethnic or tribal art is a very reductive element, because before colonization and the borders drawn by it, there was no "African art" and even less "Ivorian" art, strictly speaking. This is what would push Pablo Picasso and many of his peers to label all forms of art coming from pre-colonial Africa as primitive art and to draw inspiration from it to shape the movement of "primitivism". Thus, one could find in several different places on the African map more or less similar creations but with varied uses. In the case of the Ivory Coast, however, the concept of art was practically uniform in its functional aspect.

This is the case, for example, of the Zaouli, which is at the same time a dance, a

mask, and a traditional costume whose primary function has a strong spiritual and religious connotation. The Zaouli would be, according to the different legends with which it is associated, inspired by a woman with an almost surreal beauty. It is available in seven variants, each of which represents one of the said legends; and is worn in uniform with the mask and costume while being accompanied by the dance of the same name, but this only on special occasions and must absolutely be worn by men initiated into the rites surrounding the Zaouli. Its main role would thus seem to be associated with the productivity of the villages where it is used and would promote good harvests by asking for the agreement and protection of the ancestors. Inscribed in 2017 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This mask refers to a popular dance and music practiced by the Gouro communities in the Bouaflé city and Zuénoula departments of Ivory Coast.

A tribute to feminine beauty, the Zaouli is inspired by two masks: the “Blou” and the “Djela”. Its other name, “Djela lou Zaouli”, means “Zaouli, the daughter of Djela”. The Zaouli combines, in the same show, sculpture (the mask), weaving (the costume), music (the orchestra, the song) and dance. The Zaouli mask is available in seven facial masks, each translating a specific legend. The holders and practitioners are sculptors, artisans, instrumentalists, singers, dancers and notables (guarantors of the customs and traditions of the community). The Zaouli also has an educational, playful and aesthetic function as shown in **Figure 1**¹.



Figure 1. Zaouli mask from Ivory Coast².

¹In the history of art, the term “primitivism” refers first and foremost to the movement of celebration, by certain artists of the various avant-gardes of the 20th century, of values and forms considered original, exotic and regenerative. It is customary to place around 1900 the beginning of the craze of Western artists for works from Africa or the Pacific. Picasso and Matisse are said to have seen African statuettes for the first time in Derain’s studio, around 1905-1907. The latter had been marked by the visit, in 1905, to the “Negro Museum” in London—the ethnographic collections of the British Museum. Source: Universalis.

²Zaouli is a spiritual mask and also a traditional dance of the Gouro ethnic group of central Ivory Coast. Zaouli is inspired by two masks: the “Blou” and the “Djela”. It may be performed during various ceremonies and rites of passage.

2.2. In the Footsteps of New Forms of Plastic Expression in Ivory Coast

In Ivory Coast, the starting point of the “contemporary” era of plastic arts can be dated with the arrival of colonization. Initially stemming from so-called Western “academic” art, and more particularly French academicism, the impetus of the Negro and Pan-African philosophical and artistic liberalization movement called “Negritude” will give it its marks of emancipation. In Ivory Coast, it is especially with the influence of pioneers such as Christian Lattier, whose achievements regularly hit the headlines because they willingly abandoned any traditional Western sculptural notion by abandoning materials considered “noble” and deciding instead to focus on productions based on wire and string that he will call “sculptural experiments”, that contemporary art in Ivory Coast has really established its traces. We can also note the exhibition of the painter Michel Kodjo in 1957 at the Abidjan city hall, which would prove to be a major point in the phenomenal turning point that contemporary Ivorian art would make.

After independence, a national cultural policy was put in place to establish Ivory Coast as a cultural turning point in the sub-region and even raise the country’s colors on the world stage. This led to the creation of the National Institute of Arts (INA), which later became the National Institute of Arts and Cultural Action (IN-SAAC), which saw the birth of the National School of Fine Arts (ENBA, now ESAPAD/Higher School of Plastic Arts, Architecture and Design), which was handed over in 1961 to the sculptor Marcel Homs. Among the first members of the teaching staff, we can also note the presence of this same Christian Lattier, or the ceramist Yao Dogo. Following the creation of this school, a number of visual artists appeared on Ivorian soil, including the group of students at the origin of the artistic movement “Vohou-Vohou”³, which emerged in the 1970s and which called into question Western artistic and academic canons, while fully embracing the aesthetics of primitivism.

Talking about “Vohou-Vohou”, it presents itself as an art based on the recovery, processing and integration under a frame of any materials, considered as waste for the rest of the population, in artistic creation. These materials have the primary purpose of highlighting the natural riches of the Ivorian terroir. Thus, any heterogeneous material is used: sand, rocks, cowries, tapas (beaten wood bark), etc. Moreover, its etymology reminds us of this, because the term “Vohou-Vohou” means more or less “anything” in the Gouro language. This artistic movement thus advocates a purely African and especially Ivorian aesthetic by freeing itself from the constraints of expensive materials attributable to Western and more particularly French academic art, which will open the way to a whole new layer of

