

Distribution: limited

CC-78/CONF.624/5
PARIS, 30 August 1978
Original: English

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Meeting of Experts on the "Specificity and dynamics of African cultures",
ABIDJAN (Ivory Coast, 2-6 October 1978)

AFRICAN ART, ITS SIGNIFICANCE, INFLUENCE, CREATIVITY
AND ITS PRESERVATION AND METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

by

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(CC-78/CONF.624/COL.6)

ABSTRACT

Against the background of geography and history and other items of culture, the paper seeks to appraise art as a vital element in African cultures. First, the essence, characteristics and significance of art in Africa were examined. The finding on that was that African art is art for its own sake but also art for living's sake. Secondly, some suggestions were made as to the means of preserving creativity in African art. Here it was suggested that since art has been central to the cultures of Africa the preservation of their creativity is essential. Education, the maintenance of an environment which will encourage creativity like seminars, symposia, festivals, physical and spiritual facilities for creativity must be provided. Further, in the present circumstances, institutions should be made available to create the environment essential for creativity and preservation of this creativity.

The evaluation of African art in contact with other cultures was attempted. From the status of being curios, then specimens to prove the low nature of African material culture, African objects of art were finally accepted as art. Examples of the salutary influence of African styles on Europe have been recorded. Finally, the main lines of research into the characteristics of African art and ways of preserving its creativity were examined. A three-pronged methodology was suggested - namely study of aesthetics - the history and the sociological significance of objects of art. The place of museums, art galleries, photography were examined and found essential as methods of study, and encouragement of creativity and preservation of African art.

All through the examination, the point was made that Africa has cultures but also culture at least in the making and the efforts of Unesco as a body the United Nations has given impetus to this vital sphere of culture as an instrument of social development.

SPECIFICITY AND DYNAMICS OF AFRICAN CULTURES

Africa is geographically a vast continent covering a space of over 11,000,000 square miles. Its climatic regimes which range from equatorial to monsoon, tropical to desert and mediterranean on both sides of the Equator also reflect to some extent cultural regimes and diversities. Historically, the continent has been the very centre of what has come to be known as Black culture or civilization. Material culture - archaeological finds and art works per se - has provided a means of learning about aspects of the social histories or cultures of the people who possessed those objects. Hence the famous life heads and Benin bronzes, various chiefs' regalia of Ghana, songs and dances, rituals and religious art have provided us with records that reveal not only the social structure but also its dynamics. These records clearly suggest that, as a function of its vastness, Africa has cultures; for culture as conceived here includes ways of thinking and acting, and attitudes and learnt behaviour patterns of people at any given time. Empirically, we know that the conditions of life in a place influence philosophies and material culture, and there is evidence which makes it meaningful for us to speak of African Cultural Universals in spite of the diversities. Culture is dynamic and the current awareness of African culture as being essential for holistic development has not only brought to the fore the fact that African "cultures" exist but also that "culture", at least, is in the making.

In this paper we intend to examine the essence, characteristics and significance of African art in general, but with a bias towards visual art; the means of preserving African art; art in contact with other cultures. We shall suggest some lines for fruitful research into the characteristics of, and possible means of, preserving creativity in African art. Presumably, the special place of art as an element of culture will suggest itself in the treatment of our material.

Essence, significance and characteristics of African art

From the outset we would suggest that art is at the very core of African culture or consciousness. Here art is used in a collective sense for the art which embodies and expresses a wide range of human experience, beliefs and ideas, aesthetic creations in matter, sound or movement that activate various emotional and intellectual responses in man. Collectively, art in Africa may be said to be central to the cultures of Africa. Various forms of visual art, in particular, survive from the past and become clues to history and give the living knowledge about their ancestors. Among other things, therefore, they may act even as mnemonic devices which give insights into the philosophy, social history and the very consciousness of people. The suggestion being pressed is that the arts were serious records in the widest connotation in the African context.

In the Western context, art is often strictly compartmentalized into categories such as fine arts, combined arts and applied arts. Under the umbrella of fine arts are often placed music, literature, design, painting and the visual arts. Such arts as dance, theatre and opera come under the combined arts, whilst ceramics, textile and painting again, are placed under the applied arts. A sharp, sometimes very sharp, line is drawn between art and craft. While these divisions may be useful for analytical purposes, they should assume blurred features when we are considering the essence and significance of African art. A more adequate conception of art therefore should take a broader view of other items like costume, pottery, jewellery, objects of royal prerogative, body arts, painting, music, dance, and theatre - and arts of social and religious significance.

