Graphic Design: The History of Early Illustration Practice in Nigeria

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Abstract

Graphic design encompasses different aspects and elements. It can be challenging to explain as a fractured discipline because designers work in varied environments and may rarely or never engage in some aspects of the practice. However, as a creative pursuit, there will always be a reason to engage in other discipline areas. This paper is, therefore, a deliberate attempt to look into an ancient aspect of graphic design, which is an illustration and its antecedents in the early periods of the visual arts practice in Nigeria, and to provide a valuable resource for designers irrespective of the particular field in which they work. Ultimately, illustrations in graphic designs are used for jobs such as advertising, branding, packaging, editorials, storytelling and storyboarding, and infographics. The methodology employed in this essay is the literature review and art historical methods.

Keywords: Graphic design, Elements, Discipline, Practice, Illustrations

Introduction

Illustration is a visualisation or a representation of a subject matter made by the artist, such as painting, drawing, photograph sketch, or other kinds of image or objects seen, imagined or remembered using graphical depiction. The word is derived from the Latin word *illustra'tio* or *illu'stro* meaning enlighten. Smith (2009) sees illustration as the act of making lustrous or clear sketches, photographs and other pictorial elements elucidating and accompanying texts, while Dennis and Jenkins (2009) view illustration as artistic images, illustrating texts, poems, fashion, magazines, stamps or a book and very often made for children's books. Similarly, Kalilu and Woods (2014) see illustration as drawings mainly employed in books and magazines, specially introduced to buttress or highlight ideas visually. He emphasised that illustrations are also engaged as teaching aids.

Irivwieri (2007) stated that there are four factors which determine the suitability or otherwise of illustration, and these factors include:

    a. Illustration must be based on a refinable human appeal relevant to the target market.
    b. They must focus on some crucial aspect of the product, service or institution.
    c. They must be seen as being related to the copy theme.
    d. They must be seen as sensible and credible unless a special effect is aimed at them.

Generally, Irivwieri (2007) submits that illustrations are pictographic materials appearing with or without text amplifying or enhancing it. Although illustrations may be charts, maps, diagrams, or decorative elements, they are more usually representations of scenes, people, or objects related in some way, directly, indirectly, or symbolically, to the text they go with. When these pictorial materials are done in Pen and Ink, they are termed pen and ink illustrations. Consequently, illustration is a visual language of communication, supplementing information given in the text and reinforcing the written word.

Ultimately, illustration aims to explain or enhance an account, a poem, a story, or a piece of literal information by using a visual representation of something described in the text. Illustrations can also represent technical images of plants, medicine, or different processes, as well as biological or chemical processes or technical illustrations to give information on how certain things are used.

The historical origin of illustration is as old as that of writing. The pictographs of early humans and the hieroglyphics of ancient Egyptians contain the roots of illustration and text. Before

the printing press's discovery, books (manuscripts in codex form or scroll) were illustrated using hand drawing methods. According to Edward (1999), the earliest surviving sample of an illustrated book is an Egyptian papyrus scroll from about 2000 B.C. In ancient Egypt, the Book of the Dead, a text designed to be placed in tombs, was the most frequently illustrated work. In orthodox Europe, the earliest illustrations were made of technical texts. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322BC) used illustrations in most of his biological writings. After this period, the next developments were Illustrations in the form of authors' portraits, followed by the illustrations of literary texts such as the Iliad and the Odyssey by Homer (750BC). Well-known illustrations were also produced in China, effective from about the 5th century B.C. Edward (1999) stated further that medieval European artists illustrated texts with paintings in miniatures pictorially decorated initial letters or marginal decorations. In the Islamic world, Mughal (Indian) and Persian (Iranian) artists also illustrated works of history and poetry with intricate jewel-like paintings.

Lester (1995) posited that early manuscript illustrations were called illuminations due to the delicate nature of the designs. He stated further that Johannes Gutenberg (1398-1468) invented the printing machine in 1448, developed a movable type system in Europe, and improved casting based on hand mould and matrix. According to Lester (1995), most early 16th and 17th-century illustrations were done in woodcuts, engravings, and etchings. He further stated that lithography improved on illustration standards in the last part of the 18th century. Personalities like William Blake (1757-1827) rendered his illustrations in relief etching. During the mid-19th century, more illustrators sprang up, amongst whom was John Leech (1817-1864), the English caricaturist and George Cruikshank (1792-1878), also an English Illustrator and caricaturist. At this time, character drawings and caricatures were used to illustrate fiction magazines. (Edward, 1999)

