

THE ETHNO-CULTURAL IMPORTANCE OF AFRICAN ART

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Abstract

There is an element of art in every culture. Even the primitive culture which lack mythology or religion still have some artistic expressions, as can be seen in dance, song, design etc. Art is in fact the epitome of human life and the trust record of insight and filling. In African, Art spearheads the social and individual African human development, as it is necessary to intellectual life and inseparable with religion, which it grows with, serves and to a large extent determines. Exposition is therefore made on what sort of thing is Art, that it plays such important ethical and cultural roles in African Human Development. A work of art is a form because of the sense an apparition it gives to our perception. Art can come in a permanent form like a building, a vase or a picture. It can also come in a transient, dynamic form like a melody or dance, or even imaginary apparent event that constituent a literary work. The underlying factor is that it is always a perceptible, self-identical whole, of which its goodness and badness defines on its appearance.

Introduction

In Africa, Art is not viewed from the angle of luxury product of civilization, a culture frill or a piece of social veneer. Rather it is seen as an integral part of culture which helps to develop its values. Any society that have achieved culture, has really begotten art from inception.

Art generally, spearheads the social and individual human developments. As it plays a leading role in human development. Art it is necessary to intellectual life and also inseparable from any religion. It grows with religion, serves it, and to a large extent determines it.

The Essence of Art

Before entering into the long discussion of what is the essence of African art, the true nature of it, or its defining function, as well as the cultural influence, the

work shall first of all look at what Art is on its own, considering works like painting, sculpture, architecture, music, dance, literature, drama, film and other. According to Susanne Langer, art may be defined as a practice of creating perceptible forms expressive of human feeling.

Langer used the word “perceptive” rather than “sensuous” forms because some works of art according to her are given to imagination rather than outward senses, she gave instance with a novel which is usually read silently with the eyes, but is not made for vision, as is the case of painting.

Sound and words may play vital roles in poetry, but they are not essentially sonorous structure like music. Dance requires to be seen, but it appeals more to deeper centers of sensation. The common thing about all works of art is that they are purely perceptible forms that seem to embody some sort, of feeling.

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African Arts as an Expression

There are two types of expressions to be discussed at this point. The first one is self-expression. This means giving vent to one’s feelings. This refers to a symptom of our feelings. Self-expression according to Susanne Langer, is a spontaneous reaction to an actual present situation, the company we are in, things we are in, things people say or what the weather does to us; it bespeaks the physical and mental states we are in and the emotions that stir us.

Secondly expression means the presentation of an idea, through a proper usage of words. This can be made symbolic by the meaningful combination of words. This can be made by the meaningful combination of words, to make a good expression. A sentence can be said to be a special combination of words which expresses the idea of some state of affairs, whether real or imaginary. This symbolic expression therefore helps our knowledge to go beyond the scope of our experience, by means of language which formulates new ideas, as well as commutate old ones. This helps people know a lot of things that they have merely heard or read about. A well expressed idea is that which is clearly

conveyed by means of symbols. Giving expression to an idea is quite a different thing from giving expression to feelings. To tell a story coherently involves a conceptual symbolic expression that is different from self-expression.

The African Art of Language

Language in Africa is an important instrument of conceptual expression. The things we think about are the things we say. We present our thoughts through our words. Though language communicates ideas, but this can work only when language on its own has given these ideas form, make them clear and apprehendable. Something becomes an object for thought only when it has a name. Words make our subjective feelings quite objective; otherwise our sense experience should have only ended up as a flow of expressions. But words carve them up into things and facts that are noteworthy, can be remembered and thinkable. Language by this gives outward experience its form, and makes it definite and quite clear.

The Art of Feeling and Emotion

Feeling and emotion in African culture is a vital aspect of reality, which remains a no-go area to the formative influence of language. It is in fact the realm of an "inner-experience" which starts and ends in one's self. This condition in most cases cannot be expressed by language because language can't make them conceivable. People cannot conceive issues except when there is a logical usage of word. The inability of language to convey subjective experience is to a great extent a technical subject, better handled by logicians than artists. To put it in a simple way, one can say that the form of language does not reflect the natural form of feeling. In line with the above condition, Susan Langer posited that "we cannot shape any existence concepts of feelings with the help of ordinary discursive language". What Langer teaches here is that the words with which we refer to feeling only name very general kinds of inner experiences like excitement, calm, joy, sorrow, love, hate. No language however is capable of describing just how a particular joy differs from another. The real nature of feeling is something that no language can really render.

The Primary Function of Art

The duty of art is to objectify thoughts and feelings to our contemplation and understanding. Art therefore objectifies the desire, self-consciousness, emotions and moods and so on, that are hitherto generally regarded as irrational because

of the inability of words to give us clear ideas of them. The life of feeling is therefore not irrational in the real sense of it. Rather its logical forms quite different from the structures of discourse.

Conclusion

The question of cultural importance of African Arts cannot be over emphasized when Art is considered to be the vanguard of cultural advancement, as it was in places like Greece, Christian Europe, and other places. Culture brings about economic increase, social organization, the gradual ascendancy of rational thinking and scientific control nature over superstitions, imagination and magical practices. The importance of Arts to culture is that it provides forms, which are sometimes intangible to imagination. These forms help reasoning and also improve one's enlightenment on cultural issues.

African Art brings to the point of symbolic presentation the natural form of subjective experience. These forms we can use to imagine feelings and understand its nature. Self- knowledge, insight into all phases of life and mind spring from artistic imagination, are some major ethno-cultural importance of African art. The influence of African Art on human life is beyond the intellectual level. take for instance, language which is a form of Art gives form to our sense experience, by way of grouping our impressions around those things which have names. that is why in Africa Art education is the education of feeling, and any society that neglects it gives itself up to a formless emotion.

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