

Environmental Sculptures An Artist's view

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Abstract

Art is for the ?artist? his speech, his way of communication and the image, the recognizable shape, the meaningful symbol? is the basic unit of his language. Line, shape and colours, though they may be beautiful and expensive are by no means images. For us the image is a figured shape or symbol fashioned by the artist for his perceptions and imaginative experience. It is born of past experience and it communicates. It communicates because it has the capacity to refer to experiences that artist shares with his audience. Art is willed, no matter how much the artist may draw upon the instructive and unconscious level of his experiences, a work of art remain a purposive act, a humanization of nature. The artists? purpose achieves vitality and power in his images. Take the great Blackbull of axcurx for example and old beast and a powerful one who has watched over the birth of many arts and many mythologies. He is endowed with vitality, which is an emblem of life itself. Destroy the living power of the image and you have humbled and humiliated the artist the artist have made him a blind and powerless Samson fit only to guide the town of Palestine. And of the various branches of arts and crafts perhaps by far the greatest and nearest to the African heart is sculpture. This is so because as Luise Jefferson puts it in his ?Decorative Arts of Africa?, ?African Sculptures saved deeply rooted needs for the African?. These deep-seated needs, we shall try to explore later in this paper.

Index terms— mythologies, Decorative, Sculptures, humanization

1 INTRODUCTION

rt is for the "artist" his speech, his way of communication and the image, the recognizable shape, the meaningful symbol? is the basic unit of his language. Line, shape and colours, though they may be beautiful and expensive are by no means images. For us the image is a figured shape or symbol fashioned by the artist for his perceptions and imaginative experience. It is born of past experience and it communicates. It communicates because it has the capacity to refer to experiences that artist shares with his audience.

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Besides this view aptly expressed by Jeffer son another buffer Petrie Marie (1979) offers another succinct reason why sculpture should be given a place of eminence amongst the creative arts. She opines, "In our technical age one of the most important things is the education of the tactile sense by which we enter into the three-dimensional

44 world of reality ". The sundress of this proposition becomes very obvious when we know all about sculpture, the
45 purpose or function of sculptures and ways to promote sculptures.

46 2 DEFINITION OF SCULPTURE

47 Sculpture can be defined as a three dimensional art that constitutes one of the first creative arts of man. In its
48 narrowest sense it deals with modelling and carving of forms, but in its broadest sense it deals with subtractive
49 and additive methods, which embody carving, modelling, construction, assemblage etching etc. Sculpture is an
50 artwork that is three dimensional in nature, which has length, breadth and height and as well occupies space.

51 Sculpture is reported to be one of the oldest form of art with its early monuments dating back to the Palaeolithic
52 age, its origin has been traced to Africa where In Ancient Egypt sculpture was deeply encouraged by a belief
53 that a man's soul remained alive as long as the person's Image was preserved. The Sculpture of Ancient Greece
54 reached a high point in representational art a seeking out of the inviolate harmony of the images. Today sculpture
55 is evolving, just like other art forms but not in the direction of the ancient Greeks.

56 Sculpture is aiming towards a naturalistic depiction of the human body. For example, the direction is that of
57 analysis of deep expressions of the spiritual life of man and his social, economic and political conditions. This
58 direction has African art as its beacon.

59 There are those steeped in Western Education and in imported religious who jeer at our traditional art a little,
60 realising that some of the foremost white artists like Pablo Picasso, Alexander Calder, Jean Dubuffet and Ben
61 Shann had the greatness of their panting and sculpture founded on their sensitivity in reflecting the attitudes
62 and motifs of the Africans and there are the others who are blind to the incalculable services of our artists and
63 artistes. In Nigeria the greatest custodian of African art, the subject, art epitomise the culture.

64 3 III.

65 4 TYPES, STYLES AND CLASSIFICATION OF SCULP- 66 TURE

67 There are two main categories of sculpture; The first being one of free standing pieces, not connected with any
68 structure excepts its pedestal. It can also be referred to as sculpture in the round, which are sculptures whose
69 beauty can be appreciated from all sides like any other landscape sculptures that were A found around the corner
70 within the different cities of the country. They are placed either inside or outside the buildings, town squares
71 we have a lot of examples of these kind of sculptures in our big cities. Like , the three Lagos chiefs welcoming
72 visitors to the Lagos city at the toll gate, the Eyo Masquerade at the former Idumota soldiers, Iba Oluyle in
73 Ibadan, Yeye Osun in Osogbo etc. The second category of sculpture consists of bas relief's on interior or exterior
74 walls of buildings, it is also referred to as two dimensional art which can be appreciated only from the perspective
75 or the side presented by the artist like the The classification of these sculptures that are already being discussed
76 really alludes to the type of execution, which is to say how one is likely to meet a sculpture.

