

# FUNCTIONAL AND AESTHETIC QUALITIES OF THE VISUAL ARTS IN PUBLIC SPACES

Josiah Okeke \*

Department of Fine and Applied Arts,  
Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe,  
No. 1 college road, Abata, Nsugbe 432108, Anambra, Nigeria  
\*Corresponding author, email: okekejosiah600@gmail.com

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## Abstract

One of the inherent attributes of the Visual Arts lies profoundly in the realm of aesthetics, which defines its uniqueness. Nevertheless, it is not devoid of functional qualities; rather, it combines both beauty and utility, making it a discipline with remarkable potential. The field of Visual Arts thus encompasses both functional and aesthetic characteristics, contributing significantly to the visual appeal of public spaces. However, despite these dual qualities, it is unfortunate that few scholars have thoroughly examined their core values in public spaces. This paper specifically aims to critically explore the functional and aesthetic dimensions of the Visual Arts within such spaces. To achieve this, it is first necessary to provide an overview of the role of Visual Arts in society, which serves as the foundation of this study. In conclusion, this research seeks to enhance the appreciation of art in public spaces. It is therefore recommended that governments and communities commission artists to create works that enrich public spaces while considering their emotional and therapeutic significance. Additionally, artists should be encouraged to produce more monumental works as commemorative structures and as a means of enhancing the aesthetic experience of public environments.

## 1. Introduction

The concept of Visual Arts, as articulated by Buraimoh (2018), encompasses the totality of human creativity, where creativity itself refers to the ability to generate imaginative ideas that materialize into tangible objects or transformative concepts capable of instigating positive change within an organization or society. This process involves conceptualizing ideas in the mind and translating them into visible representations, either on a two-dimensional plane—such as painting, graphic design, and textiles—or in three-dimensional forms like sculpture and ceramics.

For clarity, Visual Arts can be categorized into two broad divisions: *Fine Art* and *Applied Art*. Fine Art primarily focuses on aesthetic exploration, with disciplines such as painting and sculpture emphasizing artistic expression over functionality. Conversely, Applied Art integrates creativity with technical skills to produce works that serve both artistic and utilitarian purposes, including ceramics, textile design, and graphic arts.

Expanding on this definition, Iwasaki (2024) describes Visual Arts as creative expressions that convey meaning, emotions, and messages through visual elements. These artistic forms are broadly classified into decorative, commercial, and fine arts, encompassing a wide range of disciplines, including painting, photography, and sculpture. A defining characteristic of Visual Arts is their ability to communicate visually, often independent of other sensory modalities such

as hearing or touch. Each form of Visual Art employs distinct techniques and materials. Drawing, for instance, involves creating images through line work using pens, pencils, or other tools. Painting, typically executed on canvas, employs brushes and pigments to compose visual narratives. Photography captures artistic imagery through the lens of a camera, while sculpture constructs three-dimensional representations from materials like clay, wood, or metal. Fashion design merges aesthetics and functionality to create wearable art, whereas printmaking facilitates mass reproduction of artistic impressions. Additionally, filmmaking—closely linked to photography—synthesizes multiple artistic and technical elements to produce moving images, narrating stories through motion and composition.

Visual Arts have always been instrumental in shaping and reflecting societal values. According to Mittman (2024), art possesses the profound ability to transform lives and foster cross-cultural understanding. As a dynamic mirror of human civilization, it provides insights into the customs, beliefs, and historical evolution of societies. Reyner (2024) further asserts that art enhances the environment, rendering public spaces more vibrant and meaningful. Beyond its visual appeal, the creative process itself stimulates innovation and critical thinking—essential competencies in contemporary society. Without the evocative power of Visual Arts, the world would be devoid of the beauty that resonates with human emotions. Dowd (2024) reinforces this sentiment, emphasizing that the absence of artistic contributions would result in a far less engaging and expressive world.

Creative Auction (2024) underscores the multifaceted role of Visual Arts in documenting historical events, preserving cultural heritage, and serving as an educational tool. Through artistic representation, cultural identities are maintained and transmitted across generations. Furthermore, Visual Arts function as a powerful medium for education, particularly for young learners, who often grasp visual information more intuitively than textual content.

Another crucial aspect of Visual Arts is its therapeutic value. Art—particularly painting—serves as an emotional and psychological outlet, helping individuals process personal challenges and express their inner thoughts in a constructive manner. Studio Director (2023) highlights that Visual Arts provide a platform for self-reflection, emotional articulation, and meaningful discourse, ultimately fostering mental well-being.