The dynamism of African cultures, like any other cultures, recognizes today what some critics call the popular culture, typified by the cinema, pop music, radio, television play and magazine story. The mass media themselves explore

and assess the importance and place of human experience in daily living.⁽¹⁾ We remark that the persistence of any particular art heavily depends on its communicativeness, and in the African situation the very essence of art is that it expresses and transmits emotions and ideas through symbolism. This presents art to us as essentially a "symbolic" language.

African art - man-regarding and spirit-regarding

By the above submission we are suggesting that African art is both spirit-regarding and man-regarding. Art may touch upon the very being and soul of the one to whom it is exposed. The story of the Asante War of 1900 illustrates this point. Yaa Asantewa, the Queen Mother, saw the attempt or alleged effort of a colonial overlord to deprive her people of the Golden Stool in 1900 as an attack not on any person in the nation but on the very soul of the people.⁽²⁾ King Prempeh's seizure was a distasteful experience to Asante but the attack on the Golden Stool - that symbol of their being and culture - was beyond their forbearance. Mention of the Golden Stool reveals the sometimes highly idealized values placed on specific objects of art in Africa. Until this day, the Golden Stool, continues to enjoy high reverential awe from many in Asante. It is not only a "coronation stool". It is a political theory in matter but it is also an historical charter and a social document like the black stools.⁽³⁾

Some African art objects help in the fact of self-assertion. Various items of regalia of Ghanaian and Nigerian chiefs are prestige items besides being objects of historical or socio-political significance. This means that some of the items may be for social control. Hence the various swords of State, the stools and linguist staffs of these countries are highly valued art objects. It is believed that the effigy in wood of Shamba Bolongogo of Bukubaland is a monument to him as the first king in central Africa. The Akan and south-east Ivorians have this tradition of representing past potentates in wood, but especially in terracotta. In a similar manner, among the Kongo and peoples of Ife and Benin, art has been used to exalt abstract values and ideas epitomized in people, particularly chiefs.

As a dimension of this and the cultural acceptance that the presence of authority or supernatural forces can be preserved in and presented by material objects, art is employed for purpose of social control in Africa; for example, masks and various art objects have been used as agents of social control. This is understandable since many pieces have been regarded as sacred in the sphere of religion as a social institution. The Go ge mask of north-east Liberia is an example of such masks. Examples of initiation masks, and many other forms of sculpture, dance and music for purposes of social control abound.⁽⁴⁾ When at public durbars regalia are displayed and spontaneous expressions of loyalty, gaitly and solidarity are demonstrated, lessons of propriety and history are taught.⁽⁵⁾

Reference to art and history brings into focus the evidence of the Ife and Benin finds, the commemorative portrait heads and leadership art of African cultures as useful records. From the available evidence, we think the special Benin art to which reference has been made has its origin in the classicism of the Ife tradition. We refer here to the story of the fifth Oba Oguala and the dispatch of bronze casters to Benin to teach the art. There are unmistakable stylistic similarities between the Ife heads and Benin bronzes. Similarly, a study of Nok corpus now in Jos Museum reveals the diversity in the art styles, besides reinforcing the oral history that we have from that part of West Africa so rich in African sculptural art. We suggest that the real purpose of the archaeologists' shovel is to throw up history and culture and present the artist in Africa as an index to the social statics and dynamics at any point in time. The artist creates for religious and recreational purposes and records the civilizations or aberrations or projections of them.

Form and content of art

But it may appear, from the repetitive figures that a great bulk of the literature on African sculpture presents, that the versatility being claimed for sculpture at least is exaggerated. Many Pangwe statues seem to have bulbous shapes, visible particularly in the arms and legs. What can this illustrate? Dogon masks from Mali are fashioned in squares and triangles, while Baule statues from the Ivory Coast normally have incised hair. There is an overall static condition. Nonetheless, some dynamism is discernible. The paradoxical thing about most forms of African art is that they incorporate known canons of propriety in their forms but at the same time have individualism. This makes the artist in Africa a maker of things of "beauty", an executor of objects for reverence and worship, magic and medicine, relaxation, recreation and enjoyment, besides being through his creations, an aspect of the conscience of the people among whom he lives.

