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## Universal Studios of Art: Professionalization and Contributions to Art Education in Nigeria



Panoramic view on Lagos Marina. Image courtesy of Wikimedia

### Overview

**Dr Augustine Okolo Bardi**, Associate Professor at the University of Benin (Benin City, Nigeria) investigated the activities of artists at the **Universal Studios of Art** based in Lagos, Nigeria. Before the hosting of the 2nd Black World African Festival of Arts and Culture in 1977 tagged (FESTAC '77), art development in Nigeria was at a moderate speed in terms of advancement. But the hosting of (FESTAC'77) exposed some wealth of art in the society through exhibitions, seminars, workshops and other art activities. The success of FESTAC '77 opened a corridor of participants by professionals in the arts at the National Theatre complex which housed the National Gallery of Arts

(NGA). The premise was used to groom budding artists both formally and informally. The huge success of this exercise by the invited independent artists as artists-in-residence advanced the growth of art education in Lagos metropolis and extended to institutions which sent students to the center on training. However, this huge success was bridged when a misunderstanding ensued between the authority of the gallery and the independent artists. This quarrel led to the establishment of the Universal Studios of Art in 1996 under the leadership of Bisi Fakeye, a renowned traditional sculptor. At the Universal Studios of Art (USA), Lagos, Nigeria students can learn from any section, such as pottery, sculpture, metal designing, graphics, textile, bead-making, print-making and many others. Art training has greatly increased the potential for empowerment of local youths and adults.

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## **Motivation for research**

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I am a graphic artists and an art historian working in the dept. of Fine/Applied Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. As an art historian, it was necessary to document the activities of art residencies in Nigeria. Though some traditional residencies have existed since the 17th century till date as guilds in Benin City kingdom under the Oba of Benin, I chose the Universal Studios of Arts (USA) because of its gradual growth from the National Gallery of Art to studios of art which became popular for recruiting youths and educating people through empowerment programs.

## **Contribution to the field**

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The research has helped to expose the techniques and potential of the artists' styles, forms and artistic productions to art scholars. Again, the research has compiled the history, artworks, techniques and stylistic tendencies of the participating artists with the goal to popularize artistic experimentations and creative genres by all resident artists who have been using the studios. Such documentation will reflect the value and positioning of the studios activities.

## **Key learnings**

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The Universal Studios of Art is a center for art dissemination at all levels. Its educational art programs allow the admission of both formal and non-formal participants. Participants are taught a basic foundation to art practicalities and other lessons to assisting freshers through the fundamentals of drawing.

**Dr Augustine Okolo Bardi** is Associate Professor at the Department of Fine/Applied Arts at the University of Benin in Benin City, Nigeria. For further information, please contact her at [bardi.austin@yahoo.com](mailto:bardi.austin@yahoo.com)