

Essay on african art

[Parts of the World, Africa](#)



Aesthetics is a section of philosophy that addresses issues related to: Art, which includes drawing, pottery, painting and sculpturing; scenery of beauty and generally the admiration and gratification of beauty and magnificence. Art as a phenomenon focuses on appreciation of culture and the environment (Damme, 1996). African art and culture has been a key subject of speculation and major interest by philosophers all over the world although African art is currently being eroded by the influence the western culture is impacting. To begin with, the argument on whether there exists a Pan-African aesthetics or not has been a major issue of contention among many African philosophers and also philosophers all over the world. The truth is that there actually exists a Pan-African aesthetic whose main aims are to foresee that common characteristics, attributes, qualities and traits that transpire in the African aesthetics are really individualized. One of the reasons I base my argument upon is the fact that there are several Afrocentric aesthetics that are actually in existence today in the world. For example, the African diaspora living in America have actually had to embrace the African aesthetics which has been actually their source of vigor, power, survival and also sense of identity in terms of culture. Additionally, the fact that one can actually speak in more than two African languages for example in Swahili, Yoruba, Shona, Zulu and other African languages actually demonstrates that there exists a Pan-African aesthetics or art.

In addition, the existence of Pan-African aesthetics is evidenced by the presence of various works of art in almost all the regions of the African continent; Southeast, Central and West Africa. The following are some examples of works of art that demonstrate the presence of Pan-African

aestheticism: First, in Southern Africa especially in Lesotho, women are involved in painting of frescos or murals on the walls of their houses. The patterns painted actually resemble or are similar to the furrows that they actually dig on the farms when they are preparing their farms for planting during the rain season. This fresco art is referred to as “ litema”, a word in Sesotho that means “ cultivate”. These paintings and decorations have several meanings a part form aestheticism and beauty; they signify a sign of respect and appreciation to the ancestors for actually providing adequate rainfall which consequently results to abundant and numerous harvests. These murals may be images of local plants consumed as food, for example millet, maize and sorghum. Sometimes red, white and black clay may be used to portray several meanings including unity, tranquility, harmony and protection (Murphy et al., 2010).

Secondly, in West Africa most specifically Burkina Faso, there are various works of art that also prove the existence of Pan-African aesthetics. The Nuna people of Burkina Faso are involved in making of masks and participation in dances during various occasions like harvesting, onset of rainfall or during social events. During cultivation time, a butterfly masquerade or mask is danced at. This symbolizes or acts like an indicator of rainfall which is very essential and significant in the growth of plants and crops like maize. Butterfly masks also characterize the progression and also onset of a new farming season. The masks are constructed from broad pieces of wood garnished, embellished and decorated with various shapes of various colors including black, red and white. This mask is usually marched

with a fibre gown or robe and it continuously plays a significant role of beauty in the Nuna community (Sasser, 1995).

In Mali, a central African nation, the “ Banama” people still hold and perform traditional dances and culture of “ Chi wara”. Chi wara is kind of attire comprising of: A headgear made up of curved wood and huge antelope horns; the body of a nocturnal animal referred to as aardvark and the fur of a pangolin. Dancers dance in the fields during planting and actually bump their heads like antelopes scraping the soil with sticks. In addition, the Chi wara acknowledges the roles played by both men and women in the society in terms of hard work and upholding of good morals in the society (Axel & Levent, 2003).

Rituals can be defined as series, sequences or chains of actions or deeds carried out, executed or performed to signify something in a specified group of people. This sequence of activities may be of religious value, traditional or communal whose main aim is to harmonize the groups and demonstrate a sign of solidarity and unity (Ottenberg, 1989). In addition, it can be contended that rituals of one community, religion or traditional group may be viewed as insignificant and meaningless to another group or community. Therefore, it is prudent to describe that the significance of certain rituals are actually subjected to only that group of people that acknowledge, value and perform it, be it religious, communal or traditional rituals. A ritual can be performed by one person, or by a collection of people or by a whole community whether in private and confidential places or in public or unrestricted places.

Rituals in Africa signify and mean a lot of things. Since time immemorial, they have been used to denote, imply and indicate several social purposes especially in Africa as a continent. Yoruba, arguably one of the dominant traditional communities in West Africa found mainly in Nigeria, Togo and Benin; is one of the richest African communities in terms of embracement of rituals as one of the necessities of culture. The following are some of the main reasons as to why rituals are practiced in Africa especially in the Yoruba community: First, rituals in Africa are performed when worshiping God or sometimes “ gods”. This is done in cases of calamities or natural disasters for example: During persistent famine; in cases of anonymous death rates in a family or community and during thanks giving after heavy harvests or in cases of success in a family or community. In Yoruba, “ Olorun”, the most adorable god and creator, is often offered with sacrifices in cases of natural calamities. The Yoruba people believe that these natural calamities like famine are mostly brought about by misconduct in the society therefore by offering rituals in terms of sacrifices, the gods may be soothed or appeased. Therefore, the Yoruba people always turn to “ Ifa”, the God of divination, in cases of problems, difficulties and crises. In addition, Yoruba people believe that when lightning or thunder hits, a deity referred to as “ Shango” must have casted the thunderstorm to the earth. Hence, after the thunderstorm the religious leaders always look for the thunderstorm, which is considered having special supremacy. In case it is traced, it is enclosed in shrines bestowed for Shango.

Secondly, rituals in Africa are performed to mark a passage of rite from one stage of life to another stage. These passages of rites may be during birth,

wedding or marriage ceremonies or during death ceremonies. For example, in Yoruba, a new born baby is usually sprayed with some water to make it weep, blubber or shed some tears. During this ceremony, no one is ever allowed to whisper or murmur and anyone younger than the newborn's mother is prohibited at the site of birth. The placenta is always covered underground at the back of the compound whereby at that point of burial of the placenta, the newborn is washed with a fibre dab or sponge then some little palm oil is applied on its skin. Afterwards, a naming ceremony is enacted followed by a circumcision ceremony. This birth ceremony as a ritual is meant to welcome the child to be part and parcel of the family and community as a whole. During marriage ceremonies, the groom is expected to provide dinner of arrowroots or yams to the guests and afterwards the bride is escorted to the groom's place of residence and her legs are cleaned with a herbal mixture which signifies bearing of many children. Finally, elderly Yoruba men are the ones that bury the dead but they should not be close family members. After the burial ceremony, feasting is done to ensure that the dead is reincarnated.

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