Adaptive Reuse of Buildings for Visual Arts Centres

Ndhuli Samuel Nguma
B02 0829 2011

Research Thesis
Bachelor of Architecture
simplicity is the ultimate sophistication
- Leonardo da Vinci
Declaration

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented, to the best of my knowledge, in any other university or institution for the purpose of awarding a degree.

AUTHOR: ............................................................................................................ DATE: .....................................................................................................................

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This thesis is submitted in part fulfilment of the examination requirements for the award of the Bachelor of Architecture (B.Arch), Department of Architecture and Building Science, University of Nairobi.

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Acknowledgements

It is Albert Schweitzer who once said: “At times, our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.” Writing this thesis has been a journey of a thousand and one miles; and I would to thank those who have been with me as I took slow steps to accomplish this goal.

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Abstract

Visual arts centres have developed worldwide to bridge the gap between the exhibition functions of a museum or art gallery and the research, education and collaboration that goes into the production of the various expressions of the visual arts. The visual arts scene within Kenya has seen unprecedented growth over the last decade or so, with Nairobi being the nexus of various interactions and exchanges in the art community. Unfortunately, most of the visual arts centres within the city are housed in spaces that weren’t initially designed to host exhibition and exhibition-related programs.

This study set out to investigate these adaptive reuse visual arts centres in a bid to explore the viability of re-purposed spaces for arts centre programs. The objectives were to establish what adaptive reuse is and to investigate the functions of visual arts centres; to examine the interior design and building technological strategies that have been applied to adaptive reuse visual arts centres in Kenya; and to suggest interventions that can be incorporated into local adaptive reuse visual arts centres to alleviate their current states.

The review of relevant literature on the adaptive reuse of buildings for visual arts centres brought to light three main aspects: building technology, interior design and various aspects on adaptive reuse. The parameters that were drawn from the summary of the literature review outlined the spatial requirements as well as building technological and interior design strategies for adaptive reuse visual arts centres.

During the field work of this study, primary data was collected from two renowned visual arts centres in Kenya: the GoDown Arts Centre and Kuona Trust Centre. This data was then analysed against the building technology and interior design research variables established in the literature review. And based on a comparative analysis of the selected case studies, this study concludes that a gap exists between the established standards for adaptive reuse of buildings for visual arts centres and what these two cases presented.

To bridge this gap, building technology and interior design strategies that could alleviate the current state of adaptive reuse visual arts centres were recommended.
Introduction

Art is a lie that makes us realize truth - Pablo Picasso
1.1 Introduction

The visual arts have manifested themselves in the artistic world in many expressions. These include: ceramics, drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, design, crafts, photography, film-making and architecture. Many artistic disciplines like performing arts, conceptual arts and even textile arts, involve various aspects of the visual arts. This is because we experience our world, in its various forms, through our senses - with sight being the most paramount.

Architecture, considered to be the patron of the arts, borrows heavily from the visual arts. Organising principles such as symmetry, balance, harmony, rhythm, datum were long being experimented on in the visual arts way before their application in architecture. And whilst museums and art galleries have for a long term served in the propagation of the visual arts, a new functional typology has arisen - the visual art centre.

A museum is an institution that cares for a collection of artefacts and other objects of artistic, cultural, historical or scientific importance. An art gallery on the other hand, is a building or a space that is utilised for exhibitions of a particular nature, typically temporary ones.

A visual art centre is distinct from the museum and art gallery. It is a functional community centre for artists and art enthusiasts with a focus on encouraging the practice and appreciation of art within a given locality. It does so by providing facilities such as gallery space and display areas, meeting spaces, studios for artists, educational facilities (like resource centres) and workshops with a range of technical equipment.

Visual art centres have developed worldwide to bridge the gap between the exhibition functions of a museum or art gallery and the research, education and collaboration that goes into the production of the various expressions of the visual arts. This study seeks to understand, from an architectural perspective, the various challenges faced by artists and art enthusiasts, by studying the adaptive re-use buildings that they use.
1.2 Background Information

In Kenya, every indigenous communities had their own unique traditions and ways of expression in the visual arts. However, the commercial value of the arts and crafts escalated when the white missionaries came to Kenya and developed an interest in what the various communities had to offer in terms of cultural expression (Miller, 1975). The Kamba for example, crafted various articles from wood and iron such as baskets and arrowheads; whereas the Kisii used soapstone to make sculptural figurines and kitchenware.

