



ARTWATCH Ghana

accelerating national development through the arts
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

International Artists' Day:

CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE TO ALL GHANAIAN ARTISTS

Artwatch Ghana congratulates all Ghanaian Visual and Performing Artists dead and alive who through their ingenious works have contributed to edutaining, inspiring, empowering and adding aesthetical value to the socio-cultural and economic lives of the people. With their creative works, they continue to preach against the social ills of the society, instill a sense of patriotism, provide therapeutic benefits and create jobs in the private sector. Artists are the movers and shakers of every nation. They include sculptors, ceramists, jewelers, painters, textile artists, furniture artists, graphic artists, leather artists, fashion designers, architects, photographers, musicians, dancers, writers and actors. As the world celebrates International Artists Day, Artwatch Ghana extends its gratitude to all Ghanaian artists both home and away for their contribution towards the development and sustenance of art and the economy. The contributions of these artists to the preservation, promotion and documentation of the history of the nation is enormous and really deserves massive celebration. However, celebrating the meritorious creative contributions of these artists to national development is incomplete when the numerous problems that hinder their creative endeavours such as prudent art policies, laws and its implementation, financial and logistical support and enabling art business environment for expansion are not tackled holistically. Even with their individualized meagre capital and obsolete equipment, they create jobs for themselves and many others. For instance considering the workforce in the music, film, and graphic design industry and the number of individuals who are employed in these fields by the private sector, it is evident that they contribute greatly to job creation.

Over the years, governments have not invested much in the creative arts industry to provide the numerous jobs the industry is noted for as in developed economies. The Creative Arts industry remains attached to other ministries which in effect have contributed to the stunted growth of the industry at large in Ghana. It receives the least budgetary allocation and attention. There are many instances where government's action and inaction has retarded the growth of the industry. Uniforms for security agencies in Ghana were imported under the rule of the two major political parties. The Ghana National Fire Service imported uniforms which turned to be inferior camouflage uniforms in 2013. The local fashion design firms were shunned and the contract awarded to a foreign firm. In November 2014, the majority leader of parliament claimed that they imported furniture from China to furnish the house due to time factor. It was presumed the quantity of furniture required at the time would take local furniture manufacturers about a year or two to produce. The Job 600 office complex was also furnished with imported furniture and interior decoration accessories. The majority leader, in an attempt to convince the nation over that move said, the import will curtail further depletion of the country's forest reserve, adding that the local furniture manufacturers lack the capacity. Ghanaian real estate developers and building contractors are refused government contract and given to foreign ones. STX Corp. of South Korea housing deal is a clear example. In that contract, the privileges meant to be enjoyed by the foreign firm were so huge though government later backed out from the deal. These are few of the numerous credible examples that indicate the silent killing of Ghana's Creative Arts Industry by successive governments. Governments patronage of products from the industry would encourage individuals to follow suit but the irony is that governments keep preaching to Ghanaians to patronize made in Ghana goods but do little to demonstrate that. As a matter of fact, the existing creative arts industry (Visual and Performing) in Ghana has been orphaned, and grew up by individuals with little government support.



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Even at the early stages of Ghana's independence, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah employed statutory and non-statutory Arts and culture policies to instill self-confidence to save the then new nation state from the colonial legacy of importing all our needs as a country. Through to his words, he commissioned the pioneer artists at the time to produce some of the nation's artistic needs. For instance Kofi Antubam was commissioned to produce the parliamentary mace, the Presidential seat, Adinkra motif design decorations inside parliament, sculptural mural at the Children's Library, Accra, and paintings at the then Ambassadors Hotel (now Movenpick Hotel); Amon Kotei designed the national Coat of Arms, Theodosia Oko designed the national flag, Fred Matey and others designed new currencies and postage stamps. These showed Nkrumah's committed effort in building a buoyant creative arts industry and creating jobs for the people. Why didn't Nkrumah's government import those artworks?

The best way to show appreciation by way of celebrating the contributions of artists in the Ghanaian creative industry is to provide them with the needed financial, infrastructural and other logistical support for the industry to expand and create more jobs. In this regard, prudent art policies that are efficient for artistic talent and promotion of skills are what is needed now rather than middle-of-road art policies that shows mere superficial relevance. Considering the huge number of people with gainful employment in the Visual and Performing arts industry, there is an urgent need to establish a Ministry for Creative Arts (MoCA), separating it from Tourism as it stands now. The attachment of the tourism industry to the creative arts is worsening the plight of the creative arts industry since the latter receives little attention for its progressive growth. Each vocation in the Visual art such sculpture, painting, furniture art, basketry, jewelry, graphic design, textile art, Fashion design, ceramics is a major industry on its own when giving the need attention and policy direction. The art and craft sector in the areas identified is equally lucrative for job creation. Music, Film and the like which constitutes the entertainment industry is more than our gold reserve when guided by comprehensive policy and financial support from government.

Various departments and units in the College of Art and Built Environment of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, the School of Creative Arts in University of Education, Winneba, School of Applied Arts of the Takoradi Technical University and many other technical and vocational-based training centres in the tertiary institutions are in dying need of state-of-the-art tools and equipment for teaching and learning. Even with the high deficit in acquisition of state-of-the-art tools and equipment for teaching and learning, they train graduates in various technical and vocational careers annually. These graduates add up to the existing pool of unemployed graduates every year despite their skills because they lack start-up capitals and simple equipment to establish their individual or joint businesses. Creating incubation centres in the vocational-based tertiary institutions where student-finalists in groups or individuals will premiere their newly developed products for approval by a jury, and onward introduction into the market is desirable. It is not enough to train students and leave them to develop or establish businesses on their own. They are amateur and need coaching at these proposed incubation centres that should be established and supervised by their respective tertiary training institutions.

Both the National Democratic Congress and New Patriotic Party have proposed in their manifestoes to establish creative arts council, and Creative Arts Fund. This a good proposal, however, if only the textiles and garment manufacturing companies contributed 15% to GDP in the 1970s, the entire creative industry when managed with efficient policies and leadership stands a chance of contributing more than 60% of GDP. Creating a separate ministry for the industry will help to give it much focused attention for job creation in its various sectors.