³Negritude is a literary and political movement, created during the interwar period, bringing together black French-speaking writers, such as Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Paulette and Jeanne Nardal sisters (considered the inspiring figures of the movement), Jacques Rabemananjara, Léon-Gontran Damas, Guy Tirolien, Birago Diop and René Depestre. Linked in particular to anti-colonialism, the movement subsequently influenced many people close to black nationalism, extending well beyond the French-speaking world.

creative freedom in Ivorian contemporary art. In October 1987, Mr. Houra Kadjo James presented a third-cycle thesis entitled “New plastic forms in Côte d’Ivoire: rupture or continuity?” at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne. In this scientific research work, the author explains his approach based on the premise that there are new plastic forms in Ivory Coast, and he sets out to elucidate their relationship to traditional art. Before setting his sights on his objective, he first decides to address those who denied the existence of these new forms. He therefore finds their figurehead in the person of Mr. Bohumil Holas, first director of the National Museum of Abidjan. For him, the writings of this ethnologist have only done a disservice to those who had tried to impose an effort to read and understand Ivorian art. James Houra in this story expresses his dissatisfaction with Bohumil Holas for his inflammatory and defamatory remarks against traditional aesthetics of primitivism.

For example, the idea of the death of traditional Ivorian art and the aesthetic, socio-cultural values that had presided over its creation. The idea of a split between the traditional, anonymous and individual aesthetic world of the modern artist and the uncertainties of a modern art that would always have to submit, wondering which ideal path to choose. Then focusing on the question that serves as its problematic—continuity or rupture?

“James Houra initially gives the impression of an indecisive observer. He believes, on the one hand, that the vast movement of awareness that assigns artists to resort to the principles and forms of traditional aesthetics allows us to speak of continuity. But he also notes, on the other hand, that several contemporary Ivorian creators openly align themselves under the banner of ‘art for art’s sake’ and believes that this suggests an abandonment of traditional art. For him, the visible dilemma in which the new Ivorian plastic production thus finds itself in fact poses the complex problem of the influences and borrowings it undergoes” (François-Xavier, 2021).

The analysis of this phenomenon must strive, in his eyes, to avoid any simplification. He notes in fact that the formal realism of certain sculptures by Georges Koulai or the geometric abstraction of Don Kouassi and Yomo Gué Gaston, considered a priori as elements borrowed from Western art, find equivalents in traditional African arts such as those of Ifé, Benin, Baoulé or Ashanti. And he wonders why the artists concerned would not have effectively made rediscoveries in favor of the movement of “recourse to sources”. The symbolism visible in certain works by Anouma Joseph, the simplification of forms, the deformation, the rhythm and other elements that are considered a priori as the prerogative of traditional art, do they not also abound in Western art? The processes of the “Vovo” artists who, in the name of Negro-African authenticity, use broken glass, sand, tree bark, pieces of fabric, etc., were they not experimented with, long before them, by Dada and the surrealist movement?

On the basis of these data, James Houra asserts that the encounters of African and European cultures have given birth, on both sides, to a teeming creativity in

which a dynamic continuity has never ceased to manifest itself.

3. Manifestation, Understanding and Stereotypical Perceptions Related to the Discipline of Plastic Arts in Ivory Coast

3.1. Methodology

In order to properly conduct scientific research, we first sought to understand the real causes of this negative and stereotypical manifestation or perception with regard to the field of plastic arts in our society. This research that we are presenting was carried out from the 1st of March to October 15, 2023 in the cities of Abidjan and Bouaké (Ivory Coast).

Sadly, in Ivory Coast, despite its quality and intrinsic value, the plastic arts are still poorly perceived and are subject to pedagogical, infrastructural, human, technical and economic difficulties. To this question, [Touré \(2023a, 2023b\)](#) notes that,

The visual arts in Ivory Coast had a difficult start due to the marginalization that this discipline suffered throughout its history. But today, thanks to the various reforms initiated and those to come, it is hoped that the visual arts will effectively integrate the country's development process, like those who have already grasped its importance in the growth and dynamics of cultural and creative industries⁴.

The observation is that despite the inclusion of visual arts in the Ivorian education system, it still suffers from this stereotype of marginalization. Is this a form of ignorance of the added value of this discipline in the training of learners? However, many studies around the world reveal that visual arts contribute favorably to the training of learners through the acquisition of knowledge, the construction of know-how and know-how that are essential to their cognitive, psychological, affective and psychomotor personal development. As indicated by [Iwai \(2002\)](#).

After all this research and analysis on stereotypes in the world of plastic arts, music, dance, theater and cinema, it therefore appears that most of the causes that have been identified in this research work can be attributed to the actors in the environment themselves. That is to say, the lack of professionalism, the non-compliance with the principles and rules in the artistic industry (copyright, the code of intellectual cleanliness, etc.). Added to this are the difficult conditions for visual artists to make a comfortable living from their profession in Ivory Coast (being an artist is not a real job, art is useless); drawing all day, studies with no future, students who are rather extravagant or on the contrary very solitary, unemployment after training, excessive consumption of narcotics in this profession, lack of theoretical knowledge on certain subjects related to economic development, science, technological innovations, etc.

