

FROM PALEOLITHIC TO POSTMODERN: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ART IN THE STAGES OF SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Human beings from the very beginning of their existence on this planet earth have at one time or the other improved and developed their immediate environments. This developments hinge on art - a way of thinking and doing. And yet, art has not been given its front seat. The psychology of people towards creativity and development is worrisome. Bearing this in mind, this paper sets to give an historical overview of these contributions of art right from Paleolithic period to the present postmodern time. In doing this the writer relies on existing literature to buttress some points. In this paper therefore, it has been made clear that art is the back bone of all ages and civilization. An overview of the contributions of art in the various stages of the societal development will go a long way in bringing to the fore how from time immemorial to the present time; art has helped and is still helping man to develop his environment in particular, and the society at large. Art is life and life itself is art as God created the world, and human beings have continued to develop it through artistic innovations, explorations, and experimentation.

KEYWORDS: Paleolithic, Postmodern, Contributions, Art, Stages, Development

INTRODUCTION

The title of this paper sets the tone for its analysis and organization. God made or created man in his own image and likeness. So says the *Holy Bible* when it quoted God as saying in Genesis 1:26, 'let us make man in our own image.' We were told also in the same *Holy Book* that God molded man from the dust and breathe the breath of life in him and immediately, he became a living being.

For the simple reason that God had made man from the dust by way of modeling, it means that he is the first artist, and for the fact that he made man in his own image, man/artists is only but next to Him in creation. How? One may ask and also want to know. Man in his quest to live and conquer his environment started forging and fashioning out many tangible things. These tangible objects started from the cave man and passed through so many periods to this postmodern time. According to Oloidi (2011) "the artists in their God-given creativity have brought varieties to the physical or the material world" (p.74). Art has therefore contributed immensely towards the development in various parts of the world. Art is the societal instrument of development. And these are what this study seeks to bring to fore so that those who dismiss art as just a spectacle would begin to be fully aware of the impacts of art in human existence and the development of the material world.

Further analysis will reveal how art has helped transform the world and will also show that life in its entirety is art.

DEFINITIONS

It may, however, be helpful to give definitions of some of the keywords so as to be able to develop a meaningful baseline for our discussion, as well as guide the reader. One cannot be mistaken if one starts by saying that art is now proving very difficult to be defined, especially now that everything that involves process in terms of manipulations is being regarded as art. But for the purpose of this paper, however, some basic definitions from some art historians and critics would be provided so as to give the reader a sense of direction. Therefore, art is defined as a universal language that is aesthetical but also utilitarian, imaginative, and creative. It is the power of doing things, which includes skill, trade, craft or acquired expertise. It can also be taken to mean the technical study and creation of things in form, symbol, texture and color that is both utilitarian and aesthetic (Azeez 2001, p. 41). For Chike Aniakor (2002),

Art is any aesthetic object (which is man-made and exhibits good as opposed to bad skill) which stimulates and elicits emotional response from the beholder, and leave with him or her lasting emotional and perhaps intellectual experience. Good examples of a work of art include sculptural works, woven structures, wall and canvas paintings, installations, metal pendants, and horse leather trappings, among others (p.300).

Development has been said to concern and involve itself with the process, growth, and advancement of a person, people or the nation-state. In other words, anything that has to do with positive change in our lives and our environments is therefore development. It amounts to a life of both an individual and the entire nation-state, being of best quality, making life possible to be improved upon from that of past to the present. Anichebe (2012) quoted Walter Rodney as saying “at the national level, there is an improvement in the general well – being of the people while at the individual level, development implies activity, increased skill and capacity, self – discipline, greater freedom, responsibility and material well being” (110). For development to be meaningful, it has to be sustainable, comprehensive and composite, such that it encompasses the social, political, economic, and cultural aspects (Ikwuemesi 2012, p. 135). Again, Krydz Ikwuemesi (2013) quoted Yemisi Shyllon in his definition of development as “the movement of phenomena and idea from one level of existence to another” (p.3).

No doubt, art has come a long way, starting from the earliest times to the present, art and artists have moved from one level of experience to another.

Art does not exist in a vacuum, because insofar it is a product of people and society, it reflects the yearnings and aspirations of its age and clime. Such reflection can provide an index on which the development of the art tradition can be based. If by development we mean the progressive improvement of amelioration of a condition or situation, art development, then, would refer to the dynamics of the sociology of art and how it is evidenced positively or negatively on the art ecology (Yemisi 2013, p. 5).

ART IN THE PRAXIS OF DEVELOPMENT

It is important to note that art and technology are inseparable. Though, they have been separated in our modern times after all. To prove that both are tied to each other the word technology derives from two Greek words, techne and logos. The former means art or craft while the later is speech or word. Simply put, therefore, technology is a discourse upon the arts particularly fine and applied arts. So, on a normal circumstance, art and technology are one and should be regarded as such in this paper.