The ‘formalisation’ of the visual arts was started off by the European settlers in the early 1960s with the establishment of the Sorsbie Gallery and the New Stanley Gallery that exhibited contemporary art. Thereafter, Kenyan artists came together and founded institutions for the promotion of local art. Examples of such institutions include: Chemichemi Cultural Centre (1963 - 1965), Gallery Africa, Gallery Watatu and Paa ya Paa. However, it is not until the 90s that local visual art centres became well established across the country. At the forefront was the Kuona Trust Centre, that was founded by Robert Burnet (a former resident artist at Gallery Watatu). Later on the GoDown Arts Centre and RaMoMa (Rahimtulla Museum of Modern Art) were also founded.

Economically, the visual arts scene within Kenya has seen unprecedented growth over the last decade or so, with Nairobi being the nexus of various interactions and exchanges in the art community. November 2013 saw the first ever art auction in East Africa that was held at the Villa Rosa Kempinski Hotel that gathered over USD 200 000 (KES 17.5M at the time) in sales. As Kenya finds its own artistic voice amidst external western contemporary influences, there is a need for artists to be ‘incubated’ in local visual art centres. Since most of these centres are ‘start-ups’ in an entrepreneurial sense, they are usually located in buildings and spaces that were not initially intended for the purposes and functions of visual art centres. An in-depth understanding of refurbishing buildings would therefore help in alleviating the current situation.
1.3 Problem Statement

Ideally, a visual art centre should foster collaboration between visual artists and art enthusiasts by creating an environment that encourages exhibitions, artists residencies, learning, networking and exploration with a view of deepening the creative expression of a particular locality.

Most established visual art centres in the developed world are based in institutions of higher learning. The departments of visual arts in these colleges and universities usually have a centre within the campus precincts that brings together students, faculty, artists and art enthusiasts to share, debate, interrogate and collaborate on various artistic endeavours. This is achieved by holding exhibitions, workshops, events and having facilities that nurture learning and exploration.

Ever since the establishment of Kuona Trust in the 90s; there has been a rise of visual art centres in Nairobi and in the major cities across Kenya. The art scene has been fuelled mainly by the private sector with little incentive from the government. Upcoming visual artists either have to start on their own or partner with visual art centres to learn the ropes and rise in the art community. There seems to be a gap between the education of the visual arts in our institutions of higher learning and its actual practice in Kenya’s contemporary art scene.

An attempt to bridge this gap is what has necessitated the rise of visual art centres countrywide. Unfortunately, due to lack of funds, most of the visual art centres within the city are housed in spaces that weren’t initially designed to host exhibition and exhibition-related programs. And as a result there is an underlying inadequacy in how refurbished buildings perform for visual arts centres.

This study seeks to explore the viability of re-purposed spaces for visual arts centre programs. An understanding of local cases as regards to the fulfilment (or lack thereof) of spatial and building technological requirements will go a long way in charting a way forward in for how the refurbishing of buildings for the visual art centres is undertaken.
1.4 Research Objectives
To establish what adaptive reuse is and to investigate the functions of visual arts centres
To examine the interior design and building technological strategies that have been applied to adaptive reuse visual arts centres in Kenya
To suggest interventions that can be incorporated into local adaptive reuse visual arts centres to alleviate their current states

1.5 Research Questions
What is adaptive reuse and what are the functions of visual arts centres?
What interior design and building technological strategies have been applied to adaptive reuse visual arts centres in Kenya?
What are some of the interventions that can be incorporated in local adaptive reuse visual arts centres?

1.6 Justification of Study
The circulation, experience and lighting performance of art galleries has already been covered in the Department of Architecture and Building Science, University of Nairobi. The gap that this research seeks to fill is to look into the extent and adequacy of the various interior design and building technological strategies that have been implemented in the adaptive re-use of buildings and spaces for visual art centres.

An understanding of the challenges faced by the art, artist, staff and visitor in these upgraded buildings alongside comparative studies of successful cases is therefore key. A thorough investigation into the appropriateness and resilience of the various strategies will help to chart a way forward in the refurbishing of buildings and spaces for the visual arts.
Introduction

Adaptive Reuse of Buildings for Visual Arts Centres

1.7 Scope and Limitations

This study will focus on refurbished or adaptive re-use buildings and spaces that are currently being used to serve the functions of visual art centres. Whilst museums and art galleries fall under ‘exhibition architecture’; this research will solely focus on visual arts centres - that is, spaces or buildings that not only serve for the temporary display of visual arts pieces; but that also offer artist residency facilities for artists to work, showcase, research and collaborate.