Interviews were also conducted with some major stakeholders who are considered

⁴Interview conducted on August 17, 2023 in Cocody, from 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Topics covered: Information on the perception and role of plastic arts in the development of ICCs in Ivory Coast.

to have more extensive information and professional experience in the visual arts community in Abidjan and Bouaké city. The choice of these two cities is justified by the fact that they are home to the majority of cultural and artistic stakeholders in Ivory Coast. Even if the list of these stakeholders is not exhaustive, the distribution is established as follows:

- 32 Musicians,
- 21 Filmmakers,
- 35 Painters,
- 13 Teachers of visual arts and music in secondary and higher education,
- 15 Craftsmen working in the informal sector,
- 6 Art critics
- 4 Cultural journalists.

These interviews were reinforced by documentary research for theoretical reasons on the subject of study and also observation to witness the situation.

3.2. Results and Discussions

In an effort to give new impetus to artists in Ivory Coast at the beginning of 2017, the Minister of Culture, Maurice Bandama, had taken stock of the situation. His observation after his audit is that the theater companies, in particular the troupes of the Theater Union of Ivory Coast (UTCI), those of Adjé Daniel, Kotéba, Souleymane Koly, Ki-Yi Mbock, Wêrê Wêrê, Bin Kadi So, Didiga, the Cercle of theatrical duo of Koffi Kwahulé and Guédéba Martin, the Sun of Cocody city, the Djiboua Theater Company of Divo, etc. are no longer in activity. Faced with this bleak picture, the Minister had announced the construction of twelve integrated cultural centres in various regions of Ivory Coast and nine centers of applied arts. These buildings that should allow the actors of this sector to express themselves effectively have never been built. As part of his policy of reviving the Ivorian 7th art, Minister Maurice Bandaman had dispatched Mr. Angama Calixte, Director of Arts and Culture to the managers of the dark rooms to, he said, revitalize this sector. At the end of his trip, the emissary took stock of the situation to the minister. According to Mr. Kouadio Richard, professor of theater and cinema, the project to reposition the said sector has never seen the start of execution. The Ivorian 7th art which has been in decline for a long time is struggling to wake up from its long sleep. Most of the movie theaters have become shopping centers or are in a very advanced state of disrepair in the different municipalities of the district of Abidjan and even in the big cities of the country. The closure of movie theaters creates real disarray for movie lovers who are also deprived of their favorite distraction. Unfortunately, under Ouattara, art, culture and well-being are sad memories for Ivorians.

Talking about the fight against piracy of intellectual works, it should be noted that this issue has posed enormous difficulties for the Ivorian government, in particular the Ministry of Culture. The bill proposed in June 2015 in the Council of Ministers was not adopted by the National Assembly. Pirates continue to duplicate

and market artists' works under the government's nose, with complete impunity at all the major crossroads of Abidjan and the main streets of cities in the interior. Ivorian artists wonder what has become of the laws that would have allowed them to earn a decent living from their creations. During a meeting in 2015 with creators of intellectual works, in the conference room of his department, the Minister of Culture and Francophonie announced to his interlocutors the imminent application of the laws that would be favorable to them in the fight against pirates. During our interviews, some interlocutors proposed the establishment of the principle of fair remuneration in two points: remuneration for private copying and remuneration for reproduction by reprography. They allowed the holders of copyright or related rights to be recognized as having the capacity to create two separate collective management structures, one for the management of copyright and the other for the management of related rights. The texts established the principle of equitable remuneration in two points: remuneration for private copying and remuneration for reproduction by reprography. These texts unfortunately remained at the stage of promises according to the statements of several artists.

On the thorny issue of the development and promotion of the Plastic Arts in Africa and more particularly in Ivory Coast, our investigations reveal that for several years, biennials and international festivals have been multiplying across Africa, testifying to the growing dynamism of the cultural sector. But what do these events represent for the cities of Bouaké and Abidjan? What do their promotion and promotion strategies reveal in the craft sector? Are they capable of contributing to the sustainable development of the country?

The cultural sector appears today in Ivory Coast as the place of new challenges. Cultural challenges linked to the preservation of diversity, in the face of the threat of globalization perceived as a potential factor of standardization. Also, economic challenges that place Ivorian creators and artists in a position of market conquest. Across the world, the work of art is considered as much for its symbolic as economic function. Everywhere, questions are raised related to its valorization, its diffusion as well as its economic and social contribution. Also, different strategies are initiated in different parts of the country and even on the African continent. They aim to promote the recognition and promotion of cultural goods as much as the development of industries in this sector.

These strategies operate, first of all, at the local level by promoting the development of an art market in Africa. They also take on an international dimension since they allow a wide diffusion of cultural products in particular through the organization of specific events and platforms for meetings between creators and professionals in the art world.

We therefore note that the lack of recognition, support and legitimation of artistic creation in Ivory Coast remains a major obstacle to its international dissemination.

3.3. Overview and Importance of Plastic Arts in the Ivorian Education System

Plastic art is a noun phrase that is composed of two entities namely "art" and

“plastic”. Starting with the word “art”, it is considered the main guide of this field, with “plastic”, its brand, its identity, that is to say the element specifying the specialty.

The etymology of the word “art” recalls the very origin of this teaching. Indeed, the latter comes from the Greek and Latin terms *ars* and *artis* which mean “skill, technique requiring know-how” (Gavoille, 1997). Artistic practice must thus develop knowledge and know-how but also know-how.