In the words of great Zik of Africa as quoted by Oloidi, 'no meaningful society can develop industrially or meaningfully without art.'¹ here, the interest is to show how art has developed our lives and environments. As we have noted earlier that art began with God and to man, it is pertinent to trace how man from inception used the tool - art to improve his environment. Through the ages, the role of art in the society and the world at large has been tremendous and fascinating indeed. Accordingly, "from the cave art to tomb art, shrine art to church; art has been the tool of hunters and Magi, musicians and politicians, priests and the affluent in the society serving their immediate needs and used to answer the peculiar questions of their time" (Nsofor 2012, p. 22).

The cave men used their creative senses to shape sticks into farm implements and hunting weapons. They also used sticks and grasses and as well as earth to build houses so as to protect them from the sun, rain and even wild animals. Art played a role in the fashioning of farm implement. Theories about the cave paintings have shown that during the prehistory time, humans had not learned how to write and because of that communicated through cave paintings. They used the paintings to document their hunting expeditions. So, art made possible shelter, protection, communication and documentation in the prehistory time. This statement is supported and well captured in these lines posited by Ola Oloidi (2011) as thus:

Man, like animals, was roaming the bush with his bare body and gathering food with his hands unaided, like an animal, during the prehistoric period. Thanks to the early craftsmen, the early creative artists-designer, who were able to eventually fashion protective coverings from vegetable materials and the early sculptors who, with chipped stones, were able to produce hunting clubs and protective as well as utilitarian instruments. Also man began to separate himself from the animal kingdom by developing his instinct for beautification through painting on his cave wall, or engraving on his rock shelter human and animal activities... this was how art marked the beginning of industrial revolution and modern technology (p. 62).

What about the Stone Age? During that time, stone was used to make implements. Stone Age artifacts included tools that were used by humans. Bone tools were also used during this period as well which served the same purpose. The Bronze Age is another period in human and society development. Worthy of mention is the Igboukwu Bronze that dated 9th BC. Since the excavation of the Igboukwu Bronze, it has in no small measures brought fame and development, and has put Nigeria and Africa at large on the world art map. The Iron Age is that period generally occurring after the Bronze Age, marked by the prevalent use of iron. It was characterized by the widespread use of iron or steel. The adoption of such materials coincided with other changes in society, including different agricultural practices, religious beliefs and artistic styles (For more on cave, stone bronze and iron ages, see <http://www.wikipedia> the free encyclopedia). It is very clear from the foregoing that in the above three - age system, art played a pivotal role and brought about development to those periods.

Hieroglyphics is an early form of writing with pictures which the Egyptians developed to make for easier communication and documentation. Calligraphy is a style in writing that Chinese developed to bring about so many styles of writing. These styles have been used extensively in the Arabic and other styles of writing around the world today. If you have taken a look at the pictures of or have seen the Egyptian pyramid, you will readily see how magnificence it is. It was built by the Egyptians not just for aesthetic purpose alone, but for providing a final resting place for pharaohs and his households, it is a center for worship, it helps in healing, and brings happiness too. The pyramid no doubt has brought about development in Egypt as it is said that civilization started from Egypt which the pyramid, among others had brought

about.

By the sixth century BC, the Greek had already consolidated in knowledge and improved in artistic standard that they developed monumental art and architecture, which today have not been surpassed by any other culture. They were also popular with coins which according to history were traceable to the Ironic period. Each state of the Greece developed and had its own coinage system which brought about development in the entire state. The Greek celebrated the close rational boundaries between man, society and the gods through an art steeped in classical idealism (Aniakor 1999, p. 18).

Having taken a cursory look at how art has aided development right from the prehistory period up to the civilized period, let us also quickly take a look into how art has also played an important role during the Renaissance period. The renaissance period was the period of rebirth in Europe. When suddenly darkness left human civilization in ruins under the dust and sweat of Teutonic heels (Aniakor 1999, p. 18) because everything was left to faith, man adopted art and used his creative talents to revive the nation state. Come to think of it, Leonardo Da Vinci is an artist who belonged to the renaissance period. He became famous for his inventions among which are his drawings for the Artillery Park, Stretching Device for a Barrel Spring, Design for a Boat, Ornithopter flying Machine, Armored Car, Design for a flying Machine, Giant Crossbow, Machine for Storming Walls, among many other drawings. These drawings and designs made it possible for these objects to come out in their tangible forms. He also painted 'The Last Supper' that Christians especially the Catholic Church all over the world makes reference to today.

