

Term paper on art and architecture

[Art & Culture](#), [Painting](#)



Aaron Douglas - Boy with Toy Plane

'A boy with toy Plane' is an artwork that was painted in 1938 by an African American artist and painter Aaron Douglas. Born in 1899 in Kansas, he proved and established himself as a leading artist of African style. In 1922, he received his graduate degree from the University of Nebraska. Then he shifted to the New York and settled in Harlem and it is where he adapted and realized the local culture. In a short time, he started creating illustrations for the two most prominent magazines at that time known as 'Opportunity' and 'The Crisis'. These magazines have close association with the Harlem Renaissance and Douglas was acknowledged as the active member within few years. Harlem Renaissance was a literary moment initiated by artists, writers and activists through their visual arts, writing and public performances (Gardullo 14).

Douglas was inspired by African culture and he reflected this influence in his paintings and illustrations. He continued his worked on magazines illustrations and also taught the art and graphical work in various capacities. He combined his interests in African art and modernism and incorporated this art work with those of Egyptian wall painting style. Consequently, he developed a unique style of his own, and by using the mixture of sharp and vague lines along with flat colors he gave a new meaning and significance to the magazines illustrations. He created illustrious and profound silhouetted forms in his illustrations. Moreover, by using the details and the colors he gave these illustrations an energetic form of art work.

He earned the reputation of producing compelling art and graphical work, and owing to this stature he found the opportunities to work with some of

the great writers of that time. Moreover, Douglas was keen to learn more and therefore, he went to study African and modern art from the Barnes Foundation in Pennsylvania. He created his first work of mural in 1930 for the Fisk University library. In the later years of his life, Douglas earned the opportunity to teach at Fish University as well. In 1933, he went to Paris to further study art teachings along with the likes of Othon Freiez and Charles Despiau (Earle 149).

Later on he started working on series of murals with the title of ‘ Aspects of Negro Life’ which represented different aspects of black American experience. He incorporated geometric art to his abstract work along with the mixture of jazz music in his mystical and captivating style. Like the fame he earned from his books and magazines illustrations, these murals provided him with new prospects to express his dreams and ideas of black American for a bigger audience. He dynamically integrated synthetic cubists along with African style and in doing so; he was able to produce legendary work of his whole artistic career. He received acclamation and commendation for this art work of murals throughout his life. It was attributed to his work that gave himself recognition of ‘ the father of African American Art’. He died of pulmonary heart disease in 1979 at the age of 79 (Gardullo 9).

Boy with a toy plane

The art work ‘ boy with a toy plane’ is an oil painting of an African American boy where the size of canvas is 22. 5” x17” inches. After having the first look at this art work, the viewer can easily observe that although the boy is carrying a toy plane in his hand but he has no feelings of happiness or joy on his face. Although, the boy is sitting in relax position but the features of his

face and the body language give the viewer a suggestion that the boy is sad about something. The solid grip on the toy determines the value of the toy for him that he is holding something special. As a result, immediately after the first glance at the painting, the viewer would develop feelings of pity and mercy for the boy in the painting (Earle 149).

Most of the painting is colored with different shades of tan and brown colors. Except from the floor patterns, chair legs and the airplane, most of the lines in the painting are unclear and asymmetrical. On the whole, the art work is the combination of organic, irregular and geometric shapes. Though Douglas used to paint in realistic and classical style but after his arrival in Harlem and the studies he pursued over the years he included the concepts of modernist in his painting. The painting can be regarded as a piece of representative art, i. e. an art work which represents the appearance of things and the objects we know from the everyday life (Frank 5).

Aaron Douglas was born at a time when black Americans were treated as servants and they are expected to work as labor class. His parents also worked as laborers, and this left an everlasting mark on his thinking as an individual and also as an artist. Due to this environment and upbringing, he joined the growing black American community of intellectuals and artists. As a result, Douglas became much more than an artist, a social leader and a reformist. Some of the most influential and captivating work made by Douglas are focused on the topics of a black American life, as servants and as labors. He expressed in his art work how black Americans, or Africans, were carried to America through slave trade in order to get labor work from them. He highlighted the cruelty and atrocity faced by black Americans and

through his art work like this one and others, he struggled for the freedom of black Americans (Miller 19).

Throughout his artistic career, Douglas pursued a path expressing his sharp racial and political awareness. His different educational experiences and expeditions helped him to develop understanding of diverse racial relations for black Americans. Douglas selected his aesthetic intelligence and illustrative methods on the basis of deeply recognized love and dedication to speak both to and for the black Americans, i. e. for his own people.

Consequently, he used the acquired knowledge of artistry and his own experiences and observations of ethnic irregularities in this art work and the other paintings.

Therefore, this painting is among one of those work in which Aaron Douglas has captured the usual moments of black American life. The fundamental idea expressed in this painting is the struggle of any black American, Douglas has himself went through, and the time period marked with the efforts and self realization of black Americans to reclaim their place and dignity in the American culture and history. His devotion for African American cultural beauty is reflected in this art work as well and the knowledge of his native culture is evident in this art master piece. He successfully achieved the purpose of creation of this painting as it enables its viewer to feel what the Douglas wanted from him. The sad feeling is evident and it really makes the viewer to think and reflect on what many black Americans have survived.

As a viewer, when someone reflects back on the years when this art work was created, he can obviously visualize that the artist is trying to express the

grieves and emotions of children who are having toys to play but, even then, they are feeling the pain in the everyday life. It has to do with the sense of being deprived and the emotions of sorrows for not being accepted. To the viewer, it has spoken so much about the struggle, fight and the triumph. Therefore, in his early days of artistic work, he expressed his love of drawing portraiture and one can witness how he has used this art work and several others of similar stature to highlight the individuality and complexity of African Americans, which he may not be able to express in the more abstract mural work he produced in the wake of Harlem Renaissance and later on. By working on the portraits, he found out another method of expression to exhibit the achievements and pride of African Americans and also the feelings of disapproval they are facing at that time. Thereby, Douglas used his early artistic training of making portraiture to capture and communicate the beauty of black inhabitants of America.

Conclusion

Aaron Douglas was remarkably talented and capable painter and graphical artist and in addition, he was a true leader and well educated teacher. He applied his capabilities to work on several dissimilar mediums of art. He worked on portraits, illustrations, murals and crayon drawings and his unique style made him an ideal for the forthcoming artists. It is attributed to his diverse nature of artistic work that Douglas has earned a place of one of the most prominent figure in the progress of art of twentieth-century. His teachings and artistic style has remained a source of inspiration for many others artists and he will continue to influence the artists of the future as well (Miller 3).

This art work conveys the depth of the artistic knowledge of Douglas whereby he used the portrait of a young boy to express the struggle of African Americans. It helps the viewer to recall the problems of African American. The painting portrays the agonies and sufferings of black American children who were deprived of dignity, equal opportunities and righteousness.

Works Cited

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