Thus, “art” which, in the past, was considered the skillful way of doing something, has undergone a clear evolution allowing it to become embedded in any field of scientific research. This is why, today, the French Dictionary “Le Grand Robert 2017”, in the new edition, defines it as a “means of obtaining a result also considered as the set of organized knowledge and rules of action. Art, in fact, is the consideration given to the creations of works of art, a set of works specific to a time, a place, a style”. From the above, it is the style that makes art which, probably, is the servant of plastic expression. Art, whatever its field of expression, demands, requires efforts. This is the reason why it is perceived as a Rigorous Arrangement of Everything (ART). Art is, above all, not an Arrangement of Nothing at All. Art is the Rigorous association of Everything; it is the reflection of the Assembly of the Realities of the Traditions of the peoples, therefore of the facts, theories and spiritual considerations that should not be truncated, dismantled, pruned and topped. Art, according to its different movements, is the direct or indirect translation of the identity, traditions, and style of the communities. It is the notion that takes into account several fields, specialties, and ways of doing things. It is also all these definitions that have allowed it to extend to inestimable disciplinary or thematic values, thus allowing it to acquire all the nobility of the meaning of the word “plastic”, constituting here the second entity. However, “plastic” is a qualifying adjective, refers to something, to a specialty whose essence would essentially be summed up in forms. Considered as a feminine noun, the adjective plastic is relative to the arts that develop forms such as sculpture, architecture, drawing, painting, etc. The plastic arts are therefore the rigorous association of cultural values translated into forms according to the aforementioned specialties. These are the specialties that we could call the typology of the plastic arts.

- **Typology of Plastic Arts in Ivory Coast**

In Ivory Coast, as everywhere else, plastic arts have a multifaceted meaning. In terms of knowledge, they are deployed in several specialties embracing architecture, sculpture, painting, engraving, weaving or textiles, communication, etc. These specialties can be grouped into two large families, namely the arts of expression and the decorative arts. Through these large families, we could illustrate several styles of plastic creations. These are, for example, ways of arranging tools to build a building, of giving shape to a lifeless material to create life. Also, it is the technique of overlapping and arranging threads by trial and error (either vertically, horizontally or obliquely) to weave. Plastic creation is the place to have fun by contemplating a space: what is pleasant to the eye, therefore the beauty that is

decoration, etc. In trying to classify these specialties, sculpture, in terms of artistic practice, is one of the first techniques that man used in prehistoric times (Tano, 2022).

In those distant times, man worked by carving stones, wood and many other materials to defend himself, to preserve and immortalize his kings, his heroes, his warriors and for his entertainment. Towards the end, “it is about 2.5 million years that these creations have been considered as works of art” (Vialou, 1991). This aspect of things is visible everywhere in the world showing the trace of men in time and space.

- **The Importance of Plastic Arts in Our Education System**

Plastic arts were officially integrated into the Ivorian training system in 1966 with the creation of the National Institute of Arts (INA). This initiative was born under the impetus of Albert Bothol, UNESCO (1968) expert in service in the country and with the consent of the Ivorian authorities. In 1975, under the leadership of UNESCO, the issue of training cultural development agents as a prerequisite for the establishment of a coherent cultural policy in developing countries was raised at the Accra Conference. At the end of this meeting, the creation of the Centre for Animation and Training in Cultural Action (CAFAC) was effective on the 5th of November 1984. Thus, in 1991, we witnessed the merger of INA and CAFAC. This union gave birth to the National Higher Institute of Arts and Cultural Action (INSAAC). Since the restructuring, this institute has brought together six schools including the former National School of Fine Arts (ENBA) renamed the Higher School of Plastic Arts, Architecture and Design (ESAPAD).

After the creation of INSAAC in 1991, it was followed by: the Information, Communication and Arts Training and Research Unit (UFRICA) with a department and a sector dedicated solely to the visual arts in 1994, the High School of Artistic Education (LEA) in 1994, the Technical Center for Applied Arts (CTAA) in Bingerville city in 1994 and the Regional Conservatory of Arts and Crafts of Abengourou (CRAMA) in 1995.

Concerning the practice of this disciplinary course in high schools and colleges, it began effectively in the 1980s. In the private sector, we find IPAC (Institute for the Promotion of Conservatory Arts); CMAK (Center for Artistic Crafts of Koumassi). Concerning general secondary education in Ivory Coast, it must be said that the visual arts are struggling to establish themselves as a discipline in their own right due to a lack of information and political will. The world is looking for workers with a creative spirit. From graphic designers to engineers, architects, sculptors, painters, ceramists, communicators, designers, video game designers or even teachers, the list is endless. All these professions have one skill in common: creativity.

Creativity is the disposition to create that exists in a potential state in all individuals and at all ages, closely dependent on the socio-cultural environment. This natural tendency to achieve requires favorable conditions to express itself (Boutinet, 1999).

