

Promotion of Cultural Values through Art: A Legacy for Posterity

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Abstract

Works of art are visual records embodying the culture, tradition and the obtainable happenings of a given geographical zone. They are efficacious in documenting the life history of a given generation and in transmitting those recorded values to the following generations that would make use of them as reference points. Unfortunately, the effect of colonialism was very drastic on traditional African art, which the colonialists treated contemptuously. Their inherent values were degraded, their presence was rejected and their continuity was jeopardized. The focus of this study is to expatiate on the imperative role of art in upholding the cultural values of a people and the importance of passing such legacies across to the future generations. Artistic visual documentation is an invaluable means of preserving the cultural essence of a race and a reliable source of cultural promotion, which this paper seeks to inculcate, for the benefit of both the present and future generations. To effectively carry out this research, published texts relevant to this study were consulted, which led to proper development of this paper. It is evident that works of art are culturally specific and serve as durable media of cultural heritage documentation, which are very pertinent to be passed across from one generation to the other, for cultural sustenance and promotion.

Keywords: Culture, Artistic Documentation, Legacy, Cultural Promotion and Posterity

Introduction

Humankind has an acceptable code of conduct and an organized system of living, which every member of the society is expected to adhere to. Every human society has a set of decorous attitudinal norms, which constitute their cultural values that direct human relationships. Culture is exclusive to humanity and an indispensable unique identity of every given race. Mazrui (1986, p. 239) avers that “culture is a system of inter-related values, active enough to influence and condition perception, judgment, communication and behaviour in a given society.”

These important values that condition a people’s behaviour, and manner of approach, including how to communicate and socialize with one another in a given society could be documented in form of writing, could be orally transmitted and/or visually preserved in form of works of art. Their transmission from one generation to the other is the best way of preserving them and works of art are one of the best ways of ensuring that. Ikwuemesi (2010, p. 17) while highlighting on the import of cultural transmission through art, as it influenced to a very great extent one of the greatest modern Nigerian artists, states that “the introductory lessons Uche Okeke received from his mother on the essence and significance of *Uli*, as well as his own inquiry into Igbo, Nigerian and African cultures have been the resource base to which he has had to return now and again for inspiration.” Uche Okeke not only imbibed the art of traditional *Uli* design, but also used his acquired knowledge about the art to significantly promote Igbo

culture by integrating *Uli* into the body of modern Nigerian art, which he advanced to international standard. Okeke successfully did that by synthesizing the art of *Uli* as a traditional art with the western art culture, culminating into creative modernism in Nigeria.

This idea of imbibing another cultural ideology in order to improve on the existing one is a welcome development, as culture needs not be static, but should constantly be subjected to positive changes that add to its values. But, Ikwuemesi (2010, p. 27) admonishes that as Nigerian artists strive to integrate themselves globally, they should embrace what is in consonance with their existing culture, in order to retain their African uniqueness. The legacy of the modernized art of *Uli* that was developed by Uche Okeke in the late 1950s through 1960s was handed over to the following generational set of artists, which Obiorah Udechukwu was part of them. Since then, the essence of *Uli* art as an integral part of Igbo people has been sustained academically, especially in Nsukka art school. Sequel to this, Knydz Ikwuemesi and some others, in this 21st century, are keenly keeping the art of *Uli* alive and one can undeniably prove that no student had ever graduated from Nsukka Art School without having the idea of *Uli* art.

In line with the essential nature of cultural preservation, the essence of African culture should not be jettisoned in an attempt to be part of the global train. Culture should be improved upon, made viably dynamic and constantly susceptible to positive changes. Any extraneous idea that is incongruous to African cultural values should be eschewed to ensure that the essence of African culture is maintained and subsequently passed across to the future generations. Artists should be conscious of this fact in their production for a better promotion of African art. Improving on what obtains in order to attain a higher creative standard through workable adoption is an acceptable method of advancing the culture of a people, because holding tenaciously onto “orthodoxy is the arch enemy of creativity,” (Ikwuemesi, 2010, p. 26).