Sezgin (2001) avers that in the year 1841, the British humorous magazine The Punch was established and high-quality illustrators like Sir John Tenniel (1820-1914), The Dalziel Brothers: George (1815-1902), Edward (1817-1905), John (1822-1860) and Thomas (1823-1906). The magazine employed all wood engravers and Georges du Maurier (1834-1896). He noted that this period witnessed a steady change from the famous illustrations of reliance on caricature to complicated topical interpretation. These early artists trained originally in various aspects of the arts but became reputed illustrators. Sezgin (2001) noted that "Punch and similar magazines such as *'Parisian Le Voleur'* realised that good illustrations sold as many copies as written content at the period.

There was also a period known as the American Golden Age of illustration. Atkinson (2009) wrote about this period, stating that the American "golden age of illustration" lasted from the 1880s until shortly after World War 1 (although the active vocation years of later golden age illustrators went on for an extra few decades. In Europe, a few years earlier, magazines, newspapers, and books had become the foremost media for public use. Advancements in printing technology allowed illustrators to experiment with colour and new representation techniques.
Today, there is an increasing eagerness to collect and appreciate unique artworks used as illustration materials in magazines, books, posters and newspapers. Many museums, galleries, exhibitions, magazines and art outlets have devoted a room to the illustrator. Creative draftsmanship from the best-known magazine illustrators is known to rake in much surplus at auctions. For instance, Norman Rockwell's (1894-1978) work, according to Hyatt-Mayor (2012), transcends even these high standards, with his painting "Breaking Home Ties" selling in a 2006 Sotheby's auction for 15.4million U.S. Dollars.

Maxfield (2014) stressed that Pen and Ink started as a medium for writing and simple diagrams. By the Middle Ages, Monks were already producing dazzling illuminated texts. A few years later, artists like Rembrandt Van Rijn and Leonardo Da Vinci started using reed and reddish brown ink pens to make expressive drawings and plans. In the last part of the 19th century, printing

became more sophisticated, with illustrators and caricaturists such as Thomas Nast (1840-1902), who developed pen and ink drawing to become an art form.

Fig. 1. Rembrandt, *Jesus and the Adulteress*, Pen and Ink (Wikipedia, 84x65cm, 1644)

From the above, it can be deduced that pen and ink practice as an art form started in the 19th century. However, the medium was developed to a high level in Chinese art during the Tang Dynasty (618-906) A.D. noted (Wilson, 2004). After that, in Japan during the Muromachi era (1338 – 1573), pen and ink have always been the primary medium of the art style of the Asians.

Presently, pen and ink practice is done by skilled craftsmen all over the world. Advertising agencies, freelance draftsmen and cartoonists have their works printed in dailies, and many other artists do pen and ink sketches as a prelude to the final execution of their works either in sculpture, paintings, graphics or other aspects of art like monograms.According to Knobler (1980), the practice of present-day graffiti started with pen and ink sketches that artists made on paper, but he further explained that not all graffiti artists were pen and ink experts. The assertion of Knobler was predicated on the pen and ink drawings of the German Expressionist Painter and Printmaker Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938), who, according to him, also practised some forms of graffiti during his time.

Fig. 2. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Frau Erna Kirchner,* Pen and Ink, (31x24cm) 1921(Wikipedia)

Graffiti as a term and art form was derived from the Latin word *"Graphire"*, meaning to write, but is directly related to the Italian graffito for inscription or design. The word precisely means "to scratch". Graffiti is truly the plural form of graffito. Etymologically, both "graffiti" and its singular form "graffito" are from the Italian word *graffi*to, meaning "scratched". "Graffiti" is applied in art to works of art by cutting a design into a surface. An interrelated term is "sgraffito". It entails scraping through one layer of colour to reveal another colour underneath it. According to Baldwin and Roberts (2006), this technique was primarily used by potters who glaze their wares and then scratch a design. In ancient times, graffiti was engraved on walls with a pointed object, although coal or chalk were often used. The word also originates from the Greek *graphein*, meaning "to write." In a nutshell, neither anthropologists nor art historians have identified where exactly graffiti originated from because Greek and Roman equivalents of the word came up almost in the same period.

