

Antique Trado-Magico-Arts of the Africans: Communicating and Connecting Ancestral History with Modernity

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Abstract

This article focused on the impact of African Traditional Religion's ancient artefacts, relics, symbols and masks in contemporary communities and implication for modern artisans. The world marked by cultural skirmish with Europeans, led to trans-border movement of sacred worship elements which represents African culture. Within historical and cultural contexts, some of these sacred elements passed through modification and distortions but still relatively survive the odds and continued to potently communicate values. Evidently, modern day artisans especially the sculptors, utilized African Traditional Religion's worship elements in their work to engage with empirical explanation, analyse contemporary issues and foster relativity across cultures thereby cumulating to a heritage referred to as traditional carrier of cultural memory, identity and social values which continued to affect individual and collective beliefs. The method implored qualitative analysis which consist interpretation of secondary data collated from books, journals, dictionaries, encyclopedia and internet sources. Nevertheless, primary data were also collated from series of interview carried out among various culture custodians. The discovery from this study proved that Africa's ancient artefacts, relics, symbols and masks - the subject matter, suggest that, African societies should take cognisance of the spiritual and historical values of these artefacts which induce modern artisan's work. Inferably, from these findings, African Traditional Religion's ancient artefacts, relics, symbols and masks presents inspiration and illumination to uphold, preserve and maintain cultural heritage via museums, heritage sites and digital platform-often reproduced in various forms such as crafts, textile, sculpture and unpixelated pictures.

Key words: *Artisans, Artefacts, Relics, Symbols, masks.*

Word Count: 243

Introduction: Impact of African ancient Artifacts, Relics, Symbols and masks on Religion, Contemporary Communities and Implications for Modern Artisans

Background to the study

Frank Willett (1971), gave description that, African art firmly in its social context entails cultural presentation in forms and ideas to bearing artefacts, relics, symbols and masks which could depict various ethnicity in given contemporary communities. Art in Africa has always been very much a part of the people's life, revealing every aspect of their working, playing and believing worlds; yet almost every general survey by art scholars or ethnologist has been primarily devoted to the aesthetic appeal of the work of art or the peculiarities of its style and form. Through the detailed material provided by anthropologists is good to explore; the socio-aesthetic connection as carefully as possible, presenting sculpture and other art forms in their political, economic, social and religious context. The approach is a practical one, involving no

great artistic insight or sensitivity on the part of the researcher. Writers about the arts of the West not only describe the formal qualities of a painting or a sculpture but pay heed to the date and place of composition, the patron, the purpose and meaning of the artist. More over, in Africa, much art represents symbols which are immediately meaningful to the ordinary educated individual, for instance, symbols of the Oduduwa life, the ancestors, historical episodes. Scholars of African art rarely take cognizance that knowledge of this kind-even if not formally expressed-plays a vital part in our appreciation of works of art.

It is therefore a strange fact that many writers and art historians, when they come to “primitive art” imagine that it is possible to appreciate it without any knowledge of the social background and the world of ideas which they reflect. The magic of African art disappears under analysis according to western historians. The sensitive and thoughtful alien can as readily as the maker observe the essential conditions of the work’s quality as an object of art. It may be true that great art has an immediate impact on the observer whatever its cultural background. This research however, is that no amount of sociological analysis can harm a “serious” work of art and the best kind of explanation can only extend our appreciation and understanding. Unless a mask or a statue is going to appeal to us for very basic reasons – because it is mysterious or sexually exciting – we must find out if it was made to entertain, to scare, to promote fertility, to destroy sorcery or merely to portray beauty. While researching, the researcher found some figures with swollen bellies, described as pregnant hermaphrodites when investigation shows that they are fetishes, depicting a victim of dropsy. Statues with their arms in the air have been said to be ancestors praying to the Sky God when the society has no ancestor cult and believes in an Earth Goddess, and the sky is the abode of metaphysical powers. While it is clearly possible to enjoy sightseeing of objects in a museum, it must increase our enjoyment to find out what the artist’s purpose was whether the piece is portraying a chief, a god, a slave, an animal. Art narrators gives explanation on many objects like how mask is to be worn or the statue be viewed. This is to show their various condition for interpretation, for instance, is a mask smiling or grimacing? Moreover, the stylization of African arts is often so extreme that without instruction it is difficult to understand the meaning unless we become intimate with the social and symbolic systems. At the same time, it must be admitted that a cultural explanation may not provide even half of the answers. There is rarely a near fit between social function and symbolism. Masks may perform multiple functions, changing their rank and meaning according to situation – one mask may entertain, scare or promote fertility according to the social context.