Considering the impact of the aforementioned scenario, Okeke eschewed the idea of sticking to tradition and synthesized *Uli* art with Western art style, which gave birth to a truly unique modern Nigerian art. As at the era of tradition, *Uli* art had its supports as the walls and the skin of human bodies, mostly females. But, for easy promotion and effective dissemination of *Uli* art, Uche Okeke introduced it to easel painting with canvas as its support, which improved its worth without jettisoning its unique characteristics. The free flowing lines with varying thickness and their accompanying open spaces coupled with the meticulously placed dots that complement one another, which were the integral features of the traditional *Uli* art, were all manifest in modernized *uli* design. Significantly, Okeke’s improvement on *Uli* art widely commercialized it as a modern painting and at the same time greatly disseminated its values globally. The efforts of the members of Zaria Art Society, in searching for African unique artistic styles and their doggedness in modernizing and improving on the values of the existing traditional arts have been the bedrock on which the modern Nigerian art is thriving. Commending the ingenious move by the Zaria Art School, Ikwuemesi (2010, p. 18) highlights that the challenging of art curriculum by the Zararists and the mixture of European and African art styles, which gave birth to a truly modern Nigerian art made the society to successfully establish a modern Afrocentric ideology. Similarly, Nicodemus (2013, p. 20) corroborates the above fact by stating that, it is praiseworthy how Africans according to the changing era developed their unique modern art to suit the period, despite the challenges of colonialism and the dearth of art institutional bodies. These

efforts of the exponents of modern Nigerian art in maintaining the traditional ideology and improving upon them have been of tremendous benefit in this modern era, for art practitioners that are their successors.

The Need for Cultural Values Sustenance and the Efforts of the Proponents of Modern Nigerian Art towards its Realization

Africans had deep rooted traditional cultures that were the driving force propelling all their activities including all the then obtainable events in the different parts of the continent. The operation of the traditional African values, activities and events were drastically affected by the advent of colonialists. African art was among the worst affected having been misinterpreted as fetish, magical, demonic and an unimaginable display of abysmal creative incompetence, by the White. This misconstrued opinion of the worth of African traditional art, by the colonialists, shook the foundation of African traditional culture, which was undoubtedly anchored on visual artistic creativity. Art could be described as the soul of African traditional culture, because it greatly influenced and reflected in all the activities and events obtainable in the traditional era.

Having been grievously affected, African culture was at the verge of going into extinction, if nothing was done towards its revival, revitalization and promotion. It was then that one of the early expatriate teachers, Kenneth C. Murray admonished his students to seek for ways of integrating cultural art styles and forms in their creative modernism. Egonwa as cited by Ademuleya (2003, p. 147) states that “during Kenneth Murray’s classroom career, he was able to establish ‘preserve our culture philosophy’.” Because of the importance of retaining and promoting cultural values, which Murray was clearly aware of, he encouraged all his students, including Ben Enwonwu, to develop their artistic styles following the existing traditional art. Sequel to Murray’s professional advise towards cultural preservation and consequent promotion, Ben Enwonuw, who initially produced works in realism later deviated and stylized his works “reflecting what he termed ‘African style’,” (Ademuleya, 2003, p. 148). Another pioneer of modern Nigeria art whom Ademuleya commends his effort in defending African cultural values was Aina Onabolu, who through his realistic portrait paintings proved beyond all reasonable doubt that Africans were not creatively incompetent. In the words of Ademuleya (2003, pp. 146 – 147), “Onabolu’s effort had a political undertone. Through his painting and classroom efforts, he was able to make the colonial masters recognize Africa’s competence in an area arrogantly thought to be the preserve of the ‘White’.” He concludes by stressing that Onabolu’s dogged move was a revolutionary approach intended to revitalize, protect and promote the African’s lost cultural values, in order to safeguard the future.