77 Sculpture could either be realistic like the Obanta Statue at Ijebu-Ode, Baba Onisekere at Osogbo or abstract
78 like the one that can be seen at Sapon in Abeokuta. In other words themes for sculpture are either natural or
79 artificial.

80 IV.

81 5 STYLES

82 We must recognise that there are so many styles and ways of executing sculptures but what this speaker seeks
83 to emphasise here is that all the stylesgenre horror, Vacui, Rococo, Mannerism, impressionism, expressionism,
84 mechanomorphic, biomorphic etc boil down to naturalism/realism and abstraction/artificiality.

85 While discussing types of sculpture, it is pertinent to mention another classification, which is very important.
86 This classification denotes sculpture by location. This, all sculptures can be referred to as either stables or
87 mobiles.

88 The stables are the stable sculptures which are firmly fixed and do not move as mentioned earlier in this paper,
89 examples of this type of sculpture has been given initially in this write up. The mobiles are sculptures that move
90 freely in the air. Traditionally, they are hung and move by air currents but nowadays by electricity or by other
91 contrivances. In the hands of a master like Alexander Calder, mobiles are a beauty to watch.

92 Discussing types of sculptures would not be complete if we fail to highlight African sculpture and its unique
93 provincial themes with African proportions as against classical Grecean proportions with transcontinental theme,
94 which are universally employed in sculptures bearing in mind the natural proportions.

95 Finally on groupings, sculptures may be classified also by their sizes e.g. (a) Figurines, which are very small
96 statuettes (b) Life size -which is real life size proportion like the Baba Onisekere at Osogbo (giant size) colossal
97 very mighty like the African torch of liberty or the classical colossure of Rhodes. From the foregoing classes and
98 types of sculptures, it is obvious that sculptures must have a role in the society. According to Nwoko (1977)
99 "what the African artist has done it to extend the dimensions of natures creativity instead of presenting nature.
100 This unfettered approach to artistic creativity established the most favourable conditions for the unprecedented
101 prolific productions of the arts in this part of the world". He also asserted that this approach to art allowed for

102 the assurance of the Valid existence of nature "from which man was free at all times to derive maximum aesthetic
103 pleasure, such environmental/aesthetic pleasure is desirable for all humanity".

104 The delicate balance between portraiture and abstraction found in Africa art has kept alive the devils
105 encounters we have of sculptures which, though, they were not made with any particular person in mind always
106 tend to strongly look like someone we know. This is not to say that African art follows the same mould across
107 the breath of the continent. Not so even for Nigeria where the masks has been shown to be one of the most
108 public art forms. Different societies in Nigeria have shown a high degree of selectivity in their choice of shape
109 patterns of masks.

110 The distinguishing artistic patterns of a group of people can be said to be directly derived from its immediate
111 creative environment for according to Chike Aniakor (1977 " artistic resources expended as a mask reflects the
112 economic prosperity of the village group and so the masks is thus conceived also as a symbol of the artistic ideals
113 of the village/community".

114 V.

115 **6 INFLUENCE OF AFRICAN ART SCULPTURES ON EU-** 116 **ROPEAN ARTISTS**

117 African art has had a great influence on art in other parts of the world. When Western artist masters like Picasso
118 painted masks it was seen that "theirs were superficial copies of the shape of the Masks". Not being grounded in
119 the African Idiom, these arts could not carry the aesthetic expressions that inspired them. The works of Henry
120 Moore an English artist might be an exception. Whatever his source of inspiration his sculptures with holes will
121 fit quite well into our landscape in Africa.

122 **7 VI.**

123 **8 THE PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS OF ENVIRONMEN-** 124 **TAL SCULPTURES**

125 Sculptures are done for various reasons. Their functions in the case of Nigeria are in various ways, our synthesis
126 of the emergent roles of the two types of sculptures in the scene-viz the purely traditional sculpture and the
127 western sculpture as imbibed from the whites.