In the light of this, we subscribe to the idea that African art is art for-its-own sake but also art for living. The purport of African sculpture may often not be manifest but is inherent in it. The canons and symbolism are varied. So African sculpture may be naturalistic, semi-naturalistic, figurative or highly stylized. The figures may also be anthropomorphic or zoomorphic. The sculptural pieces may be stated in simple straightforward ways and their proportions may be mensurational or mainly those of significance. Usually those with proportions of significance are void of details or have only a few to focus on the part of the work bearing the crux of the message in the art. Such parts may be articulated for emphasis. Consequently, a sense of compactness and organic unity is often portrayed.

Interestingly, a number of visual art objects have songs or dance associated with them, which reinforce the message of the visual object or are used to bring home vividly their own message. Hence the Klama musical form of the Dangme of Ghana, which contains the history, the folk and medical lore of the people, is helped through dance, drama and statues to activate the message. The Dangme, Ga, Hausa and many other peoples of Ghana, West Africa, and indeed all Africa, have very distinct praise songs as well as tongue-lashing songs for expressing negative and positive sanctions. Even so are the arts of dance and theatre in African culture. Essentially then, African art, which includes sculpture, music, dance, philosophy, verbal art and literature, represents the records of African aesthetics, history and sociology.

PRESERVATION OF CREATIVITY IN AFRICAN ART

We have noted that the arts of Africa have been powerful elements in the cultures and have thrown light on many aspects of the culture. As we shall see from an evaluation of African art in contact with other cultures in this paper, African art has added to the stature of world art. Creativity in African art was powerful because art was integrated with life. To preserve the high degree of creativity that was characteristic of African art, and even to increase it, the environment for this in contemporary Africa must be revived or created in modern terms. The princely courts of the past, the liberal patronage enjoyed by the artist, the political, ritual, social and recreational activities that favoured proliferation of art have undergone change. Significantly, however, assertion of cultural identity is realized as an essential catalyst in contemporary African social development. Now it is accepted that preservation of cultural property in museums, monuments and sites, archaeological objects and works of art, the encouragement of artists in all sorts of ways which help to create an atmosphere conducive to artistic creation, study of art history and the sociology of art, government sponsorship of the arts through institutions providing requisite and appropriate legislation for the purpose of preservation of art consciousness, are all likely to help foster the spirit of creativity and preservation of this creativity.

African art and culture

Mention has been made of the princely courts and the outstanding patronage the artist enjoyed in the past in African society. Many items of the material culture of Africa were decorated. African philosophy and social organization found expression in the arts. Leaders, chiefs and priests were patrons of the arts. Hence in old Dahomey (Benin), Oyo and Benin in Nigeria, Congo and the whole of Central Africa and Akanland in Ghana, art and artists were prominent in the life and thought of the people.

Sculpture of every description - mud, wood, and metal - funerary art, stools, crafts, several types of textile such as appliquéd cloths, kente, adinkra, the fugu and many others; song and music generally, drumming and dancing, oratory, verbal art, ceremonials and rituals, all contributed to making the courts, the environment in the towns and villages living museums. They provided the rationale behind styles and forms. The relegation of African arts into the background by the accident of history, which at a point regarded them all as expressions of imperfectibility and savagery, dealt a blow to the sense of creativity. The position of art and the cultures of Africa can be restored as a product of the current realization of the need to assert African cultural identity. The assertion of cultural identity has been the basis for the emergence of many African colonial peoples as nation-States. Self-government is only a facet of the whole exercise of self-liberation. It is indeed now being seriously suggested that cultural liberation should be the basis and a strategy for contemporary socio-political, economic and spiritual self-determination and development. (7)

It would appear that creativeness in art and preservation of this creativeness would therefore be greatly enhanced by effective assertion of African cultural identity, and by seriously planned cultural activity sponsored by meaningful cultural policies of Africans and their governments. Already, the cultural policies of some governments stipulate the establishment of institutions and agencies for the study and promotion of culture. Strengthened by the decisions reached at the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies in Africa, organized by Unesco at Accra in 1975, individual African governments are drawing up their own cultural policies. (8) Creativity in African art will be enhanced when individual African States really and clearly rehabilitate their cultures, taking the principles that have been appreciated by all of them as their guidelines. Close co-operation between various national cultures of Africa is also likely to reveal vividly the cultural universals which unite Africa as a cultural unit, and these will enable the artists, who at times can become active elements in the consciousness of a people, to expand their creativity.