The first skill is creativity. Etymologically, the term creativity comes from the Latin word “creare” meaning to create. This polysemic term (Piccardo & Capron, 2019) is in everyday language the ability to produce a production (an idea, an object, a composition) that is both new and adapted to the context and constraints of the environment in which the production is expressed. For Stein, “creativity is that process which results in a personal work, accepted as useful or satisfactory by a social group at any point in time” (Stein, 1953: p. XI). In 2012, Filteau took up the same idea by proposing a more complete definition of creativity which requires taking into account the person, the process and the product interrelated with each other during a creative activity in a given environment (place) and in a given time (period). Bonnardel, in 2002, defined creativity as “the capacity to produce an idea expressible in observable form or to produce a production which is both innovative and unexpected, adapted to the situation and (in certain cases) considered to have value” (Bonnardel, 2002)⁵.

What our society will need to understand is that the presence of artistic and cultural activities at school stimulates students’ commitment to academic success, increases their involvement and motivation in class, and is also an important element in developing a sense of belonging to their environment. Many studies show how attached students are to their art classes, and how they help maintain a vital link between them and the school. Integrating visual arts into the school curriculum reduces disciplinary problems and increases the effectiveness of teaching and the ability of teachers to meet the needs of all students. The arts at school are infinitely more than a place of expression or letting off steam: for many students, they promote the development of their sense of belonging to their environment and stimulate their commitment throughout their journey towards educational success. Motivated, young people become able to learn on all levels, and the visual arts play a vital role in maintaining this involvement. In addition, for students in difficulty, the arts promote the path to autonomy, help them overcome personal challenges that hinder their learning, to be able to express themselves freely, to enrich their personal knowledge and to discover new creative skills. Art teachers can help children move towards careers in the visual arts from the beginning of their school life. Wouldn’t this be the ideal time to recall the importance of artistic and socio-cultural activities in our school system, as well as the aims of the training program?

In addition to promoting healthy identity building on a personal and social level, artistic activities such as visual arts, music, dance, storytelling, and theater, at school contribute to the development of high-level transversal skills, thus referring to their formidable integrative power.

4. The Universe of Plastic Arts and Their Role in Innovation, Technological Sciences, Industrial and Creative Development in Ivory Coast

In Côte d’Ivoire, a country rich in cultural and artistic diversity, plastic arts are

⁵Interview conducted on August 17, 2023 in Cocody, from 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Topics covered: Information on the perception and role of plastic arts in the development of ICCs in Ivory Coast.

positioned as an essential lever for innovation and development for cultural and creative industries. This discipline, which encompasses a wide range of artistic practices such as painting, sculpture, photography, architecture, fashion, ceramics, etc., offers possibilities for creative expression. As a form of visual artistic expression, plastic arts open up a space for experimentation, critical reflection and questioning of established conventions. Plastic artists explore new techniques, materials and concepts, which stimulates creativity and inspires innovation in the field of art and many others. In terms of painting, we can cite the creation of the “Vohou-Vohou” artistic movement in the 1970s and the “Daro-daro” of the 1997s which made Côte d’Ivoire proud both nationally and internationally. These avant-garde movements which break free from pre-established academic rules have made it possible to trace the furrows of contemporary Ivorian painting. In this regard, [Touré \(2021\)](#) notes that:

“By calling their art ‘Vohou-Vohou’, Ivorian visual artists wanted to demonstrate that one could start from nothing and end up with wonderful things, full of meaning and values. Contemporary Ivorian painters, by adopting this term, have left a positive mark on Ivorian art. Thus, this practice, outside the classic patterns of artistic creation, will free the Ivorian artist and place him in the orbit of an African inspiration that takes into account ancestral culture and current concerns. In addition to the contribution of Vohou-Vohou artists, we can also mention the sculptural works of visual artist Christian Lattier, one of the most remarkable of which is ‘The Three Ages of Côte d’Ivoire’. This 8 m high work and 1.5 tons of recovered scrap metal demonstrates an innovative and ecological approach to art”⁶.

Through the hypothesis that plastic arts sometimes reflect the cultural identity of a country, the objective is to demonstrate that plastic arts participate in the cultural animation and development of Côte d’Ivoire through exhibitions, openings, festivals, national or international carnivals. Thus, Côte d’Ivoire, in the momentum of exporting its rich and varied cultural identities, will hold exhibitions to build a policy of presenting cultural values for its development. On these occasions, visual artists driven by the desire to identify themselves, to make themselves known and to develop their economy by selling paintings and even by forming partnerships, will engage in confrontations with the public. Confrontations of ideas, values, visions where artists become cultural animators. This is an important moment during which they develop their performances. These are all facts which, upon analysis, have provoked questions in us. Information on the role of “Vohou-Vohou” in the emergence of contemporary Ivorian art⁷.

⁶Meaning “anything” in the Guro language, Vohou-Vohou, beyond its technique of recovering and integrating heterogeneous materials in the creation of its works, aimed first of all to break with the standards of creation that governed training at the National School of Fine Arts of Abidjan (ENBA). Interview conducted on December 10, 2021 in Cocody, from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. Topics covered: Information on the role of “Vohou-Vohou” in the emergence of contemporary Ivorian art.

⁷Excerpt from the online article, “Industrial designer, a passionate profession”, <https://eureka-study.com/designer-industriel-un-metier-de-passionne/>. Published by Armelle K. Website consulted July 17, 2024 at 6 p.m.