Building upon these fundamental insights, this study seeks to examine the interplay between the aesthetic and functional dimensions of Visual Arts in contemporary society. By analyzing its roles, applications, and societal impact, the research aims to deepen appreciation for Visual Arts and advocate for broader integration of artistic initiatives in public spaces. This study also explores how governmental and community-led efforts can support artists in creating works that not only embellish the environment but also serve as tools for education, cultural preservation, and emotional healing.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Study Design**

This study adopts a scoping review methodology, which is particularly suitable for mapping key concepts, identifying research gaps, and synthesizing evidence across a broad range of literature (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Peters et al., 2020). A scoping review enables a comprehensive exploration of the functional and aesthetic roles of visual arts in public spaces, providing insights into their societal impact. Since the study relies exclusively on secondary sources and does not involve human or animal subjects, ethical approval was not required.

## 2.2. Eligibility Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure the relevance and quality of the selected literature.

**Table 1. Eligibility criteria for literature selection**

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Type of Study	Peer-reviewed journal articles, reports, government publications, grey literature	Opinion pieces, editorials, non-empirical studies
Language	English	Non-English publications
Publication Period	2018–2025	Studies published before 2018
Focus Area	Studies on the functional and aesthetic impact of visual arts in public spaces	Studies focusing solely on private or commercial art
Geographical Scope	No restriction	None

## 2.3. Data Sources and Search Strategy

A comprehensive electronic search was conducted using multiple academic databases to ensure a wide range of relevant literature. The following databases were utilized: Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Artstor, and Reports from cultural institutions and government agencies.

To refine the search, Boolean operators and targeted keywords were employed. The search strings included: "Public art" AND "urban aesthetics", "Visual arts" AND "community engagement", "Street art" AND "social impact", and "Aesthetic quality" AND "public space design."

The literature search followed the PRISMA-ScR (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews) framework (Tricco et al., 2018), ensuring a systematic and transparent approach in identifying and selecting relevant studies.

## 2.4. Study Selection Process

The study selection process was conducted in three phases: (1) Title and Abstract Screening: Two independent reviewers assessed the relevance of studies based on titles and abstracts; (2) Full-Text Review: Studies that met the initial criteria were retrieved for a full-text review; and (3) Resolution of Discrepancies: Any disagreements between reviewers were resolved through discussion and, if necessary, consultation with a third reviewer.

## 2.5. Data Extraction and Synthesis

A standardized data extraction template was used to collect key information systematically. The extracted data included: (1) Author(s); (2) Publication year; (3) Study location; (4) Research focus; (5) Methodological approach; and (6) Findings on functional and aesthetic impact.

The extracted data were then synthesized thematically, with findings categorized into four key themes: (1) Public Perception: How visual arts shape community attitudes and identity; (2) Cultural Significance: The role of public art in preserving and celebrating cultural heritage; (3) Spatial Integration: The relationship between public art and urban design; and (4) Social Engagement: The capacity of visual arts to foster social interaction and civic participation.

A narrative synthesis was employed to highlight emerging trends and insights into the ways visual arts contribute to public space development and community well-being (Gadsby, 2021).

By employing a rigorous scoping review methodology, this study ensures a systematic, comprehensive, and unbiased synthesis of literature on the functional and aesthetic contributions of visual arts in public spaces. The findings from this review will serve as a foundation for future research, policy recommendations, and practical applications in urban planning and cultural initiatives.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

#### 3.1. Different Forms of Visual Arts Found in Public Spaces

Various forms of visual arts contribute to public spaces, taking either two-dimensional or three-dimensional forms. These forms, as elucidated by Wyans (2024), include:

*Sculptures:* Sculptures are works of art created from a variety of materials such as stone, metal, and wood. They serve as focal points and can draw public attention. Most sculptures are three-dimensional, meaning they can also be classified as "art in the round." In addition to Wyans' perspective, Ford and Roberts (2023) define sculpture as an art form that involves creating three-dimensional works using diverse methods and materials. They further categorize sculpture into relief sculpture, additive sculpture, subtractive sculpture, and casting sculpture.

*Murals:* Murals are large-scale paintings created on walls or buildings, transforming spaces into visually engaging environments. The monumental design elements of murals make them striking, capturing the attention of both pedestrians and passing traffic. Eden Gallery (2021) describes murals as an ancient form of artwork that involves painting directly onto a wall or ceiling. Key techniques within mural painting include fresco, mosaic, graffiti, and marouflage.