Statement of problem

Previous work on the impact of African Traditional Religion focused on archaeological proofs of worship elements, traditional communication and interpretation, integration of African traditional colours and symbols, sculptures as symbolic African communicative heritage. For instance, many scholars had previously written that, to recognize and understand African worship elements was to understand the root of African culture-the panacea to contextual cultural study, in that, African Traditional Religion was tied to the culture of “ancestry”- using the sacred physical worship elements to interface with the spiritual realms. As expository as the works of these scholars were, none had been able to properly discuss the impact of African Traditional Religion’s artefacts, relics, symbols, masks and colours in contemporary communities and implications for modern artisans and a vacuum this study seeks to fill.

Aims and objective

The above subject matter refers, the researcher aims and objective is to;

1. Substantiate some of the ATR’s ancient artefacts, relics, symbols and masks
2. Find out the aiding factors for ATR’s worship element’s trans-border movement

3. Reveal some culturally inclined artisans' work
- 4.

Research questions

The subject matter of the impact of African Traditional Religion's ancient artefacts, relics, symbols and colours in contemporary communities and implication for modern artisans is carelessly treated, common and yet controversial. The researcher therefore asks the following questions;

1. What features culturalized ATR's ancient artifacts, relics, symbols and masks
2. What aids transborder movement of ancient artifacts, relics, symbols and masks
3. What notable features are seen from modern artisans' work?

Explanation of research methodology

The method implored qualitative analysis which consist critical analysis of secondary data collated from books, journals, dictionaries, encyclopedia and internet sources. Nevertheless, primary data were also collected and collated from series of interview carried out among various artisans.

Theoretical framework

This research is grounded in "archaeological proof theory" and "religious empiricism" which help to explain how people uses worship elements blended with culture, ritual and rites within various communities. Archaeological proof theory explains how religious traditions extract artefacts through excavation to support myth in explaining structure of rituals, rites and practices or resilience to validate certain religion and how they survive despite labelling.

Meanwhile, religious empiricism theory is associated with indigenous ancient mythologies cum technology which uses the available digital platforms to broadcast and promote cultural values and tradition arising from trans-generational knowledge.

Literature review

The simple aim of this research is to put African art firmly in its social context. Art in Africa has always been very much a part of the people's life, manifest in every aspect of their working, playing and believing worlds; yet almost every general survey by art historian or ethnologist has been primarily devoted to the aesthetic appeal of the work of art or the peculiarities of its style and form. Through the detailed material provided by anthropologists, this research explored the socio-aesthetic connection as carefully as possible, presenting sculpture and other art forms in their political, economic, social and religious context. The approach is a practical one, involving great artistic insight or sensitivity on the part of the researcher. Certain words like; "mystery", "awe", "serenity", "vigour", "calm" "beseeching" find no place in African arts, although, this research does not deny what subjective and aesthetic explanations have in common. However, it peeped into the arts of the West and not only describe the formal qualities of painting or a sculpture. Moreover, in Europe much art represents symbols which are immediately meaningful to the ordinary educated person, for instance; symbols of deities, ancestors, historical episodes. The search for unity within historical periods or at least, for a coherent grouping of diversities, is crucial for both style definition and art criticism. Cultural expressions in the manner of the classical unities of Greek drama, usually occur within definite limits of time, place and action. The search for the underlying ideas that motivate human activities can often reduce to basic simplicity that appears on the surface as a confusing multiplicity of directions. And because the arts are usually experienced simultaneously not separately, it is often better to seek understanding from many directions rather than from one. If a common configuration of ideas can be found, then aspects that previously proved baffling may suddenly fall into place and become meaningful.