Onabolu’s quest for the institutionalization of modern Nigerian art was in the early 1900s, while in the late 1950s a more irresistible effort towards restoring African culture and jettisoning the western imposed values and norms was made by the Zaria Art Society. The Zarianists strived to destroy all the legacies of colonialism in order to establish strong African cultural values that would reflect in the artistic modernism, being formed then, (Ademuleya, 2003, p. 152). That laudable dream of the Zaria Art Society, which was christened ‘Natural Synthesis’ targeting to establish a unique African cultural identity was realized according to Oloidi (1998, p. 37) when these members of the society; Uche Okeke, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Yusuf Grillo, Simon Okeke and Demas

Nwoko, fell back on their individual tribal traditional art and integrated their forms, motifs and styles into their modernized Nigerian art.

The trailblazers of modern Nigerian art saw the challenge of colonialism as an impetus to be resilient is rejuvenating the lost values of traditional art. It was that battle of artistic restoration, which took place in the early colonial days, as commenced by Aina Onabolu that formed the base on which today's modern Nigerian art is thriving. Ezenwa (2015, p. xi) points out that the colonial influence prompted Nigerian artists to struggle for unique artistic identity that would be peculiarly African. Although there were remarkable efforts towards rekindling the values of traditional art during the era of colonialism, Nicodemus (2013, p. 19) highlights that "not until independence could deeply rooted aspirations blossom out as the expression of the self-esteem of the Africa that had shaken off the colonial yoke." She further states that "the two things that all the countries and all the people in Africa with few exceptions have in common are the trauma of colonization and the relief of acquiring independence." The commendable efforts of the aforementioned forerunners, who saw to the successful establishment of a truly modern Nigeria art, should be sustained by not yielding to the influence of neocolonialism. The present day 21st Century modern Nigerian artists, who are enjoying the legacy of what was established as the foundation, should stand their ground in defending African cultural values, for the benefit of posterity. Ikwuemesi (2005, p. 15) opines that "for any culture to really achieve sustainable development and keep at bay the dangerous by-products of passivity, that culture has to be primarily its own judge and advocate." Artists should always work to protect the values of their culture and to promote it before the world by not succumbing to external influences, but reflecting the unique characteristics of their cultural creativity, always in their works. That is the only way the true worth of their established culture and its legacies would be passed across to the future generation.

The Place of Art in Culture Formation, Preservation, Development and Sustenance

Culture is a tool that guides human relationship and directs their conducts in a given society. Culture exists for the sake of humanity and without human existence; there would be no need for the formation of culture. A culture that has been formed to guarantee human safety, peaceful co-existence and socio-political stability has to be preserved, developed and sustained. These factors can effectively be carried out through works of art, which would serve as visual elements interpreting and documenting the essence of the created culture, for smooth transmission.

Whatever man does to make life better for him in any given society, which becomes generally acceptable in that place, becomes automatically, part of that people's culture. Ogumor (1993, p. 1) avers that "art is the ability and desire of man to improve upon the world, by modifying and adding to nature." This typifies what leads to formation of culture, which majorly is for the betterment of human existence. Creating whatever seems appropriate in filling perceived vacuum, which results in solving common societal problems. This is the ideology behind artistic creativity because undoubtedly, "the most important function of art is that it is the visual representation of human thoughts or feelings ..., which functions as a medium of communication," among the citizens of a given society (Ogumor, 2007, p.2). Works of art are mostly deducible and could be interpreted by both the literate and illiterate members of the

society, which makes its expressive visual language to be more generally understandable than graphic symbols. This quality makes a work of art to be a veritable means of documenting and preserving cultural values, for the benefit of future generations.