*Installations:* According to Wyans (2024), installations are temporary or permanent works of art that range from interactive displays to multimedia presentations. DeGuzman (2023) defines installation art as a visual medium that utilizes various materials and locations. He explains that installation art aims to alter the viewer's perception of space and environment. Unlike other three-dimensional art forms, installation art engages the viewer's perspective dynamically, allowing movement to influence the experience. Additionally, DeGuzman highlights that installation art often invites viewer participation, distinguishing it from traditional sculptures, which are typically observed from an external standpoint.

*Performing Arts:* Performing arts involve live performances requiring physical engagement in the presence of an audience. Wyans (2024) emphasizes that this form of art creates a unique and immersive experience for spectators. APAC (2024) expands on this definition, describing performing arts as an umbrella term encompassing disciplines such as music, dance, and drama. Furthermore, performing arts incorporate four essential elements: time, space, the performer's physical presence in a medium, and the relationship between the performer and the audience.

*Land Art:* Land art involves creating artistic compositions using natural materials such as rocks, wood, and plants, transforming spaces into natural landscapes. Kench (2022) defines land art, also known as "earth art" or "earthworks," as an art form that integrates natural landscapes as part of its composition. He clarifies that while natural elements like rocks, logs, and foliage are commonly used, man-made materials may also be incorporated if they interact with the surrounding environment. According to Kench, most land art is sculptural, though some artists integrate elements of painting, carving, or performance. Battaglia (2020) further notes that land artists often forgo conventional materials such as epoxy and paint, instead utilizing elements like rocks and soil.

**Table 2. Different forms of visual arts found in public spaces**

No.	Forms of Visual Arts	Description	Key References
1.	Sculptures	Three-dimensional artworks made from materials such as stone, metal, or wood; serve as focal points in public spaces. Categories include relief sculpture, additive sculpture, subtractive sculpture, and casting sculpture.	Wyans (2024), Ford & Roberts (2023)
2.	Murals	Large-scale paintings on walls or buildings, enhancing public spaces visually; techniques include fresco, mosaic, graffiti, and marouflage.	Eden Gallery (2021)
3.	Installations	Temporary or permanent artworks that engage viewers dynamically through interactive and multimedia displays, altering spatial perception.	Wyans (2024), DeGuzman (2023)
4.	Performing Arts	Live artistic performances (music, dance, drama) requiring physical engagement, creating immersive experiences for spectators.	Wyans (2024), APAC (2024)
5.	Land Art	Artworks made using natural materials (rocks, wood, plants), transforming spaces into integrated natural landscapes.	Kench (2022), Battaglia (2020)

### 3.2. Visual Arts in Public Spaces

The functional qualities and aesthetics of visual arts in public spaces are multidimensional, affecting both the physical environment and human perception. Wyans (2024) asserts that public art plays a vital role in activating public spaces by creating engaging and inspiring environments, contributing to their overall vibrancy. As cities become increasingly urbanized, Freshmind (2023) highlights that one factor consistently adds color, life, and a touch of the unexpected to everyday landscapes: the visual arts. Below are the functional qualities and aesthetic contributions of visual arts in public spaces.

#### 3.2.1. Social Interaction

Visual arts in public spaces can stimulate social interaction. People naturally gather around public artworks, fostering a sense of community and encouraging conversations. The Studio Director team (2023) notes that art displayed in public spaces is often controversial and groundbreaking. When art provokes discussion, it has the potential to spark meaningful conversations that lead to societal improvements. This social interaction surrounding public art enhances its recognition as a distinguished and valuable profession. The engagement between the artist and the audience often blurs the boundaries between creator and observer, making the latter an integral part of the creative process. Pradilion (2024) further states that public art fosters social cohesion by transforming ordinary places into dynamic spaces for communal exchange and interaction.

#### 3.2.2. Preservation of Cultural Heritage

Visual arts serve as a medium for cultural preservation. Many sculptures in public spaces reflect the history, traditions, and occupations of a community. For instance, Awka, the capital of Anambra State, Nigeria, is renowned for blacksmithing, and several sculptures in the city depict this traditional craft. Similarly, at Zik's Roundabout in Onitsha, a statue of Nnamdi Azikiwe commemorates his leadership in Nigeria's first republic. The Sango statue atop the NEPA office in Marina, Lagos, represents Yoruba mythology and the god of thunder. These sculptural images not only showcase but also preserve cultural heritage. Freshmind (2023) argues that public art serves as a visual narrative, chronicling the history of a place and its people while stimulating discussions on community issues. As these artworks endure across generations, they become not just commemorative symbols but also vital records of cultural

identity. Pradilion (2024) highlights that public art, whether through monuments, sculptures, or architectural details, strengthens a place's identity and invites reflection. Gesare (2024) reinforces this by asserting that public art enhances community identity and urban development by reflecting historical narratives, fostering social cohesion, and promoting civic engagement.