Such ideas may be initiated by artists themselves either individually or as a group or by single or collective patrons endowed with sufficient discernment, means, and energy to pursue projects to completion. Such a patron might be a ruler with the vision Pericles who presided over the cultural climax of ancient community; an enterprising medieval abbot or bishop who envisaged a great monastery or cathedral complex; a family of merchant princes, such as the Medici, who brought Renaissance Florence to its creative peak; or a religious order like the Jesuits, who spread the Counter Reformation baroque style in the wake of their missionary endeavours. The 20th century has witnessed the Commonwealth of India commissioning Le Corbusier to construct Chandigarh, an entirely new capital city of the East Punjab, complete with every public and private facility. In New York, the heirs of a modern industrialist have contributed an architectural complex in Rockefeller Centre that compares in grandeur with the imperial forums of ancient Rome. And many public agencies and private contributors have joined forces to erect in New York the Lincoln Centre “acropolis” that embraces a complex of opera houses, concert halls, theatres, libraries, museums and educational centres.

Whenever a centre has attained a degree of civilization, it has developed a prosperous economy, has given birth to a number of promising individuals, has fostered an adequate educational system, has in its midst groups of artists and master craftsmen, a significant cultural expression may occur. When this happens, it is usually as a result of participation some personality of powerful convictions who reacted so strongly to the challenge of his time that he/she is catapulted into a dominating position. Various explanations have advanced, such as the “great-man theory”, which holds that outstanding person stamp their image upon an age, and that genius is the primary causal influence on history. Social realists, however, contend that environmental forces shape the characters and actions of the individuals involved. The truth probably lies somewhere between these extremes of nature and nurture or the interplay between powerful personalities and the stimulus of their times which brings about the explosion commonly described as genius. Techniques of production are the private problems of particular craftsmen. Composition, however, is common to all of them. An architect put building materials together, a poet words, a musician tone. But contrary to the views of some purists, they do not do so in vacuum of self-expression but in order to communicate thoughts, fantasies, social comments, satirical observations, self-revelations, images of order and the like. Their works – temples, statues, murals, odes, sonatas, symphonies- are addressed not to themselves but to their fellowmen. The artist’s choice of medium, his way of handling materials, the language with which he expresses his thoughts, his personal idioms and idiosyncrasies, his mode of vision, his manner of representing his world, all add up to a vocabulary of symbols and images that define his individual style. In a broader sense, however, a style must include similar expressions in many media whether in visual, verbal, or tonal forms. Artists, working within a given time and place, share a sociocultural heritage; therefore, it means that each has a common point of departure. In the arts, as in politics, there are conservatives about who try to preserve traditional values and liberals, who are concerned with current trends and progressives who point to coming developments. The individual artist may accept or reject, endorse or protest, conform or reform, construct or destroy, dream of the past or prophesy the future but his taking-off point must be his own time. The accents with which he and his contemporaries speak, the vocabularies they use, the symbols they choose, the passion with which they champion ideas, all add up to the larger synthesis of a style.

A positive approach, then, can be established on the coincidence of time, place, and idea. Artists, while working in separate fields, are an integral part of a society, living within a certain geographical and temporary centre, collaborating to a greater or lesser extent. Warren, L. d’ Azevedo, et al. (1973) avers that, the closer the coincidence, the closer the relationship will be. Composite works of art-forum, monasteries cathedrals, operas and the likes are always collaborative in nature and must have considerable degree of mutual influences. Liturgical

needs, for instance, must be taken into account in the design of a cathedral meanwhile, the sculpture and pictorial embellishments must fit into the plan iconography of the structure. Hence, in one time and one place, the arts of architecture, sculpture, painting, music and liturgy share a common constellation of ideas in relation to the contemporary social order and its spiritual aspirations. True history, then, is no mere record of dates, treaties, battles, kinds and generals. Aristotle long ago recognized this fact when he placed poetic truth higher than historical truth. The political life of a nation is but one phase of its whole life. If one desires to understand the spirit and inner life of a people one must look at its art, literature, philosophy, dances, and music, where the spirit of the whole people is reflected. While kinds, dynasties, and dictators rise and fall with political revolutions and battles, history seem abruptly to settle the affairs of men, the arts, as the expression of the living unity since history is a footprint that can't be scuttled though, there are peculiar periods of rise and fall but historical art reveal the continuity of life. Ultimately what matters in art, as Mary, L.S., (1970), pointed out in the case of painting that, is not the canvas, the hue of oil or tempera, the anatomical structure, and all the other measurable items, but its contributions to our life, its suggestions to our sensations, feeling and imaginations." Romans Rolland has rightly observed: "Art, like life, is inexhaustible; and nothing makes us feel the truth of this better than music's ever-welling spring which is transgenerational through the centuries till it become an ocean".