To foster creativity, appropriate institutions for the promotion, preservation and dissemination of art should be available. It will also be necessary to provide for art production, to receive encouragement from government and the different disciplines in the educational system. Thus, history, sociology and aesthetics, treated in an interdisciplinary style, will help to revive African creativeness in art and broaden the artists' resourcefulness and creative acumen. Creativeness is likely to be sustained and improved by an environment which continues to be artistic and art-promoting. So the landscapes, costumes, social institutions, festivals, social structures and changes in the structures, man in the changing world and machine culture should be agents in the promotion of art. The art environment should be real to encourage schools, universities, cultural centres, young peoples centres, workers' unions, women's groups, rural organizations, museums, art councils, churches, religion in general and mass media, to be creative agencies in the sphere of art - in matter, sound and movement.

Art education and preservation of creativity

It is not difficult to realize the significance of art in old Africa. It is known for example, that sculpture helped to define inter-personal and ethnic social relationships. Regal art, art for social control, religion, economics and recreation are in this category. Music and also physical movements were used to teach desired norms at initiation ceremonies, worship and ritual situations. Legends, folklore, and story-telling open men's minds to the enviable exploits of the ancestors. Verbal art in general, but also proverbs and riddles may give us knowledge of the social history and customs of the current communities. Indeed, education is concerned with the whole matter of socialization. Art is not only a leisurely pursuit. Its function transcends that of decoration. It is a medium for the transmission of culture. Truly, African art defines values and the theories of art education in Africa go beyond the concepts of art which most professional artists and the general public became accustomed to as a result of their education and total colonial experience.

For African art to recover its vitality the artist and the public among whom he operates need to be re-educated. Since the motivation of the artist, as we have observed, derives from the environment, the artist's first, and his total life experiences, must inspire his creativity. An artist in the contemporary setting is likely to be highly creative if he has intimate knowledge of his own culture, then knowledge of related cultures and finally ideas about world art. In the present circumstances, creativity will be encouraged if his education brings him diverse experiences from private and public patrons as substitutes for the vanished atmosphere which encouraged art production in Africa.

As a result of the low value that people were induced to place on their art, both artists and the public need to be educated to help them rid their minds of the unfortunate beliefs they had acquired. The scholarly method is inevitable, for the educators themselves must know the language of the arts to be able to educate themselves and the public. A lot of homework seems necessary here. In the schools' system, the syllabus must be based on realities which will inculcate a sense of values and aesthetic sense in pupils and all who engage in artistic work. In Ghana special training colleges for art specialists have recently been set up, in an attempt to improve teacher training. The bias of these specialist training colleges is fine art. The important thing here is to expose such teachers to the whole range of traditional art, with special reference to visual art. Specifically, this is likely to inspire the specialists to appropriate some of the canons of African art which have added in no small measure to world art. (9) The arts of sound and movement have also specialized institutions in Ghana, such as the Institute of African Studies, the School of Music, Dance and Drama under the Institute of African Studies, and the musical wings of the Arts Council of Ghana. These institutions should be able to do research into the traditional forms and in so doing, enhance music, dance and theatre. (10)

Art environment and creativity

What we describe as cultural environment involves the whole of culture - the visible and the invisible worlds of a people. These worlds include the sacred and the profane realms within which they operate as social beings. These sacred and profane worlds involve natural and man-made environments. Through geographical control, natural environments are subjected to man's will. Architecturally, transformations are made to serve the will of man. Up to a point, man is master of his environment. Of course, natural disasters occasionally disrupt his ingenuity and frustrate his plans and efficiency. But the environment of man as a whole is the one large factor that determines his creativity.

Museums, monuments and art galleries

Museums and monuments in Africa can do much to help promote consciousness and creativity in art. The concept of museums as cemeteries of "dead" materials and things of the past assembled for their own sake, must give way to one which should regard them as "libraries" wherein we may read history and culture. Museums must be "live" cultural meeting places. Museums relate history based on cultural material. Taken seriously material in museums should help rejuvenate art consciousness and inspire creativity. Similarly, monuments can inspire people in different ways. Archaeological finds, tombs of men of renown, chiefs, mosques, relics and symbols are known to inspire awe and creativity. The outstanding and unique place of museums and monuments in education should now be seriously noted and their proliferation encouraged. This will undoubtedly aid cultural education and art consciousness.