4.1. The Role and Importance of Plastic Arts in Innovation, Technological Sciences, Industrial and Creative Development in Ivory Coast

The role, importance and impact of plastic arts in the innovation of technological sciences and industrial development are those of its relationship with design. Indeed, design is a field that encompasses functional and aesthetic aspects, and plastic arts provide a valuable source of inspiration for designers. The shapes, colors, textures and compositions explored by plastic artists can be adapted and applied in products, architectural spaces, digital interfaces and other design creations. On the issue of design, *Zamble Bi (2021)* emphasizes that:

[...] The industrial design sector can be very interesting for young people who are both creative and scientific. It is a rich profession, constantly evolving, driven by innovation [...] In addition, numerous partnerships exist between engineering, art or applied art schools and universities.

Here, we are looking at four areas of design in which the visual arts participate while justifying its role as a lever for innovation in the cultural industries. These are: space design, textile design, product design and communication design.

Space design is a discipline of interior and exterior design of a public or private space. Its purpose is to create different and innovative spaces in order to make them functional and attractive. Space design includes: architecture, landscaping, events, etc. For Ivory Coast, space design can be a tool for developing quality infrastructure and promoting the emergence of local companies dedicated to this sector of activity. The construction sector is one of the most dynamic in the country. Between 2012 and 2022, the construction sector experienced annual growth of 26%, while its turnover quadrupled, from EUR 617 million to EUR 2.38 billion. Its share of GDP increased from 4.5% in 2015 to 5.5% in 2019.

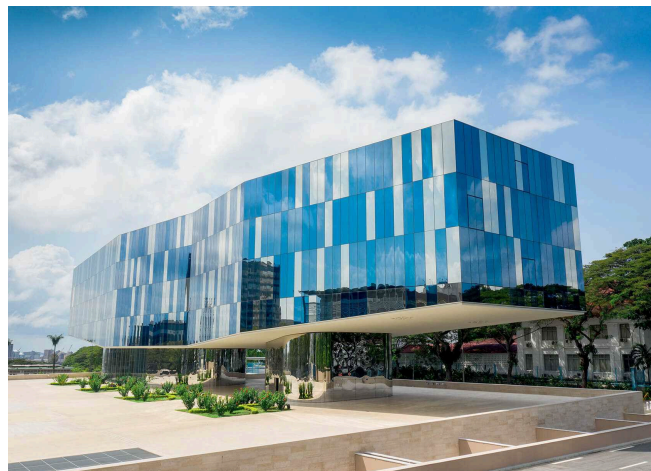


Figure 2. The presidential palace of Ivory Coast.

Ivory Coast now has more than 215 certified architects grouped within the National Council of the Order of Architects of Côte d'Ivoire (CNOA). The National

Council of Interior Architects of Ivory Coast (CNAICI) has 16 members. Contemporary architecture as a whole is now intended to be ecological and sustainable with the use of local materials. This architecture takes into account the culture of the country, like the F tower (64 floors) which will represent an African mask. To corroborate our words, we can cite the Koffi & Diabaté architectural firm, the PFO AFRICA company (**Figure 2** & **Figure 3**) which have carried out numerous spatial developments and architectural works in Ivory Coast and in many African countries including the new presidency of Ivory Coast, the Tour F du Plateau.



Figure 3. The construction project of Tower F.

See below some architectural achievements of the Guillaume & Diabaté company (**Figure 4** & **Figure 5**).



Figure 4. The new headquarters of Orange Côte d'Ivoire Company in Abidjan.



Figure 5. The project “Complex Green Abidjan”.

4.2. The Contribution of Plastic Arts in Technological Sciences in Ivory Coast

“Since the Renaissance, art has looked towards science: mathematics in the broad sense, with geometry and numbers, anatomy, dissection, optics, theories of color, theories of perception, evolutionism, Darwinism, theory of relativity and the fourth dimension, non-Euclidean geometries, psychoanalysis, structural linguistics, cybernetics, information theory, game theory, and in recent years, mathematics of chaos, fractal objects, cognitive sciences and life sciences” (Couchot, 1998).

Art, science and technology have special relationships, two by two, depending on the moment in history, especially when technology is assimilated to technology. The encounters between art and science or between art and technology, considered from the point of view of the Plastic Arts and aesthetics, must also take into account those that are formed, at certain times, between science and technology, remarkably illuminated by Jean-Marc Lévy-Leblond in his work “Le Grand Écart”. Their loves and divorces also vary according to the eras and the systems of thought, which complicates the development of a definition for each. However, for the first time without doubt, in an unprecedented way, art, science and technology made technology seem to find common ground in what we call the “digital era” (Lévy, 2013).

The questions raised by contemporary culture are found with even greater force in the field of art. Exhibited before the general public, African ritual objects that have remained hidden from the gaze of women, the uninitiated and foreigners are today considered “on the same footing” as Western works of art; this is clearly a source of pride for Africa, but do these objects resist the symbolic logic of territories and the emergence of new technologies? What is the attitude of the African towards new technologies? How can we read the question of the possible acculturation of African art in the face of international standards? Does this art have the choice between adapting and imitating, or can it make international standards

evolve towards a consideration of its own world and its own aesthetic standards? Is the ethnic group that does not lack authentic values interested in the projects of the State?