Through the study of the arts in relation to the life and time, out of which they spring, a richer, broader, deeper humanistic understanding can be achieved. The past, as reflected in the arts, exists as a continuous process and any arbitrary separation from the present and future disappears in the presence of a living art work. Of a truth, critical appraisal of art or indeed of any other human activity can never be a catalogue of minutiae or a record of isolated moments. Understanding can come only when one event is related to another and when their sum total is absorbed into the growing stream of universal life from which each particular moment derives its significance. In their natural relationship, the arts become the study of people reflected in the ever-changing images of man as he journeys across historical time, his self-expressive attitudes towards people and the universe, his relentless quest for reality and personal ceaselessly pursuit to achieve the ideals that create meanings for life. Furthermore, Francesco, A. et al., (1972), explained that, objects placed in museums – statues of gods and goddesses formerly enshrined in temples, altarpieces that once graced Renaissance Churches – are now seen in impersonal circumstances and are classified coldly as "works of art". Originally, they were never conceived as art objects at all but as sacred images that inspired reactions of reverence and awe in the hearts of adherents. Until recently no artist ever consciously painted a picture with the idea that it would hang in museum. Therefore, it calls for imaginative powers to conjure all the possible meanings a work may have had and to define the vital forces inherent in a great work of art that make it significant to the contemporary observer. Only the educated eye and the disciplined imagination can overcome the deficiencies of reproductions to compensate for the dissociation and detachment of works of art from the life and times in which they were produced. Symbols, as opined by Dillistone, F.W., (1968), like other things and human are subject to change. Attempts served it from the "past or prevailing events" which may be affecting the foundations of human existence. But such attempts must inevitably fail. The more important task is to keep alive the very notion of the symbol in a time when powerful forces are seeking to embrace the whole of the world and social existence with the inflexible framework or quantitative forms and mechanical processes. The symbol, truly conceived, may be the most important of all human creation and fabrications. According to Bernard E.M., (1976), If symbol disappears, its acclaimed power and glory, will have departed from the human scene. Man will have become a creature ruled either by blind instinct or by in exorable machine.

The impact of art was first felt in the Western world towards the end of the fifteenth century. Richly carved ivory salt-cellars from the Benin and Sherbro tribes in the region of present-day Nigeria and Sierra Leone were brought to Europe as highly-prized items of trade by Portuguese travellers, until the latter years of the nineteenth century that artifacts from the African continent became readily available to the European collector and at this time they were considered as nothing more than the handiwork of almost sub-human savages.

European collectors amassed vast collections of tribal artifacts, giving little or no consideration to the aesthetic content of the material; the method of collecting was often thorough, almost to the point of obsession. Although the acceptance of the values of tribal art may appear to be a rapid embracing of a new form of expression, the way had in fact been paved over the preceding fifteen years. For some time, artists had been looking back to earlier civilizations and societies, such as those of Egypt, Japan, the Middle East and the early Renaissance, to what they saw as an honesty inherent in the artistic expression of these societies. An attempt was made to cut through the ephemeral extravagances of the late nineteenth century in favour of what was seen as the rejection of irrelevant sophistication by the societies which they flatteringly termed 'primitive'. This movement was however, in no way similar to the way in which painters for several decades had earlier looked back to, for instance, the Golden Ages of Ancient Greece and the Renaissance. From Jane, D. (1986), the mood was rather one of optimistic growth whereas that of the earlier artists was often nihilistic as they viewed all work subsequent to the Golden Ages as being indicative of a process of gradual decline.