In the same way, art galleries should be able to encourage artists to create new forms through the inspiration they receive from the works of masters, and maybe their own works, displayed on the shelves. (11)

Seminars, symposia and art festivals

Locally arranged or international seminars and symposia, discussions, and presentations of art will aid the rediscovery of authentic sources of cultures forcibly relegated to the background through falsification, disdain and alienation which the African continent had to suffer. Papers at symposia, seminars and art festivals will encourage the transcription, recording, collection and preservation of material for study and documentation.

An atmosphere of art is presented at such gatherings, which activate the artistic and social regeneration of a people. Seminars, symposia and festivals provide instruments to help safeguard cultural authenticity, to take action on cultural inventories, to train historians, ethnographers and art critics. For music, dancing and theatre to flourish, conditions need to be created for their development. Preservation and presentation of traditional music and audio-visual recordings for the purpose of study by scholars and the public generally, generate an atmosphere conducive to creativity. Art festivals incorporate many art forms, and inspire artists to create more to record civilization. (12)

Encouragement of art through grants and facilities for work

To encourage artists to increase their creativity, and to preserve all forms of art, they need to be patronized. In the traditional African system the leaders or chiefs, priests and the general public were patrons of the arts. The situation created congenial environments for the promotion of art. We have observed that a similar or even better environment would have to be created to encourage the contemporary artist, who needs effective patronage. Such patronage could take the form of scholarships, facilities for work, commissions to execute public and private monuments and decorations, and to write national music for organizations or communities. Other factors that should help creativity are subsidies, awards, memorials and fair prices for artists' works, festivals and exhibitions, galleries and institutions for research, promotion and creativity.

Some institutions for research into culture promotion, preservation and development

The Arts Council and the Institute of African Studies

We draw upon an example in Ghana where, as far back as 1959, the Government formally established an art and culture institution to increase art consciousness. The Council was expected to foster, improve and preserve the traditional arts of Ghana. It was also to explore the means of encouraging a national theatre, which even at its inception, should reflect the traditional cultural heritage of the country. (cf. Guidelines for programmes of the Arts Council of Ghana.)

Three years later, the Institute of African Studies was established primarily as a cultural research institute which should also undertake post-graduate teaching in African studies. The scholarly study of Africa and the promotion of the creation and preservation of her culture was therefore noted as a priority area right from the time of self-rule.⁽¹³⁾ Since 1961, the centre has been open to students and scholars from universities in Ghana and abroad. The research programme has involved cultural and historical studies in the fields of anthropology, history, government and politics, community studies and the arts - music, dance and drama. The current statement on Ghana's cultural policy still requires the Institute to do research into the arts and cultures of Ghana as one of the surest ways of preserving and creating art consciousness for development purposes.⁽¹⁴⁾

The Institute is required to create conditions which will make the public conscious of culture and participate in cultural events. Further, it is expected that opportunities will be provided to learn about the Ghanaian traditional heritage at all levels of education. So it has mandate to provide reference materials for the future, and continue research into the indigenous cultures of Ghana, including the recording and documentation of cultural items.⁽¹⁵⁾ The need to widen traditional frontiers of art, cultural integration and national understanding, research into problems of incorporation and cultural integration are seen as fields in which the Institute should be active.

As we saw earlier on, this specific case of Ghana also highlights as necessary facilities for training artists, craftsmen, musicians, dancers, actors, etc.⁽¹⁶⁾ Programmes are expected to include documentation of artists, problems of artists, consensus and divergent opinions on critical standards, relevance, audience responses. The aim is to provide a body of knowledge which will inspire creativity.

The Arts Council of Ghana continues to be the body responsible for the actual promotion, and hopefully thereby for fostering the creation and innovation of art and culture in Ghana. The programme areas cover cultural promotion, artistic creation, arts education, studies and circulation of cultural material and objects, cultural training programmes and provision of ancillary facilities and superstructure.⁽¹⁷⁾ The Arts Council is expected to study and promote entertainment and recreational programmes, concerts, drama publications, timetables, film shows of African productions, exhibitions (art and performers), festivals, lectures, symposia and seminars. Under artistic creation, the institutions are to encourage through promotion, the evolution of artistic idioms based on local cultures, the creation of new works of art and development of performance techniques. Action programmes in this sphere should include competitions, prizes and awards, exhibition of artists and performers. Other strategies for fostering creativity are experimental workshops, and community drama.⁽¹⁸⁾

Reference should also be made to the Guidelines for the Ghana Arts Council. Programmes must be prepared to enhance knowledge and appreciation of art in the communities; this will make for creativity. Schools, the youth and the general public must be encompassed in this education process.