Besides, being a powerful educative medium, works of art help immeasurably in educating the members of the society about what obtains in all ramifications of the society. The duties of art are multifarious and its efficacy in elucidating issues inherent in all other disciplines of the socio-cultural lives of the people is unquantifiable. This makes works of art to be very effective in the developmental aspects of a people's culture, for a guaranteed progressive growth and possible sustenance. Talabi (1990) captures this exclusive quality of visual art in his statement postulating that "art provides the mirror through which all other disciplines of life are seen clearly." Talabi's proposition is corroborated by Aladenika (1999, p. 2) who describes art as "the life wire of other subjects taught in schools." This goes a long way to prove that art is an indispensable subject in the education of societal members and without sound education; there cannot be worthwhile development in the cultural norms and values of any given society.

The roles of art in ensuring a culturally stable society embrace also the inculcation of productive practical skills into the societal members, which guarantees a sustainable self-reliance. Uzoagba (2000, p. 48) asserts that art education helps to prepare students for a vocational career to enable them make money while serving the society. Citizens who imbibe artistic skills in service of the society do not lack patronage, even though the level of art appreciation by the today's Nigeria society is not quite encouraging. But this ugly scenario notwithstanding, products of art are needed and are constantly being utilized in different spheres of human lives. The society cannot do without, clothing, household utensils, graphic products, and a host of other utilitarian and aesthetic works of art. These essential services being rendered through art facilitates the patronage that artists enjoy from the members of the society. Amadi (2004, p. 283) highlights that "we live in the world that is full of art, and art touches our lives every moment. The houses we live in, our culture, clothes, environment, politics, all reflect art." So, the role of art in promoting the culture of a people cannot be overemphasized. In fact, Ikwuemesi (2005; p. 14) captures the importance of art in the society well while stating that "art is the soul of any society. Its socializing and spiritual essences are central to the pursuit of civilization and excellence by any people."

Art when it is valued by any society and is given the deserving attention in their educational system contributes significantly in forming, modifying, documenting and promoting their cultures. Ghariokwu (2015, p. 1) posits that "exploring art helps us to understand our cultural and historical background, as well as those of others ... Art offers us the opportunity to imagine, communicate and explore our own personalities and beliefs through our own creations." The art of a people should be guarded jealously, treasured and made very active in its practices, in order to facilitate its enhancement of cultural values and the protection of cultural essence. The artistic tradition of a people should for no reason be trivialized, jettisoned or neglected. Instead, it should be made the bedrock of their cultural development, since art has the ability to shape the future of a people's culture, for the advantage of their posterity.

Extraneous Influences that Degenerate Cultural Values

The world like a jungle is full of struggle for dominance. All around the globe, right from the prehistoric era, humanity had and has always exhibited the quest for

power and the desire to exact control over others. This scenario brought about slavery, colonialism, imperialism and neo colonialism, all showcasing economic and political supremacy. The continent of Africa has grievously suffered the impact of the aforementioned suppressive measures, largely from the western world, a situation that have glaringly affected African culture.

The Europeans instituted colonization in different places in Africa and forcibly entrenched their cultural norms and values, which in no small measure altered the obtainable African cultures and degraded their essence. As it concerned the influence of colonialism in Nigeria, Ademuleya (2003, p. 145) points out that “the beginning of the 20th century in Nigeria witnessed a gradual replacement of political, economic and religious institutions with the colonial ones.” That greatly affected the then existing traditional art, which was at the centre of every cultural event prior to the advent of the colonialists. Ikwuemesi (2005, p. 9) regrets that “it was from the period of colonialism that African art came under severe extraneous influence through Western-style of education.” The Western mode of educating the people under their colonies was a clever measure utilized in ensuring that their presence was firmly established and their rules unquestionable adopted by the colonized regions. It was the colonialists’ cunning attitude towards establishing their rule and devastating the values of other peoples’ culture that a Kenyan playwright and novelist Ngugi Wa Thiong’o as cited by Ikwuemesi (2010, p. 24) accused the West of “dropping a cultural bomb on the struggling people of the world, destroying indigenous languages ... making it much more difficult, if not impossible, for those people to fulfill what Franz Fanon called ‘their passionate search for a national culture.’” The coming of the white man to African land was not very favourable to the existing traditional culture, which the West out of ignorance, misinterpreted what they met on ground, especially the traditional art and fought for its total eradication. Rasheed Araeen as cited by Smalligan (2010, p. 263) laments that modern African artists found it difficult retaining the formalistic qualities of their traditional art and its functionalism owing to the overarching influence of colonization, which was utterly against its continued existence.