African art was especially appealing to the Cubist/Expressionist school of artists, in that, it differed utterly from the imitation of nature prevalent in Western art since the Renaissance. The African artist created an object which rather than attempting to mirror nature, was an analogy of natural images. In his carvings, the African artist embodied the vital forces of nature integral to the mystery of the Universe as experienced by man within a tribal context. It is therefore a strange fact, according to, Edward, H. (1892), that many writers and art historians, when they come to "primitive art", imagine that, it is possible to appreciate it without any knowledge of the social background and the world of ideas which they reflect. The magic of African art 'disappears under analysis'. The sensitive and thoughtful alien can as readily as the maker observe the essential conditions of the work's quality as an object of art'. It may be true that great art has an immediate impact on the observer whatever its cultural background. My own view, however, is that no amount of sociological analysis can harm a 'serious' work of art and the best kind of explanation can only extend our appreciation and understanding.

Art in Africa, therefore, fulfills a multitude of functions. It may be a symbol of status and prestige, a means of acquiring and maintaining political power, a stimulus to farming or trading a piece of entertainment. African art has never been merely religious. Furthermore, nearly all traditional African statuary, no matter in what media, is magico-religious'. Art for art's sake implies that the artist produces an object which is valued for itself, which attempts neither to edify or to induce religious awe. Although, the final object will have a social function, many African works of art have no overtly social or magical purpose; as in Europe they may be made artist concerned with the solution of artistic problems alone. At this level a functional analysis such as this one, cannot explain works of art in presenting it as an integral element of economic, social or political institution

Findings

The subject matter of African ancient artifacts, relics, symbols, mask and colours provides information concerning art as human behaviour and the relationship of the behaviour to other behaviours in a given society. While the literature abounds with technical, as well as historical description of aspects of liturgy, oral art, literature, and even to some extent dance and drama, were found that, virtually nothing of the artist as a creative member of a society, of the ethno-

scientific views of the arts shared by coalition of cultures, of the cognitive process involved or even of the descriptive terminology employed in societies other than our own. Therefore, it is a phenomenon requiring identification with cultural relativity. They involve series of collection or collations, categorization or classification and community cultural support system.

Discussion of findings

This research indicates that, African Traditional Religion worship elements which are culturally inclined and spiritual active are potent sources of history, power and identity in Africa. Additionally, since Africans are connected to ancestral spirits hence, the sculpturing, imaging, patterning, decorating and exhibiting Africanism thereby integrating African Traditional Religion's mythologies on digital platform across the globe with cultural history and realities to demonstrates values and belief system of the Africans. A broad range of subjects has been included to illustrate useful techniques and the many different ways they have been used by contemporary artisans and earlier times. The finished works are remarkably varied and demonstrate the adaptability of found materials to the interests of decorators, teachers and amateurs, as well as professional artists.

Conclusion

Sequel to the above presentation, African Traditional Religion ancient's artefact, relics, symbols and masks offers valuable insights into identifying underlying educational, religious and economic impacts of African Traditional Religion's worship elements and its multi-facet history for identification devoid of bias or misplacement as well as providing a template for modern day artisans by understanding proper approaches to norms and value digitization to develop a more robust, culturally-sensitive, wholistic and ethno-religious models, particularly in diaspora context to disregard previous alien pervasion and beliefs which tampered larger with every bit of meaning than is implied in their assumption. Because, the way cultural anthropologists have been disclosing to us for some time now, every culture partakes of its religious legacy in ways that shape its ethos and sensibilities; and thus, gives rise to its cultural identity. Disregard to these basics, will have historic shaping of peoples undoubtedly, at the root of much of the confusion in relating one culture to another; or the impasse between them when rapport or negotiation fails.

Recommendations

1. **Cultural preservation:** ATR's artefacts, relics, symbols and masks are both culturally and religiously important therefore, more orientations should be given to our traditional religion institutions.
2. **Further field research:** future studies should incorporate more intent interviews on archaeological archives.
3. **Academic documentation:** scholars should undertake more detailed research on ATR's artefacts, relics, symbols and masks.
4. Identification and classification of ATR's artefacts, relics, symbols and masks: community support system should promote the potency in ATR's ancient worship elements.
5. **Research on ethno-deities:** different tribal groups in Africa should be able to identify the usefulness of historical deities, ancestral spirits through and by imaging.
6. **Integrative collaboration:** regional flags should bear or carry symbols of ethno-deities to form a formidable identity
7. **Protection of heritage sites:** museums and archives in Africa should be well fortified
8. **Developing ethnocultural bank and transfer:** concerned authorities should create a pool of artefacts, relics, symbols and masks which can be exported via cultural market.

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