During the Renaissance, stylus, metal points, and pen and ink were considered fine line media inconsistent with the broad line of charcoal and chalk. Illustrations can be artistic images, illustrating a text, magazines, or a book. Traditionally, Pen and Ink illustration is a minimal channel, allowing only individual monochromatic pen strokes. However, despite the shortcomings of this medium, beautiful pen and ink illustrations incorporating a wealth of textures, tones, and styles can be created. Certainly, partly because of their simplicity and economy, pen and ink illustrations are widely used in textbooks, company profiles, product manuals, advertising and many other forms of printed matter. Egonwa (2012) saw illustration as "visualisation such as drawing, painting or other works of art that stresses subject more than form". He stressed that an illustration aims to explain or beautify a story, poem or piece of written information, such as a newspaper article, by providing a visual image of something described in the text. On the other hand, an illustrator specialises in enriching written text by providing a pictorial illustration that flows with the content of the associated text.

Part of the appeal and beauty of pen and ink illustrations is that they can be easily printed with text, using the same ink on the same paper, without any dent. For the same reason, Pen and Ink

illustrations could also be useful in desktop publishing and laser printing, especially if the illustrations were generated and manipulated on a computer. Salisbury (2009) maintains that the requirements of interactive pen and ink illustrations have two significant properties that distinguish them from other art media. According to him, these are the distinguishing properties thus:

> Every stroke contributes both tone (darkness) and texture. Since tone and texture are not autonomous parameters, the pen artist should take care to deliver both of these qualities simultaneously. Strokes work collectively; in general, no single stroke is of profound importance; instead, strokes operate together to express tone and texture.

Despite the limitations inherent in working with just two essential elements, pen and ink renderings allow the artist to express himself in various styles. Pen and Ink renderings have a rich history, including simple outline sketches, cartoon caricatures, and detailed illustrations.

Early Illustration Practice in Nigeria

 In Nigeria, the twentieth century witnessed the rise of pen and ink illustration. Kalilu (2014) thinks that the twentieth century was an essential part of art history, not only because of the abundance of documentation but also because it brought African and Nigerian art to the global limelight. Among the forerunners who became famous in art and drawing between the beginning and the middle of the century in Nigeria were Aina Onabolu (1882-1963) and Akinola Lasekan (1916-1972). They were all celebrated first-generation artists with Western orientation. Oloidi (1998) submitted that Onabolu (1882-1963) made hundreds of pencil and charcoal studies of his models; he stressed that Onabolu was more proficient in portraiture than still-life drawing. Lasekan (1916-1972) was regarded as the first Nigerian cartoonist and the forerunner of modern Nigerian drawing with his satiric drawings in cartoons.

Fosu (1986) noted that among Lasekan's drawings are the provocative cartoons of poor Africans and the Blackman in the West African Pilot. Lasekan's proficiency was justified by the four books of animated cartoon drawings he published in the 1940s. Their works influenced Ben Enwonwu (1917-1994) in the 1940s and the array of students of the Zaria art school in the late 1950s (Fosu, 1986). There is no doubt that drawing was inherent in all of them, but only Uche Okeke (1933-2016) truly excelled in drawing, which was so pronounced in his Uli experiment, known as Ulism. Okeke's drawings are often rendered in pencils, pen and ink, charcoal or gouache with titles such as Ojadili, The Orphan and The Maiden's Cry. Okeke influenced Obiora Udechukwu (b. 1946), who later became an apostle of the Uli symbols in art. According to Fosu (1986), Udechukwu's works are marked by line drawings; "Wait or Drink from the Gutter" was a clear example.

The late 1970s and 1980s, according to Oyelola (1998), were invariably one of the most vibrant periods in the history of modern art in Nigeria, especially in draftsmanship. It ushered in and witnessed the emergence of more art training institutions in the country, which turned out more academically oriented artists than ever. It also saw the rebirth of drawings with astonishing exhibitions in the visual arts and its diversification into other media, such as newspapers and advertising agencies. Artists of significance and noticeable records in drawing during this era were Agbo Folarin (1936-2010), Tyrone Geter, Josy Ajiboye, Ebun Aleshinloye, Sola Ogunfuwa and Hilda Woods. Oyelola and Fosu were lecturers at Ahmadu Bello University and the University of Ibadan, respectively. Although Geter was not Nigerian, his drawing skills were said to have been reawakened during his residency at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, where he staged two outstanding exhibitions tagged footnotes: An exhibition of Paintings and Drawings and Vibrations: Harmonious Discords of Space Exhibitions of Paintings and Drawing in 1983 and 1986 respectively. Fosu (1986) maintains that his drawings, particularly that of Gani Odutokun's portrait in the 1983 exhibition, can be described as outstanding for their fluidity in his use of charcoal.