128 Traditionally, sculptures are the heart of the culture. This is so because as Thurstan ??haw (1977), observed
129 that the African culture is highly "symbolic and visualised" Majemite(2004), expressed the same thought when
130 he said that "most of the belief, and almost every aspect of the traditional lives of Nigerians are centred around
131 some deities either of the land, the sea, the air, the woods or a host unnamed supernatural forces. Invariably,
132 the worshipping of these myriad of goods and cosmic hosts is heavily embedded in concrete art symbols and
133 images-mostly sculptures".

134 Besides serving as spiritual bridge between the living and the ancestors, sculptures could be used to show
135 honour, love or respect to either the living or the dead. For example a gift of any of our masks to a visiting
136 dignitary will establish diplomatic and political good will. The statues are carved to immortalize great national
137 leaders who represent a landmark in the history of a nation or symbolize the culture of a society. A good statue
138 is neither a moral nor a social liability to a nation. It is an economic assets, the Colossus of Rhodes, a giant
139 hundred foot bronze statue of Apollo the deity of the ancient Greek, thought destroyed after fifty five years is still
140 recorded on the pages of world history as one of the worlds seven wonders. If it had survived, it would have been
141 worthy of trillions of dollars. The British Museum bags millions of pounds from tourist who visits the remains
142 of Mausolins, erected since 350 BC. By Queen Artemisia as the tombs of mausolins, King of Caria. The statue
143 of Liberty located in New York Liberty Island receives millions of tourists all over the world and contributes
144 millions of dollars to the economy of the U.S.A.

145 Sculptures too record and relate to our history, they are also very good social comments. Sculptures being
146 three-dimensional are more easily understood and appreciated than paintings when used for decorative purposes.
147 Sculpture have also enhanced the beauty of houses especially where they form part of the architectural design.
148 Sculptures are used for divination in African content. They are also used to promote morals or inculcate
149 specific social norms. Sculptures are used by many African Tribes to heal many ailments through magico-religion
150 practices. Sculptures too form the heart of Phallic and fertility cults of most African people.

151 In themselves sculptures are of high economic value. Besides, sculptures have immensely contributed to the
152 establishment of art shops, art centres, art galleries, art gardens, amusement parks, museums and the edification
153 of many places for tourist attraction withinin Nigeria , engaging in modelling as a hobby is Sculptures are very
154 eloquent in speaking about the beauty of a place. For example, the entrance to the Oshun shrine is or tourist
155 attraction on accounts of its arts especially the sculptures that were found around the entrance of the shrine.

156 There is a rich tradition of sculptures in the country from Igbo Ukwu, Benin and Ife in the South to Esie
157 and Nok in the North. Modern sculptures adorn many states. In some states like Edo, Delta, and Anambra
158 art galleries, art shops museums, art centres are well repleted with rich and varied sculpture, masks, plaques

8 THE PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCULPTURES

159 sculptures in the round. The Northern states too are not left out. States like Borno and Kaduna have enviable
160 environmental beautification through landscape sculptures.

161 Osun state like others is trying hard to break ground in environmental beautification. Plans are underway to
162 beautify the State Capital and the Local Government head quarters with Sculptures and other art works in well
163 built round about and amusement parks. For now, there are some efforts by individuals and corporate bodies to
164 use sculptures to decorate places. In due course, one hopes to see more buildings in the state Capital that will
165 be decorated with beautiful relief running round the facia.

166 The sculptures in our landscapes should be encouraged by the government of the day, the religious aspect of
167 our life as against the erection of free standing sculpture should be discouraged because of the beautification it
168 added to our squares and environment. In a paper of this kind it is not possible to make an extensive survey of
169 the art of the present generation, it may be noted however by way of concluding this paper, that many young
170 artist and others not so young are entirely at work today seeking to forge a personal style for themselves relevant
171 to line and place. Others keep abreast of fashion. But just who among the artist of the present generation will
172 produce work of enduring value is a question that only the future will decide, it may be noted nevertheless that
173 work of interest and promise is being produced at this moment in the continent.

174 Modern art has librated the artist from his bondage to the world of natural appearance, it has not imposed
175 upon him the need to withdraw from life, the widespread desire as it is claimed, to purify, painting has led many
176 artist to claim that they have invented a new language. We see no evidence at all of neither the emergence of
177 such a new language nor any likelihood of its appearance. rewarding and acts as a useful step into the technical
world. CONCLUSION ^{1 2}



Figure 1:

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