The appropriate development to be welcomed in a people’s culture is that of gradual and congruent evolution that culminates into a positive transformation from traditional era into a progressive modernism and not jettisoning the old in order to cling to an alien culture incongruous to the obtainable tradition. Smalligan (2010, p. 268) quoted Olu Oguibe, who points out the fact that the colonialists denied Africans the opportunity of successful transition from the obtainable traditional culture into an enhanced and harmonious modernism just in an attempt to disdainfully trivialize African tradition and enforce their own cultural belief on us and maintain their supremacy over the Black. The disregard of the worth of African tradition, in the Western perspective, goes a long way to prove and substantiate the fact that Africa is a dark continent, a people with neither a worthwhile culture nor with a praiseworthy tradition. Araeen (2010, p. 284) laments that “for Europe, Africa has always been, and still is its other, its suppressed unconscious, the land of savages and primitives.”

There is no gainsaying that the Western approach to African tradition really dealt a deadly blow to the values and regard vested on African culture in the pre-colonial era. The African traditional culture lost its values and what first emerged as modernism had little or no link with what existed before as it concerned artistic creativity. The alienation of modern African art, from the socio-cultural environment, depreciated the initial keen

appreciation of products of art and made patronage almost non-existent. Kennedy (1992, p. 22) highlights that African artists, at the inception of modern era, “were confronted with the pre-conceptions of their audience ... and were faced with the problems of continuing to work and survive economically in an atmosphere not particularly conducive to, or sympathetic toward modern artistic expression ... Often, the dichotomous position between tradition and modernity and between Africa and the West were evident in the works.” The estrangement of modern African art from the societal expectations, owing to the influence of colonialism, which contradicted African tradition, was indeed problematic, because the cultural essence of the exiting traditional art that needed to be enhanced and developed for a continued progression was abysmally degenerated.

Issues that Encourage Cultural Stability and Development

The regard accorded to any culture is directly connected to its values, its stability and its substantial development, which promote the image of its people all around the globe. A people’s culture should be nurtured, sustained, developed and promoted through all their social, religious, political, educational and economic involvements, for a promising prosperous future. This is one of the most valuable legacies that any society would bequeath its future generations. Being aware of this all important cultural development, Kenneth Murray, an early expatriate art teacher during the era of colonialism, encouraged his students, of Nigerian origin, to always incorporate the African traditional art forms and styles in their intended developing modernism. “There was Murray’s insistence that the works of African artists be judged by a set of cannons appropriate to their own culture during the early modern Nigerian art,” (Kennedy, 1992, p. 22).

Besides, in cultural growth, modification of what obtains through the invention of new approaches to life and/or imbibing aspects of other people’s culture that are harmonious and can enhance the values of the previously existing culture are important and acceptable. A Brazilian poet and art historian, Oswald de Andrade as cited by Nicodemus (2012, p. 6) avers that “for all-round creative development, one has to eat the culture of others to make the true self, mutual appropriation is a vital necessity of all human cultures.” Although imitating others’ cultures to improve the existing self is important, one must be conscious to ensure that what is being copied can be accommodated without causing harm to the tradition, but creates room for a significant enhancement. Ikwuemesi (2010, p. 25) cites Uche Okeke the frontman of Zaria Art society, who in their Natural Synthesis philosophy opined that “the call for ‘synthesis of old and new’ was only an enunciation of the germs of cultural progress ... for no society attains greatness by sterilizing itself and adorning itself completely in borrowed robes.” African artists should proudly retain their African uniqueness in their artistic creativity and be bold in sustaining their cultural particularities, without shying away from the present day required global integration.