As for Folarin, Oyelola (1998) observed that he is remembered for the preliminary drawings of Ogun and Osun, the Yoruba god and goddess, used for his *Orisa* lithograph series in 1979 and 1980.
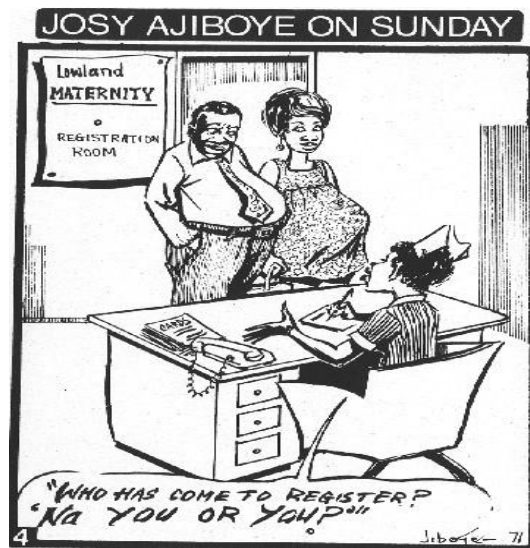

Fig 3. Josy Ajiboye, *Cartoon series* pen and ink, 8x15cm, 1971 source: Wikipedia

Josy Ajiboye's pedigree in cartoon illustrations in the newspaper industry is traceable to the pioneering role played by Akinola Lasekan. Although Ajiboye started drawing before the 1980s, his works became more pronounced in the 1980s, particularly for his ingenious depiction of the political and economic realities of the period in satirical cartooning on the Nigerian Daily Times, where he worked. He also had to his credit a book on cartoons titled Josy Ajiboye on Sunday, which was a totality of some of his contributions to drawing. However, Ogunfuwa belongs to the class of a younger group of artists. His illustrations on the pages of two Nigerian dailies, the Guardian and the National Concord, were still noticeable in the archives of these newspaper houses. An example of this is Figure 4 below.
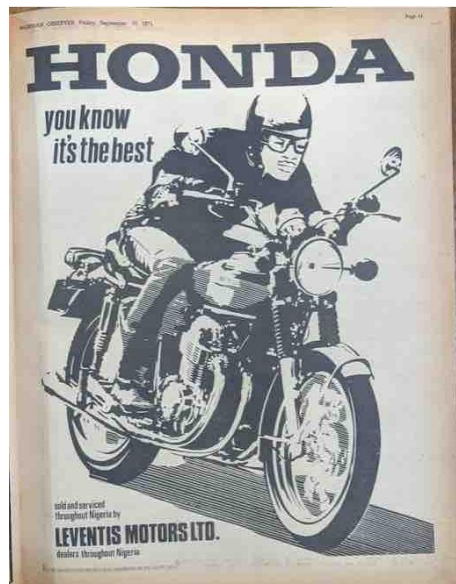

Fig 4. Concord Newspaper *advert of Honda Motorcycle* 1970 source: Wikipedia

There is no doubt that the 1980s witnessed several illustrations by other illustrators. The Advertising industry was also included in the drawing as it formed the basis for any meaningful

advertising design. Lintas Communications Limited is among the first-generation advertising agencies in Nigeria. By the 1980s, the numbers of these agencies had increased, with Rosabel and Insight communications coming formidably stronger. All these agencies have visual artists who do storyboard of any advertorial design in the form of illustrations; notable among such artists was Erhabor Emokpae (1934-1987), who rose to the post of the head of design section of Lintas, Lagos, in the 1980s. As Aaker et al. (1992) corroborate, the decision to invest resources in purchasing time or space in these agencies distinguishes advertisers from non-advertisers. The advertiser makes use of mass media, but non-advertisers do not.

Kalilu (2014) noted that there was no doubt that the conception of drawing in the 1980s gave birth to its diffusion into educational publications in the 1990s and the 2000s. These revelations informed the colourful illustrations on the pages of most kindergarten, primary and Junior Secondary School books. Macmillan and Oxford publications are some of such publishers. Most of these publishing houses now employ visual illustrators who draw for them. This submission of Kalilu shows that Nigeria has come a long way regarding the practice of pen and ink illustration and, by extension, general drawing.

