Show me a political organisation and I will show you a related body of artworks that has been crafted to communicate group aspiration. Now, if you are thinking NDC-NPP (here we go again), let us help stretch your horizon a bit. The above assertion can be obtained the world over, and in Germany, art and politics actually fly. Indeed, to be politically correct in this country one needs more than a little dose of cultural savvy. ‘In our society one must be cultural to be relevant,’ said a senior government official.

For a nation that has positioned itself as the European Capital of Culture this is not asking too much. And if you ask me, they are trying. Take an individual like Dr. Klaus Schmidt, a German diplomat who told me over dinner at the Foreign Office in Berlin that he collects an exquisite piece of art in each country that he serves in. ‘Now, I am learning to paint,’ he adds rather apologetically whilst dipping dry bread in a bowl of olive oil.

In Germany the operational space for contemporary art is ever so expansive. More so because of the fall of the Berlin Wall twenty years ago. For inspiration alone, this geo-political shift offered much to be creative about. For the first time in 28 years, there was suddenly an increase in movement across East and West Germany. In terms of logistics, much space became available and at cheaper rate too.
In the words of the Federal Commissioner for Culture, Madam Rosa Schmitt, ‘No other capital has as many galleries as Berlin and no other metropolis has more exhibition halls.’

While private artistes, individual patrons and businessmen are out and about to make the art scene vibrant, the German government has not been lacking in the backing. To buttress this commitment the federal government herself is directly involved in the collection of art works for installation in official spaces.

According to Madam Rosa Schmitt, driving a cultural policy with a focus on contemporary art is a strategy that has served the nation well. Year in and year out several cities across Germany play host to a multitude of international galleries, museums, artistes, curators and collectors. Some of these exhibitions are the Art Forum Berlin, Art Berlin Contemporary, and the Düsseldorf Preview. Alongside the presentations, the exhibitions also invite visitors to take part in a series of discussions, at which guest speakers discuss current topics in contemporary art production and cultural policy.

One cannot recount the relation between art and politics in Germany without referencing the success story of an old steel manufacturing area which was voted in 2010 as European Cultural City. The Ruhr Region of Germany was industrially-fatigued and was the least likely to win. However, the area was dramatically transformed and the group of cities executed the role as European Cultural City in a way that has become a case study.

Professor Hans-Dietrich Schmidtt, Commissioner for International Relations for the Ruhr Project said that a critical success factor was that the various elements of Ruhr society identified with the campaign.
Professor Schmidtt was recently invited to Ghana by the Goethe Institute to share his experiences. Highlighting the role of politics in the bid, he explained that the 'Ruhr 2010' success story was nothing less than a political coup de grace.

'It took a long time to convince the politicians but as soon as they bought into the idea we could taste success.'

The lesson is that with political will art can transform society. But one may ask what really is the synergy between art and politics? On the surface, the two appear to be strange bedfellows. Politics is mainly concerned with representing social groups and constantly works to form the majority. Art on the other hand, remains committed to the cause of individuality, subjectivity and originality.

However, a close look would show that they have more in common than meets the eye. Both art and politics like to draw attention to themselves and their virtues. To survive, a political entity must consistently project itself as the best alternative. Art, similarly, is about self-expression. Indeed, it's very essence is to be displayed and appreciated. Interestingly, another platform of convergence for both art and politics is the media. Through information communication technology art could be made to become more beautiful, more adaptable and more accessible. Again, through multimedia, the politician has the chance to create a better image of himself and to make his message more accessible through a wide range of media.

Take a good look at today's politician in motion and you will see an individual who tries to master the art of dressing, speaking, and communicating his image and message. Consider the length they go to in their campaigns: the designs and symbols of identity, the graphic art, the billboards, etc, have all become part of the political turf. Today's politician draws a lot of sustenance from art.

Just for an example, at his encounter with journalists recently, President Mills courted some controversy concerning what he said or meant. But remember his appearance? Splendid. Ace arts critic Nanabanyin Dadson described the shirt as 'a beautiful fully Ghanaian-made shirt that is good enough for any occasion- formal or casual.'

This traditionally-motifed attire is the handiwork of a design artist. The net effect is that irrespective of one's point of view on the issues at the event, His Excellency scored full marks for being artistically, culturally and politically, correct on appearance.

Back to Germany. Without a doubt, no institution here promotes the dialogue between art and politics than the Deutche Bundestag (please don't get scared, this only means 'German Parliament'). During what was termed an 'art tour' of the German Parliament, I couldn't help but realise that the (Reichstag) building itself is an artistic monument which can be aesthetically judged by being compared with other installations.

Visitors to the Reichstag Building are not only able to admire its impressive architecture, but also view a range of artworks created by established German and foreign artists. The art installations include (as a gesture to Berlin's former four-power status), works by artists from the USA, France, Great Britain and Russia. The German legislative body's involvement in the art movement doesn't end with physical structures. There is an Art Council in Parliament. According to the Curator of the Art Collections, Andreas Kaernbach, this council, chaired by the President of the Deutche Bundestag himself, is about the most powerful in the House.

In his submission captured in a parliamentary publication, the President of the House, Wolfgang Thierse, noted that the German Parliament has opened its doors to the world of art; adding that never before have so many renowned artistes entered into such an intense dialogue with the world of politics.

The presence of these artworks reflect the way in which the German Bundestag, accepts cultural experience as an integral component of its own working environment. In other words, it sees the promotion of art as part of its mandate. Thierse puts it better: 'the supreme constitutional body of a nation that deems itself a cultural state has a particular duty to promote culture and the arts even in times of limited public funds.'

The relation between Art and politics in German society is deeply ingrained. It would be recalled that during the National Socialist Party (Nazi) era of the 1930's one of the symbols that drove the political agenda was the artistic, and very symmetric swastika sign. Quite frankly, it goes further than that.

Take the example of the eagle, on the German coat of arms. While this bird of strength must feature as a symbol of state, how it is presented is not standard. In other words the shape, size, outlook and posture of the eagle could vary depending on the convictions of the particular state institution using it.

An Imperial Government injunction of 1919 guarantees this: 'Minor artistic modifications shall be permissible for any particular purpose...'

For art's sake, this declaration is a bonanza for creativity. Thus there is a baby eagle, an aged eagle, slim eagle and a fat one (by the way how many countries don't have the eagle as their national symbol?).
The specimen adopted for the Bundestag depicts a stout, single-headed eagle (there has been double headed ones in the past) against a golden background. It has its head turned to the right with wings open and feathers spread.

Now trust calculated German humour. They call this eagle the 'fat chicken'. And for good reason too. This symbol reflects the new happy times and the nouveau riche coming into politics.

The politico-artistic metaphor doesn't quite end there. Not too far from the parliamentary grounds, one could see the rather rectangular but imposing, white mansion of the executive seat of power. Chancellor Angela Merkel rules the nation from there. Germans have nicknamed that house the 'washing machine'. If you believe politics must be laundered before delivery to the public.

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