It is expected of the members of any given society to eagerly protect the values of their culture from any negative influence that would deteriorate the image of the culture, be it internal or external pressure. Some citizens of developed nations, with very strong cultural background, are always bent on intimidating the weaker cultures into dancing to the tune of their dictatorship. But, the onus lies on the people of every cultural group, whether weak or strong to vehemently defend what they believe in and strive to

propagate its values globally, for better acceptance into the mainstream. This scenario typified the attitude that the Zaria Art Society exhibited against the colonialists in their effort to defend African culture as cited by Oloidi (1998, p. 37), who states that “the members of the Zaria Art Society waged war on all those things which eroded their identity” and integrated African style of artistic production in their modern work creation, which they referred to as Natural Synthesis. “Zarianism is a philosophy of creative revolt, artistic pride, standard, originality, art intellectualization, experimentation and liberty,” (Oloidi, 1998, pp. 34 – 38). The Zaria Art Society’s resolute approach in defense of African culture, in the midst of the overarching colonial influence, is what is required for a guaranteed cultural stability. Modern Nigerian artists in this era of globalization should not yield to any incongruous influence that would not contribute to the promotion of African culture.

One vital area in African society where the role of art, as a vocational field, is needed is in ensuring the stability of the cultural economy. The viability of any culture in the midst of committee of nations is directly linked to its political and economic stability. A culture with a weak economy has little or no say in the present day globalized world and can easily be manipulated into going contrary to its ideological principles through imperialistic pressure from the economically buoyant cultures. Art as a field of study can contribute significantly in promoting African culture and bequeathing the future generation with a stable, vibrant culture through imparting the necessary practical creative skills in the citizens, which will enable them to be self-reliant. Okwuolise (2004, p. 229) opines that “visual Art is that education that ensures that citizens are provided another sphere of learning that gives them basic skills, for self-reliance, that makes employable manpower and imparts in learners right values and attitudes for survival.” Moreover “if Vocational Visual Arts Education is properly organized, it can help to revitalize our ailing tourism industry by attracting foreigners to participate in well-organized art exhibitions and festivals,” which no doubt is a nice avenue in improving the economy of the nations, (Eheli, 2004, p. 246). Besides, highlighting on the importance of art in harnessing and enhancing the cultural economy of any given society, Ugwoke (2004, p. 285), stresses that “whether an individual trains as a professional artist or not, having been adequately primed in the appreciation of the Visual Arts and the artist’s vision, he automatically becomes an asset to both private and public sectors.” Art paves the way for economic growth, it practically promotes the image of a nation through harmonious syncretism and develops a people’s culture by situating it among the global artistic mainstream.

Culture a Weapon for Dominance in the Globalized World

The rates of cross-cultural get-together and cosmopolitan interactions have dramatically increased in this era of globalization. In the art world, artists domicile in different parts of the world can via online hold a discourse on a trendy topic and/or physically come together using the present day available quick means of transportation, to converge and exhibit their works at a given centre and exchange their wealth of experiences. This situation, most often, does not provide a level playing ground for all the involved artists, instead a condition that could best be described as survival of the fittest always prevails. There is always attempt by the artists, who feel that they are from stronger cultural backgrounds to showcase their creative views as normative and

pressurize others into accepting them. African artists have to be persistent in their artistic creative cultural representation and avoid being lured into abandoning their African ideology through mouth-watering patronage, sponsorship or any other form of neocolonial wheedling.