The concept of Pen and Ink Illustration in Graphic and Advertising Design Communication
Graphic design is the process of visual interaction and problem-solving through image, space, typography and colour. Graphic and advertising design work is always done with communication to the public in mind, especially when fitting illustrations accompany it. 'Visual' is a term derived from the word 'vision', which relates to the concept of seeing. At the same time, communication is sharing messages, information, and ideas with others at a particular time and place. According to Microsoft Encarta 2009, communication involves talking and writing and non-verbal communication such as body language, facial expressions or gestures. Irivwieri (2013) defines communication as transferring information from creature to creature, person to person and point to point. Graphic design communication involves using printed images to convey messages through symbols and signs. This assertion of Irivwieri agrees with that of Ogilvy (1999), who opined that for an excellent advertisement to take place, it must be informative and capable of reaching everyone or reaching the target audience and market. Visual communication is thus the use of images or pictures, such as painting, photography, video, or film, and electronic communication, such as mail, cable television, or satellite broadcasts, to pass information from one point to another. According to Peter and Michael (2001), communication is essential to personal life. It is also essential in education, business, and other circumstances where people encounter each other.

Businesses are connected with communication in several ways. Some businesses build and mount communication gadgets, such as fax (facsimile) machines, video cameras, CD and DVD players, printing machines, personal computers, telephones and Closed-circuit televisions. Others create some of the messages or content these technologies carry, such as movies and software. These companies are part and parcel of the media or telecommunication organisations, as organisational communication is vital in every business concern. People in organisations need to be in contact to organise their work and to update others outside the business about their goods and services. These kinds of communication are called advertising and public relations.

Frascara (2004) thinks that writing is a way of recording language in visible form and giving it relative permanence and goes further to explain that until the invention of audio recording, speech was limited to those within earshot or on the other side of a telephone. It fades away immediately,

except in the memories of the speaker and hearer. Writing and drawing overcomes this limitation and allows the storage of immense amounts of information and its transmission to wherever a written message may be conveyed. Pen and Ink drawing as a tool for illustration in graphic and advertising design production further concretises the effect of communication by bringing the message to everyone's understanding via visual means.

Herbert (2000) noted that pen and ink illustration, as entrenched in graphic and advertising design, is a special blend of art used to deliver information to a particular group of people. If the information is presented in a way that attracts the intended audience and persuades them to take action (such as buying articles or informing people of the intended gathering or meeting), the designer has done his or her job well. One approach to state the purpose of the graphic artist is to construct visual formats for messages, considering the intended audience by using mutually understandable illustrations, alphabets, symbols, images, and colours and selecting suitable media. Hence, the messages are acceptable and elicit a positive response. Simmons (2012) observes that whether one drives down a well-travelled highway, stroll through a local shopping mall or surf the Internet, one sees and interprets many graphic design messages every day. These messages may be in logos, illustrations, graffiti, signs and posters, or television, computer and magazine graphics. One may need to plan some image messages of one's own; one may need a handbill or billboard to advertise an event, a newsletter or brochure for an organisation, or a logo for a business. Pen and Ink drawings as tools for illustration give more people access to understanding the message conveyed by the design.

However, using these tools to communicate a message efficiently requires comfortable knowledge of the skills involved in accomplishing such work. It also needs an understanding of how to organise visual information using the principles and elements of design. The area of design that deals with structuring visual information for communicating messages is called graphic design, as corroborated by Goldstein (1980). So, information is becoming more illustrative as we exchange information with people whose languages and cultures vary from ours. Pen and Ink drawings are tools for illustration in graphic and advertising design production, and well-designed symbols and images in the form of illustrations may help make our messages easier to understand. Harney (2012) noticed that today's young people will face many situations in the future, both on and off their jobs, in which they will need to understand and use good advertising design strategies to ensure that their messages are seen and understood.

Every piece of graphic design arises from the need to communicate a specific message and to obtain desired feedback; in other words, it comes to survive because someone wants to say something to somebody else so that this someone else does something. This is perhaps why one cannot pass judgments on the quality of a design only based on its visual manifestation.

Harrison (2003) felt that the aesthetic aspects that affect the selection of some designs in juried exhibitions and books should be distinct from the assessment of the main reason for advertising design, which centres on generating a specific response from the target audience.