This research will be geographically confined within Nairobi because of the wide variety of visual art centres and institutions that are available within the city and its environs. International desk case studies will be carried out to offer a comparative analysis of successful accommodation of visual art centres in an adaptive re-use buildings and spaces in order to draw important lessons. The findings that are of interest in this study will be confined to the various interior design and building technology manoeuvres implemented in the selected local and international cases. Technical and experiential aspects regarding to lighting and circulation shall be ignored.

1.8 Significance of Study

With rapid urbanisation worldwide, there is a dire need to offer viable solutions in the adaptive re-use of buildings in cities and urban centres. Visual arts centres are architecturally, at the confluence of museum and institutional architecture. An understanding of the challenges faced by the art, artists, staff and visitors in the local refurbished spaces and buildings can offer important cues in the creation of better and more functional environments. This study will benefit the various stakeholders, be it artists, patrons, interior designers or contractors, who seek to convert, upgrade, retrofit or refurbish spaces and buildings to alleviate costs while providing architecturally sound and functional spaces.
### 1.9 Terms & Definitions

**Adaptive Reuse:** Refers to the reinventing of existing buildings or sites for new uses; with a view of preserving their inherent character whilst transforming their purpose.

**Renovation:** This is the renewing of a building to make it suitable for contemporary life. When a building undergoes this kind of renewal, no major change is made to it function or form.

**Remodelling:** This another term for adaptive reuse. It refers to the locating of entirely new functions within an existing building. Sometimes, this may result in substantially modifying the building to accept the interjecting of the new functions being infused.

**Refurbishment:** The action of bringing buildings, structures and their technical installations up to modern requirements whilst restoring them to meet current functional standards.

**Preservation:** The fixing of a building in its found state whilst making no attempt to repair or improve it but ensuring that, so far as such a thing is possible, it is immune from further decay. This approach is suitable where it would be historically or culturally unacceptable to attempt to return the building to its original state but where further neglect would cause the effects of time and weather to bring about ultimate destruction.

**Restoration:** The returning of a building to its *as-built* state using materials and techniques to create the illusion that it has been untouched by the effects of time and weather.

**Visual Arts Centre:** A functional community centre for artists and art enthusiasts with a focus on encouraging the practice and appreciation of art within a given locality. It does so by providing facilities such as gallery space and display areas, meeting spaces, studios for artists, educational facilities (like resource centres) and workshops with a range of technical equipment.
Chapter I of this research document gives an introduction and background information on the topic of study. It outlines the state of visual arts centres in the ideal and defines the shortcomings that visual arts centres in Kenya have. The research objectives and questions are then discussed alongside the justifications of why a look into the adaptive re-use buildings for visual arts centres is timely. The extent and constraints of the research are then made and the stakeholders that are likely to benefit from the study are listed.

Chapter II of the study delves into the published and unpublished works that are relevant to the adaptive reuse of buildings for visual art centres. For coherence, the chapter is broken down into the following sub-headings: building and construction technology in the field of adaptive reuse; the spatial organisation and interior design of visual arts centres; and a look into some best practice international case studies. The literature review is set to create a knowledge base of the various requirements of the art and the users (visual artist, staff and visitor) and how refurbishing buildings can be undertaken to best serve their functions. Christopher Gorse and David Highfield, both experts in the field of refurbishing and upgrading buildings, offer the bulk of literature on adaptive reuse. On the other hand, Francis D.K. Ching and Clive Edwards have been relied on for the interior design approaches that are pertinent to this study.

Chapter III brings to light the various methods and techniques that will be used to conduct this research. The research purpose and research strategy are discussed together with the time horizon of the study. The chapter also highlights the sources of data alongside with the methods of data collection, analysis and presentation that will be used to create a necessary understanding of the study.
Chapter IV entails a critical study and analysis of relevant case studies. Kuona Trust, Dust Depot and GoDown Arts Centres, being local cases studies, are used to obtain primary data in order to understand the situation of visual arts centres locally. For the purpose of a comparative analysis, international desk case studies of successful visual arts centres are discussed in order to draw essential lessons on the various building technology and interior design strategies for adaptive reuse of buildings. It is important to note that both the international and local case studies in this chapter are not analysed to their entirety; but only within the limits of the aforementioned scope and limitations.

Chapter V gathers the pertinent lessons made from the Data Analysis and Presentation and draws conclusions that cut across the board for the accommodation of visual arts centres in buildings that were designed for other uses. Recommendations are then made to chart a way forward in how buildings in the Kenyan context can be successfully adapted to fit the functions of fully fledged visual arts centres.