The intimidation Africans felt during the era of colonialism from the Western colonialists, which eroded the essence of African culture should not be allowed to continue in this globalized period when our path will compulsorily continue to cross with theirs. During the time of colonialism, Nicodemus (2013, p. 18) laments that, “on the rather flimsy ground that handing over knowledge about the past has traditionally occurred in African societies through oral tradition and rarely through written documents, the West has declared Africa a continent without history.” That was one of the Western strategies in getting others abide by their rules. They intimidated their subjects into believing the Western supremacy and accepting the colonized worthlessness. In that nightmarish scenario, the colonies would be utterly disillusioned and would make no significant effort in protecting or promoting their cultural values, since they already do not place any importance on them. Kawaguchi (2005, p. 4) in pointing out this Western approach of disheartening others by stereotyping them laments in his statement that “Europe had once again created a simplistic image of the ‘other’ cultures according to its own perception.” In a similar vein, Nicodemus (2013, p. 18) regrettably states that “Africa as the ‘heart of darkness’ is a Eurocentric myth.” This form of stereotypical statements worked for the West during colonialism, and African artists should learn from the past experiences and be resolute in defending the values of African culture in this present era, for the benefit of posterity. There is no one ideal cultural norms that could serve the entire universe. Societal backgrounds and the problems confronting them are diametrically different and therefore, every human society should design their culture to suit their belief system. Kawaguchi and Yoshida (2005, p. i) highlight that “from a historical point of view, art is not universal but a changing cultural category.” Art should be employed in promoting a people’s culture and that is only feasible when the products of art are in agreement with the people’s expectation for a better understanding and consequent appreciation.

Modern African artists should integrate themselves in the global artistic mainstream, but should strive to make their voice heard and their cultural views respected. They should not create to reflect what the major players in the globalized world expect from them. Instead, their objectives for their artistic creativity would be to make African culture visible and respected throughout the world. As it concerns exploring the instrument of globalization by the West to exert control over others, Ikwuemesi (2005, p. 10) opines that “today art is perhaps a major tool for neo-colonization in the emergent cultural monologue known as globalization ... Cashing in mainly on the lack of patronage and the little economic value placed on art in Africa and coupled with its own hegemonic desire, the West become from 1960s – but particularly from the 1980s – the chief judge and advocate of African art.” The Western culture no doubt is advanced and progressive, but to adopt it blindly in an African context because of the Western alluring patronage and advocacy is a regrettable decision that mars the legacies of African cultures. “Under the eyes of the West, sponsoring and patronizing the Third World Nations represents a leeway for cultural re-colonization, for the so-called dominant cultures are not out only to help for its own sake, they also seek to appropriate and to dictate what they would patronize,” (Ikwuemesi, 2005, p. 14). African artists and

the continental leaders should endeavour to build a strong artistic local market that would make the modern art practice to be lucrative and enticing. That is the only guaranteed source that would prompt and encourage the continental artists not to behave beggarly before the intimidating Western patronage. According to a declarative statement issued by Pan African Circle of Artists (PACA), Africa should rise up and use its rich art to state its view before the world and leave bold footprint to be felt by the entire universe.

The Importance of Influential Cultural Heritage

The culture of a society describes their nobility, development, social class, living standard and the possible prospects that the future holds for the society. When the culture of a given society is built on a strong foundation, it facilitates hard work, patriotism, honesty, sound education, all round development and minimizes corrupt practices. Any society that holds strongly onto these aforementioned qualities and stabilizes its culture on them becomes influential among other nations and vice versa. Art has a lot to contribute in making a people's culture formidable. Art is an indisputable instrument in the formation and documentation of various aspects of the culture of a society. It is a means of transmitting same to countless generations, who would strive to maintain and improve on the existing standard. In cases of corrupt practices that devalue the essence of the people's culture, art is an invaluable weapon for combating such nefarious activities. Art is an essential instrument for defending the value of the culture of a society from external or internal forces that contradict the societal cosmology.