Finally, everybody must have access to cultural material and objects. Hence, the necessity of research on the preservation, promotion and presentation of the arts and, of course, economic and political institutions that relate to development of the arts and other aspects of culture. Other activities include: compilation of inventories; preparation of educational kits; publication of journals and magazines; publication of artistic works and introductory booklets.

By the general statement on art and cultural education, and creativity and the special Ghana case study, we have sought to indicate how creativity in art and culture could be fostered and preserved. In the process we have also indicated some current research into the ways of preserving creativity which we examine in greater detail later in this paper.

EVALUATION OF AFRICAN ART IN CONTACT WITH OTHER CULTURES

African art in contact with Europe

An evaluation of African art in its contacts with other cultures relates to the level of creativity after the era in history when Europeans seriously interacted with Negro Africa on several levels - as friends, missionaries, and colonial masters. Our purpose is to assess their influence on art consciousness in Africa and African influence on art later in Europe.

Serious European contact with sub-Saharan art dates from the Europeans' navigations to this region in the fifteenth century. At first, African art made no marked impression on the European world. In fact, European attitudes to African art through time, may be summarized in three phrases. First, African objects of art were regarded at best as curios. Later, they were looked upon as specimens for validating the talk about primitive people on very low levels of human evolution. It was only in the later eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries that objects of African primitive material culture emerged from the status of mere curios or specimens - to be regarded as art pieces. These included cloths, ivory carvings, bracelets, jewellery, decorated poles and State swords, stools, plaques and many other things. However, the period of spectacular change in Western attitudes towards African art was between 1850 and 1930. The onset of this final period was quite sudden and the "new" art to European experience was hailed as being "expressionist", "cubist", anti-classical, "abstract" or anti-naturalistic. The admiration for this art was almost extravagant. The extremes of attitude - either disdain or praise - derived from the values of the European judges of the art. At one end, antagonism to the art sprang from the spirit of mere ethnocentrism; hence the missionary zeals of Christian and Moslem propagators which tended to be iconoclastic. At the other end, enthusiasm was based on misinformation as to the true nature of the arts, but none the less their fascinating forms inspired rebellion against the set forms of European painting and sculpture.

Since the recognition of African art as art, its uniqueness continues to be manifest to Europe and other lands. The notion that African sculpture and painting especially are simplistic or unsophisticated and not worthy of comparison with Western art has disappeared among serious minded artists. Of course, even in the past, African art, for some section of European public, had the properties of vitality, simplicity and purity. Straightforward statements were made in art which suggested direct and strong feelings. It was noticed rather late, that African art tended to concern itself directly with life.

Significantly, the early part of the twentieth century saw the acceptance of the values of African art as given and incontestible stylistic forms. French artists are on record as becoming aware of the vigour and simplicity of African art in this era. African forms generally activated some European master artists

and they fostered expansion in their own styles. Their aesthetic values were re-shaped and there was fumbling after new forms. The European artist experienced emotional activation brought about by abstraction of forms, and the architectonics of planes or dominance of spheres over the cube. Derain, Vlaminck and Picasso are among those who declared the influence that African forms had on their own styles. Though Vlaminck was believed to have done little himself to show the influence of African art on his work, he is on record as having introduced his contemporaries to Negro art. We notice that Matisse's work was influenced in some way by the purity of line, form and content of statuettes. Mrs. Buffet Picabia would suggest that Picasso learnt a lesson from his association with Negro sculpture - that "big" and "small" men can depend on one another for inspiration. The desire to return to fundamentals is the greatest lesson African art taught Picasso, as his works between 1907-1908 testify. Picasso's "Ballerina" (1907) is believed to have been inspired by the funerary art of the Bakota. His painting the "Head" was also believed to have been influenced by masks of the Ivory Coast.

In the sphere of painting, Picasso was again thought to have been influenced in polychrome streaks by the Negro process of *tapas* and their ritual objects, called fetishes by Vlaminck. Other elements of African traditional art that have influenced European art are the resolution and reorganization of planes, the synthesis of forms reduced to their essentials, the limbs either merged in the statue or only summarily sculptured.

Mention is also made of the familiar feature of the concave face in African sculpture and its influence on the concave face-style in European art. In African sculpture, the concave face often appears with cubism. Again, we see this influence in Picasso's "Demoiselles d'Avignon" and it is suggested that the problem of the concave face prominent in African sculpture occupied his mind at that time. As a product of the influence of African art, it was believed, the freedom of self-expression touching on the inner self was gained. This made for a constant renewal of personal experience as evidenced in Picasso's dynamic works.