In view of the new transversalities, at these doors and bridges opened between cultures, what therapy should be administered to ethnic communities, to politics and to the State? So many questions push us to use our gaze and to listen at the same time, so as not to betray African identity. The gaze is always imagined more or less in the form of an eye, even if it is closed. It is very fruitful when it communicates with the ear. Auditory communication plays a major role in black African societies. Among the Dogons and the Bambara for example, the intellectualization of symbols and the slow transformation of semantics into semiology follows the path of evolutionary phylogenesis which gives primacy to the two sensory atlases: visual and audiophonic.

It is by taking care of all these senses that we would try here to climb the slopes of truth. The orality in which these societies still draw is linked to action, destiny, the future, the transmission of social norms, religious and superstitious practices, in short to civilization. Beyond all quarrels about African art, it is important to remember that African art carries the soul of an entire continent, with extremely rich societies, cultures and myths. Unlike Western societies in which art is almost exclusively perceived from an aesthetic and intellectual angle—which results in making it a specialty essentially reserved for a few enlightened amateurs—African art proceeds from a fundamentally opposite approach; but it is grappling with the reality to which we would be wrong to have our eyes closed.

Even more than talking about technology to qualify the knowledge at stake in the design of tools and the sciences applied to techniques, we will talk about “technosciences”, so much have techniques annexed the fundamental sciences. The new digital technologies go much further in the magical effect of their uses. Not only do they allow possible operations outside the user, but they are also deployed without him: artificial intelligence pushing the limits of our capacities, interactivity allowing the creation of the other, immersive worlds extending the illusion, while the virtual offers the construction of a new but true reality; incorporations of technologies into the living body making us cyborgs. In the 20th century, science has therefore encountered technology to the point that it finds itself, according to Jean-Marc Lévy-Leblond, “captured” “by its own technical results”: we will now speak of technoscience “where there is no longer a clear distinction between discovery and application, between research and development, between the world of science and the world of technology” (Lévy, 2013).

Here, it is a question of taking an interest in technological innovations called Artificial Intelligence in the field of Plastic Arts in Ivory Coast. These are: contemporary art, photography, product design and communication design. Since 2016 until today, the Ivorian capital has hosted an international event that promises to set the world of arts and technology ablaze: “The International Meetings of Digital and Visual Arts in Abidjan (RIANA)”, as shown in **Figure 6**.



Figure 6. Digital creation workshops, artificial intelligence, digital marketing and virtual reality live show at the 8th edition of the international meetings of digital and visual arts of Abidjan (RIANA)⁸, on April 4 and 5, at the Ivorian-Korean ICT Center.

This initiative by visual artist Jacobleu highlights technological innovations in the field of contemporary art. A major stock market in West Africa, a cosmopolitan, teeming and creative metropolis, Abidjan has also been, since the 1980s, one of the beacons of the sub-region's art scene. It has become one of the main contemporary art markets in French-speaking Africa. Since 2011, with the return of growth, golden boys and expatriates, this market has exploded, diversified and is no longer reserved for a small circle of patrons or members of powerful families linked to large local monocultures. Among the emblematic amateurs and promoters are Janine Diagou, General Manager of the NSIA Group's banking division, Professor Yacouba Konaté, Director of the Nour-Al Hayat Gallery Foundation, Ms. Louise Simone Guirandou, Ms. Cécile Fakhoury, Ms. Sandrine Mesquida, Thierry Dia, etc. Renowned gallery owners who are pioneers in the cultural industry in Côte d'Ivoire have very large private collections of paintings and sculptures signed by the main Ivorian masters, from Michel Kodjo to Ouattara Watts.

“Abidjan has established itself as the capital of West African plastic art in the French-speaking world, because there is purchasing power”, says Thierry D. B., founder of the Houkamy Gyzaign gallery.

If contemporary art showcases are multiplying in Abidjan, there are now about ten of them and the local market is also developing. In the absence of reports or quantified studies, all professionals in the field interpret the slightest signals as confirmation of a growing market.

“The occasional or permanent return of Ivorian artists is an unmistakable sign”, says Mimi Errol, artistic director of the Houkamy Guyzagn gallery and also one of the country's only art critics and exhibition curators.

It is clear that all these art galleries and foundations have significantly contributed to revealing a new generation of visual artists such as Aboudia, Pascal Konan, Yéanzi Saint-Etienne, Jems Koko Bi, Mominé Paulin, Armand Boua, Monnou Désiré, Obou Gbais, Laeticia Ky etc., now known worldwide. Among these illustrious visual artists mentioned, we will endeavor to highlight one of the stables that

⁸Meaning of RIANA (International Digital Arts Meetings of Abidjan).

represents a pride, a model of success, an inexhaustible source of registration, an ambassador in the cultural industry and promoter of contemporary Ivorian art on the national and international level. It is therefore the visual artist Aboudia.

At 41, Abdoulaye Diarrassouba known as ABOUDIA has become the darling of collectors. His paintings are snapped up in Marrakech, London, Paris, New York and even Hong Kong and Beijing. The excitement is such that the price of his works has increased tenfold in less than a decade. On October 26, three of his paintings found buyers at the “Generation 21” sale organized by Artcurial. How did this artist of Ivorian origin, who lives and works between Brooklyn and Abidjan, so quickly conquer the hearts of collectors around the world?