Modern African artists should constantly strive to employ their artistic creativity towards strengthening the essence and values of African culture, as did their forerunners especially during the era of colonization. In this spirit, Nicodemus (2013, p. 19) commends that "the adventure of developing African modernism was carried through by a few rather isolated individuals, daring and obsessed like Onobolu." This great patriot, Aina Onobolu, who today is regarded as the founder of modern Nigerian art fought vehemently to destroy the notion, by the colonialists, that Africans were creatively incompetent. The West in their quest to destabilize and weaken African culture attacked their art, which they noticed controlled almost all the activities of the traditional African societies. The White described traditional African art as weird, magical, fetish, devoid of aesthetic qualities and a proof of unimaginable creative incompetence. It was that abysmal disdainful treatment of African cultural art that prompted Onobolu to create realistic portraiture imbued with striking resemblance, which was the kind of art that the West thought was their prerogative right. In that vein, Onobolu was able to prove the West wrong, restore the respect of African artists and laid a good foundation for modern Nigerian art that could defend its cause. Onobolu was not alone in his dogged fight for cultural stability as Araeen (2010, p. 279) highlights that "the social forces or classes which produced Onobolu in Nigeria had also emerged in most of the rest of Africa, like the South African artists John Mohl and Gerard Sekoto, and provided Africa with the framework for its intellectual pursuits and struggle for self-determination." there were still other African artists in diaspora whose names are worthy of being mentioned for their resilience in fighting for a strong African culture. Nicodemus (2013, pp. 23 – 24) states that;

in Paris, black avant-garde writers, preeminently Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor from Francophone Caribbean and continental Africa, worked out Pan-African theories of black African aesthetics, particularly Négritude, while the Caribbean psychiatrist and political thinker, Frantz Fanon established a critical analysis of colonial and postcolonial culture in Africa.

All these mentioned African artists made significant efforts in one way or the other in ensuring that African culture became valuable and influential. The present day modern African artists should not relent in this type of struggle, in order to ensure that what they will leave behind for the future generations will be a worthwhile heritage.

Art works of African artists should be proudly created to reflect African culture. The style of African art does not depict sign of creative incompetence and African artists should not shy away from its creation. Sweeney (1935) as cited by Stoller (2006, p. 94) while describing the amazing features of African art posits that

it is the vitality of forms of Negro art that should speak to us, the simplification without impoverishment, the unnerving emphasis on the essential, the consistent, three dimensional organization of structural planes in architectonic sequences, the uncompromising truth to the material with a seemingly intuitive adaptation of it, and the tension achieved between the idea or emotion to be expressed through representation and the abstract principle of sculpture.

Considering the above descriptive elucidation of the qualities of African art, there is no gainsaying that African culture is valuable and can effectively be defended, maintained, preserved and promoted through its artistic creativity. Africans must value what they have and be sensitive in promoting their cultural importance. Leaders should be patriotic and work for the common good of the nation through supporting vital cultural institutions like art. Ikwuemesi (2005, p. 14) laments that “African leaders’ inability to harness, preserve and promote Africa’s varied and rich cultural heritage ... has provided an opportunity for others—especially the West—to influence preponderantly the development of art in the continent.” If the West is given a continued chance to control African artists through their advocacy, patronage and sponsorship, most modern African artists would create to please Western expectations, which no doubt would give them the leverage to influence the representation of African cultural image to their own advantage. That would weaken the values of African art and make it malleable to Western dictates.

Conclusion

The culture of any given society should be guarded jealously. That is because; it is the key to the societal developmental progress and therefore determines, to a great extent, the regard that others would accord such a society. Culture should be made positively dynamic. Its values should be maintained, preserved and promoted, which is very much achievable through art practice.

Art is a veritable instrument in culture formation, preservation, and development and can also effectively sustain its values. Works of art can be employed in combating all extraneous activities that devalue the culture of any society. African artists should be keen and vigilant in their creative journey to ensure that any issue that does not lead to

the promotion of the continental culture is jettisoned, while those ones that encourage and stabilize African culture are imbibed.

That is the only way to successfully be part of this era of globalization without being swallowed by its singular ocean full of sea monsters. African artists should always retain their cultural essence and enable them reflect in their creative works. They should not succumb to the intimidation and unnecessary control from the supposed stronger cultures; otherwise they would have no legacies to bequeath their future generations. African artists should be actively involved in the defense of African culture. They should ingeniously create works of art that would sustain, preserve and promote Africa's rich cultural values, for the benefit of posterity.

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