### **3.2.3. Tourism and Economic Benefits**

Public spaces adorned with art often become tourist attractions, drawing visitors who appreciate and engage with the artworks. These sites serve as educational resources where students from various institutions gain visual insights into cultural, social, political, and religious themes. Pradilion (2024) notes that urban art, from monumental sculptures to subtle architectural details, has the power to transform ordinary locations into tourist destinations and social hubs. Such spaces encourage interactions that can lead to business networking and economic opportunities. Erdmann-Goldoni (2024) states that contemporary public art extends beyond exhibitions; it creates interactive and immersive experiences that foster engagement. Brodowics (2024) further emphasizes the economic impact, noting that traditional and contemporary art in major cities like New York and London attract millions of tourists annually, generating employment and boosting the economy.

### **3.2.4. Urban Beautification**

Visual arts in public spaces enhance the aesthetic appeal of urban environments. Before their inclusion, many areas remain unnoticed by pedestrians and commuters. Mundane surroundings tend to be uninviting, whereas artistic elements can captivate and elevate the ambiance of a space. Erdmann-Goldoni (2024) asserts that contemporary public art can transform underutilized sites into vibrant cultural hubs. The integration of artworks increases the perceived value of these spaces, making them more attractive and engaging. Pradilion (2024) supports this view, stating that public art enriches cities by making them more beautiful and inviting. Wyans (2024) adds that public art can revitalize abandoned areas, attracting interest and investment. Thus, art installations not only beautify cities but also contribute to their economic and social revitalization.

### **3.2.5. Encouraging Emerging Artists**

Public art serves as a source of inspiration for emerging artists. Seeing their work displayed in public spaces can be a motivating factor, as it attracts diverse audiences and fosters appreciation across different social groups. The visibility of public art reassures aspiring artists of the profession's relevance and potential impact. In Nigeria, where some university art departments struggle with low enrollment, public appreciation of art has boosted student interest in the field. Johnston (2019) emphasizes the need to maintain art within public discourse and integrate it into educational curricula, ensuring that it remains a fundamental aspect of learning, even in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

### **3.2.6. Therapeutic Benefits**

Visual arts in public spaces also provide psychological and emotional benefits. The colors, forms, and compositions of artworks can have a calming effect, reducing stress and enhancing emotional well-being. The visual engagement offered by paintings and sculptures can uplift moods and create a sense of joy. Kaimal et al. (2017) and Luzzatto (2021), as cited in Webb (2023), note that art therapy reduces anxiety, depression, and stress while improving overall well-being. They further emphasize that artistic expression facilitates emotional release, communication, and the exploration of complex emotions.

The visual arts in public spaces contribute significantly to urban aesthetics, social cohesion, cultural preservation, tourism, economic growth, and emotional well-being. By transforming urban landscapes and fostering interaction, public art plays a vital role in shaping the identity and vibrancy of communities. As cities continue to evolve, integrating visual arts into public spaces remains essential for cultural enrichment and sustainable development.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is evident that visual arts significantly contribute to the enhancement of public spaces by improving their aesthetic appeal and fostering social interaction. Furthermore, their presence in public areas not only serves as a means of beautification but also provides therapeutic benefits by positively impacting individuals' emotional well-being. The study has highlighted the functional and aesthetic significance of visual arts in public spaces, emphasizing their role in cultural preservation, tourism, and economic growth. Therefore, greater attention should be given to the integration of visual arts in urban planning and community development initiatives.

For future research, it would be beneficial to explore the long-term effects of public art installations on community engagement, mental health, and economic development. Additionally, investigating the public's perception of visual arts in different cultural contexts could provide valuable insights into how artistic expressions are received and interpreted across diverse societies. A comparative study on the impact of visual arts in rural and urban public spaces may also yield a deeper understanding of how art influences various socio-economic environments.

To maximize the potential of visual arts in public spaces, collaboration between governments, private institutions, and local artists should be strengthened. Policies that support public art projects through funding and incentives should be implemented to encourage more artists to contribute to the beautification and enrichment of urban spaces. Furthermore, awareness campaigns and educational programs should be introduced to help communities understand the value of visual arts, ensuring that public artworks are appreciated, maintained, and preserved for future generations.

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