And why do his works set auctions alight to such an extent? Today, half of his paintings are valued at more than \$50,000 each at auction, with price spikes reaching \$500,000 and beyond. Winner of the Best Prize of the visual arts promoter in 2023 and rewarded by the President of the Republic of Côte d’Ivoire, the works of the painter Aboudia are increasingly talked about, are increasingly shown and more and more auction houses are distributing his work: in France with Millon, Piasa, Artcurial, Cornette de Saint-Cyr; in London where Christie’s and Sotheby’s joined Bonhams in offering his works from 2017. In 2018, Aboudia joined a very popular sale: “New Now”, organized by Phillips in New York. His signature is now at the heart of the sales most followed by international collectors of contemporary art and prices are climbing year after year. In 2018, Bonhams sold a work for \$42,000. The following year, Piasa sold a lot of drawings for nearly \$79,000, then, in 2020, Sotheby’s hit the hammer at \$99,000 for a large canvas. Christie’s climbed to \$223,000 in March 2021, a new price threshold that several large canvases would meet in the following months. A year went by and Christie’s doubled this score, with nearly \$500,000 obtained for Haut les mains in March 2022. Finally, \$607,000 was paid in July 2022 (Figure 7) for an untitled canvas from 2018 (Céline, 2022).



Figure 7. One of the works of the Ivorian painter Aboudia purchased for 289,891,950 FCFA (about \$282,000) during an auction exhibition in the United Kingdom 2022.

Today, we can say that the rise in growth and success of the painter Aboudia in

the field of Plastic Arts has favored a huge blossoming of several young artistic talents in Ivory Coast. His career and popularity have inspired many students to take the entrance exam to the Higher School of Plastic Arts, Architecture and Design, formerly the School of Fine Arts of Abidjan.

4.3. The Importance of Investing in the Arts in Ivory Coast

The arts and culture sector in Côte d'Ivoire offers considerable investment opportunities for local and international players. With favorable government policies, diverse cultural wealth, and growing demand for cultural products and services, Ivory Coast is well positioned to become a regional leader in the field of culture. The art market in Ivory Coast is booming, with increasing demand for both contemporary and traditional artworks. Investors can get involved in organizing art fairs, developing online sales platforms, and creating art investment funds. Challenges related to access to financing, visibility, and infrastructure can be overcome through targeted initiatives and strategic partnerships.

Investors can also capitalize on opportunities in the visual arts, music, live performance, cultural heritage, film, and media by developing innovative solutions to meet local and global needs. Opening art galleries and organizing exhibitions are effective ways to promote local artists and showcase their work. Investors can support the creation of art galleries, finance traveling exhibitions, and develop online platforms to sell Ivorian artwork to an international audience. Artist residencies provide an environment conducive to artistic creation and foster cultural exchange. Investors can fund residency programs to attract local and international artists, **creating opportunities for collaboration and artistic development.**

- Cultural Heritage and Tourism

Heritage Conservation: Ivory Coast has a rich cultural heritage, including historical sites, monuments and ancestral traditions. Investors can support the conservation and restoration of these sites, finance heritage research projects and develop initiatives to promote cultural tourism.

Cultural Eco-Tourism: The development of cultural eco-tourism offers opportunities to promote Ivorian culture while supporting environmental conservation. Investors can develop tourist circuits, cultural centers and eco-lodges, allowing visitors to discover the culture and natural heritage of Côte d'Ivoire.

- Challenges and Solutions:

Access to Financing: Artists and cultural businesses face daily difficulties in accessing the financing needed to develop their artistic projects. The lack of capital and funds dedicated to culture can limit growth opportunities.

Visibility and Promotion: Promoting Ivorian culture internationally can be a challenge, especially for independent artists and productions. The lack of promotional platforms and international networks can limit the visibility of Ivorian artists.

Infrastructure and training: The lack of cultural infrastructure and training programs can limit the development of the sector. Artists and cultural professionals

need support to access quality infrastructure and adapted training programs.

- **Solutions:**

Encourage the development of investment funds dedicated to art, culture, artistic training and technological science innovations. Partnerships with international financial institutions and private investors can provide the necessary capital to support cultural projects.

5. Conclusion

Although it has been present for centuries and academically confirmed for several decades, art, particularly plastic arts, still evokes mixed feelings in Ivorian society between appreciation for its aesthetics on the one hand, and rejection of its controversial practice on the other. Thus, in view of all that has been said above in this research work, it is clear that the phenomenon of Plastic Arts in Ivory Coast is constantly reinventing itself and is no longer limited to a simple function of aesthetic expression. It therefore takes on a mantle of profound educational, social, cultural, artistic, philosophical, spiritual, historical and economic dimensions, serving as a mirror, showcase and model for the concerns and aspirations regarding the values of Ivorian society. Through their creativity and multiple sales, exhibitions and international conference actions, Ivorian plastic artists are emerging as major players in the construction of collective identity, contributing to significantly shaping the socio-cultural landscape of the country.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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