

Comparing pre-colombian and african art

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The two art pieces I have chosen for the analysis are an Egungun Mask of African art and a Seated Figure of Pre-Columbian art. I picked these two particular items because they both picture a human face. So this common feature should help to understand the major differences and similarities in the way African and Pre-Columbian artists were creating their artwork.

According to the information given by the Denver Art Museum, the Egungun Mask of an unknown artist was created for ceremonial use in Abeokuta, Nigeria. Members of the Egungun Society used such masks at masquerades for honoring deceased ancestors. Such ceremonies were held annually or biannually.

It can be seen that the piece of Egungun art pictures two faces: of a human and of a rabbit on the other side. The mask itself is made of wood with black pigment. The art piece is decorated with a costume made of colorful clothes. Purple, brown, white, black, pink and red colors are present on the pieces of fabric that makes up the costume.

The human face of the mask has vertical cheeks, clearly outlined eyes and a straight nose. All the parts of the face are well shaped. Especially interesting effect have the eyes - they are made so well that might seem real. This may lead to an assumption that the Egunguns were not afraid to give their symbol of the dead some features of the live, so that the ancestors can live in and see through those eyes. This though is supported by the fact that the mask has one more face - that of the rabbit. A rabbit was considered by the Nigerians to be a nocturnal creature and, thus related to magic and the beyond (Blomberg, 1998).

The ceramic Seated Figure, created in America long before Christopher

Columbus arrived to its shores, was created by the Olmecs on the Gulf Coast of Mexico. The figure is hollow and solid, made of one material. The ceramic figure was created with the help of earthenware. It is a special techniques of the Olmecs that involves firing the material under 1000° Celsius. The surface of the figure is smooth and glossy due a layer of clay that covers it.

The face of the Seated Figure, just like the face of the Egungun Mask from Africa, is well-carved. The details of the face are well performed and, thus, accurate. At the same time, the eyes of the Figures are not as distinct as those of the African mask. The Seated Figure's eyes are narrow, as if they were half-closed. The mouth, unlike that of the Egungun Mask, is downturned.

At the same time, the two pieces of art have a significant thing in common: they both are sexless. Neither of the pieces can be said to have a clearly shown gender. They both seem to be just representations of the human race. Also, they have different purpose: while the Seated Figure seems to be just an art creation, the African Mask has ceremonial use.

Sources:

Blomberg, Nancy. 1998. New acquisitions at the Denver Art Museum.

Africanart. com.

“ Mask (Egungun).” Artist not known. African art. Denverartmuseum. org.

“ Seated figure.” Pre-columbian art. Denverartmuseum. org.