This writer thinks, however, that some illustrators and designers conceive their pieces with design exhibitions in mind, to the detriment of the clarity, effectiveness, and appropriateness of the materials produced, although some designs can become junk, historical documents or aesthetic paradigms once they have accomplished their primary goal. Illustrations and advertising design are not just about looks but fundamentally about performance. Sometimes, the concern for originality and beauty has contributed to visual complexity and cultural value development. However, it has yet to promote the communication function of design and has often distracted illustrators and designers from the original purpose of their work.

Detecting social, cultural and historical meanings in designs often happens without our awareness of the process and is part of the pleasure of looking at these designs. Some of the information we bring to reading images concerns what we perceive their value to be in a culture at large. This raises the question: What gives an image that social value? Sturken and Cartwright (2001) think that images do not have value in and of themselves; they are given diverse kinds of value, be it monetary, social or political, in particular social contexts. They went further to state that the capacity of images (Designs) to affect their viewers and consumers is dependent on the more significant cultural meanings they invoke and the political, social and cultural contexts in which they are viewed and that their meanings lay not within their image elements alone but are acquired when they are consumed, viewed and interpreted.

To understand Pen and Ink illustration and advertising design properly, Jonathan (2001) believes we have to think more about actions rather than objects. The emphasis should be on something other than the product, given that this is only a means. Essentially, the designer generates the communication by designing an event, an act in which the public interacts with the design. Therefore, the designer's intention is the design of the communication situation. Furthermore, the significant issue is not the communication act itself but the impact that this has on people's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour. This makes clear the need to study the interaction between messages in illustrations, the general design and people, not only the interaction of visual elements with one another, which has absorbed the attention of designers so much in the past. Illustration composition is imperative, but it is only a tool to organise the communication event. This communication event takes place over time, not only in space. It is loaded with complex human elements relating to speech, understanding, age, information, instruction, memory, cognitive style, preferences, prospects, needs, and other perceptual, academic, social, cultural, and emotional dimensions.

Irivwieri (2011) noted that for a work of art to be successful, it requires skilled organisation or arrangement of its various segments to arrive at some order and unity. These various segments are known as principles and elements of art. He further elucidates that design principles are sometimes called principles of organisation. These principles include proportion, contrast, balance, eye movement and unity. Therefore, the principle of pen and ink illustration in advert promotion is to affect people's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour, which happens after communication occurs.

Graphic design is everywhere, from wrappers on biscuits to mugs and office supplies logos. One sees many graphic design examples daily, and most of the time, one needs to realise its impact. Graphic design can serve many functions, such as Signage, Corporate identity/ Branding, Packaging, Printed materials (books, flyers, magazines, newspapers), Online (banners, blogs, websites), Album sleeves, Film and television titles and graphics, T-shirt and clothing designs, Greeting cards, Holograms, Logograms and Monograms and Other more minor mementoes.

Summary

This account has espoused the character and modes of operation of graphic designers of old times. The practice of present-day graphic design has gone beyond the hand-drawn analogue illustrations and the use of papers and letrasets for page layout; the practice of modern-day Graphic design is in the domain of the use of the computer in everything ranging from typography, page layout, web design, animations, branding and packaging, cinematography and film production, non-linear editing techniques, game design and also the application of artificial intelligence packages to optimise designs, enhance the quality of photographs for adverts and indeed all aspect of graphics and very lately, artificial intelligence technology has been introduced by FIFA, EUFA, CAF and other continental football bodies to detect the veracity or otherwise of certain decisions taken by the centre referees which he or she might have inadvertently taken in the course of a game. Recently,

The Video Assistant Referees stationed in their cubicles radioed the centre referee to review such decisions via the screen stationed by the pitch. Artificial intelligence technology reveals the minutest details in real-time and, in most cases, converts the video clip into a vector image to reveal the actual situation.

Fig. 5. Felix Osaigbovo: Photoshop interface of photo transformation

This has shown the development of graphics from the time of the analogue to the present digital era. Figure 3 above shows the processes of photo transformation using Photoshop software with artificial intelligence filters using the same composite photograph to achieve different variants.

Conclusion

This is only a tiny fraction of the many areas of graphic design. Sometimes, such as signage design, it must provide straightforward ways to convey information. Pen and ink illustration simplifies something quite complex, making it easy to navigate and understand. Graphic design is a discipline that takes ideas, concepts, text, and images and presents them in a visually engaging form through print, electronic, or other media. It imposes an order and structure to the content to facilitate and ease the communication process while optimising the likelihood that the target audience will receive and understand the message. A designer achieves this goal by consciously manipulating elements; a design may be philosophical, aesthetic, sensory, emotional, or political.

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