Art has been an instrument for struggle and liberation. Here reference is being made of the Black Americans who suffered subjugations and racism in the hands of the Americans. Tired of their rejection by the American community in nearly all fields of political endeavor, a group of young artists in 1958 started rebelling against what they detested and what they saw as American system. They started producing artworks that chorused anti-American sentiments, subjugation and rejection. They formed an association known as Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) in Chicago. Titles like Wall of Respect, Wall of Confrontation among others accompanied their mural paintings. They painted with words and images that have feelings. Their compositions showed tribulations, suffering and victimizations. Words like "We shall overcome" were integrated into their paintings.

OBAC was later changed to COBRA - Coalition of Black Revolutionary Artists. They were revolutionary in their paintings and their focuses were on the Black American family. They launched direct attack with their artworks on the White people, and supported directly the Black people by focusing on things that will promote the Blacks and their survival. Their works had titles like I am better than those Mother Fuckers. COBRA was later changed to Afri-COBRA which means African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists. They became international in their ideological output, challenged Euro-America control of the economy that was totally to the disadvantage of Africans. They focused on the images of African peoples and their experiences, among others.

The above factor no doubt contributed in no small measures to the emancipation of the Blacks in America, hence the change in their name from Black Americans to African Americans. Today, Barrack Obama the president of America is an African. It took its root from those struggles. Similar to the above is Ghana's ugly experience between 1976 to 1983, when the country underwent the worst period of moral decay, economic distress and dehumanizing events, which according to Benjamin Menya (2001)

Was characterized by such a degree of mal-administration and bankruptcy, oppression and suppression, graft and

greed that Ghanaian professionals shifted to neighboring countries in an attempt to escape hardship. The artists used themes such as 'The Vicious Circle,' 'Pull Him Down,' 'Lead Kindly Light,' and lot more. The artists did not fail in proffering solutions that were based on ideas and these ideas hinged on the upliftments of the citizenry, and in turn inspired them towards the determinations to achieve the best for their dear country which was in total mess within those time frame. They were simply on a social mission (p.147).

During the colonial administration in Nigeria, Zik used the instrument of art to accompany his many notable speeches. The illustrations and cartoons of Akinola Lasekan in the West African Pilot covered all areas of colonial experiences. They focused on racial injustice, nationalism, economy, corruption, quality education, illiteracy, unity, discrimination and various social problems. In fact, the cartoons of Lasekan were very essentially a celebration of Zik's achievement, political ideals or ideology about man and Africa (Oloidi 2004, p. 22).The clamor on how to manage wastes in our immediate environments is on the increase. Facts about climate change as quoted by Ozioma Onuzulike and Eva Obodo (2012).

Raises core issues of how environment and climate change resolve around the destruction of man's natural habitat through his daily activities, especially land use, oil exploration, industrial manufacture and other developmental programmes and activities that result in deforestation, land and water pollution and emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. It is interesting to note that through the instrumentality of art, the awareness is being created concerning the problem of climate change. Government in some part of Europe has funded some artists to create public sculpture as well as installation to that effect. From exhibition catalogue one will see that artists on every side of the world have engaged themselves in the business of recycling waste products to create art, thereby have helped and are still helping to reduce wastes in our environment (p.105).

CONCLUSIONS

What necessitated this research is manner in which art has been taken by ninety percent of the people in my country Nigeria. Their ignorant believes that art is nothing and therefore incapable of contributing anything in nation building. In the course of this study, it has been found that since the creation of man by God, man has not relented in using his God given artistic talent to improve his environment through things he finds around his environment. These have in so many ways helped man to exist at one time or the other. The technological advancements in the world today took its root from art. *Ars*, a Latin word and refers to both art and technical skill and is used in one or the other meaning depending on the circumstances. The two were closely bound together (Ikwuemesi 2012, p.136). So, art has been the pendulum on which development in its entirety swings.

What has been done in this paper, therefore, is to show how art has right from creation played and is still playing obvious and important roles in developing a people and a nation, asseverating therefore, that "art actually is a visual document of history which also has the capacity to provide the praxis for symbolic communication and thus an ideal tool for nation building and reconstruction" (Aniakor 1999, p. 21), as have been evident in our discussions. Art has become implanted in the very process of nation building whether it refocuses on the cultural past or the exigencies of the present (Aniakor 1999, p. 29). Since art has left indelible marks on the sands of time bringing about developments in the world at large from the beginning to date, it is of essence to appreciate and applaud it. And so be it!

NOTE

- Nnamdi Azikiwe's goodwill message of November 4, 1961 to Akinola Lasekan after resuming at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka as reported by Ola Oloidi is cited in this paper because of its import.

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