Other modern artists supposed to have been influenced are the Romanian Constantin and Gaudier Brzeska who shows the style of an elongated trunk, with flexed lower limbs in the tradition of Baule figures. The head is shown as stiffly positioned on the neck. In all, the features stand apart from the oval face in Negro statuary. African influence on Western art is noticed also in sculptures and painting of European artists like Max Ernst, Max Pechstein and Karl Schmidt-Rotluff.

African art generally in European art

It is useful at this point to note that Africans have been depicted in European art ever since classical days but the motives for presentation have been naturally different from age to age. From the pictures on the black figure vases of the Greeks, we notice that Greek artists were familiar with Africa before the sixth century B.C. It is suggested that when African art was better known in Europe from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, some aspects of mediaeval art known in Europe were revived. Since art was then the handmaiden of Christianity, artists were concerned with the portrayal of phenomena of visible reality. So human form was subjected to stylistic treatment that derived from abstraction and stylization. If Africans were ever depicted, they were treated in the context of their role or presentation in the scriptural writings. In the twentieth century, we notice an attempt to reorganize even Christian liturgical art to reflect the influence being felt on European art. (20)

Influence of some African forms in the New World

The most obvious influence of African art in the New World and the Carribean is on music. In Surinam and Brazil, acculturation is evident in the sphere of religious art and of course music. We only mention these positive influences since they could be better treated separately by experts in music and dance. Brazilian religious art is Yoruba in form and even content. The thunder and fire gods are treated in the style of Yoruba axe fire gods. Surinam songs and even verbal art are Akan in content. Work songs, the Negro spirituals, jazz and the various forms of it, are seen as having been influenced by or derived from African forms.

All over the continent, just as in Europe, symbolism, which continued to be the central style of African sculpture and design, can be traced. It is not suggested that all African-like forms outside Africa have been influenced by Africa. The independent development of styles which are similar exists. However, the recognition of African influence on world art is an acknowledged reality. A study to delineate the areas of influence on all world art would be interesting.

Contemporary influences on African art

Contemporary African art has reciprocally received some ideas from other arts. The colonial experience in Negro Africa has contributed to this influence. In Benin (old Dahomey), Nigeria, Ghana, indeed in all West, Central and East Africa the incorporation of the musket in art is significant. Figures for warrior ancestors may have muskets in African art complexes. The evolution of pottery in Ghana shows the results of the cultural interaction. (20A) The forowa metal containers of the Akan create problems for the art historian. The intricate re-poussé, incised or stamped designs which cover forowa surfaces have suggested outside influence, although this has not been resolved. The influences that have been suggested include those of North Africa.

On the whole, African influence on contemporary European styles is spectacular. African art has clearly and indisputably greatly influenced world art. Emerging from the status of curios in European estimation, to specimens, and then art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, African material culture especially, but also music and dance, have been accepted and have influenced world art in divers ways.

SOME SUGGESTED LINES OF RESEARCH INTO THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AFRICAN ART AND WAYS OF PRESERVING ITS CREATIVITY

The examination of the creativity in African art and the influence of this art, especially in Europe, makes consideration of the lines of research into its characteristics and ways of preserving creativity interesting. In my research and teaching programmes, a three-pronged method of approach to African art enables me and my students to appreciate realistically the full multi-dimensional nature of specially African visual art. By the nature of the subject-matter, a fruitful way of approaching its study is from many disciplines. We study the subject from the perspectives of aesthetics, history, philosophy and sociology. Although our principal study has been the visual arts, we have had to look at other related arts, such as the crafts, music and dance, oral literature, verbal art, philosophy, history, art and education, design and architecture. Our primary and secondary studies have included library and field work. So our methods necessitate interdisciplinary and empirical treatment of the subject. In this way, the meaningful appreciation of art in society and consequently the ways and means of preserving creativity suggest themselves to the inquirers. If history is really told, philosophy and the rationale behind forms are unveiled, the way of life of the people is made manifest in their art, then creativity in art is likely to appeal to people if they know this, and preservation of creativity will be consequent upon such knowledge.

Aesthetics

Surely, today the cultural interaction between all parts of the world is closer on all counts. Now concepts and ideas flow rapidly from society to society. Consequently, there are concepts of "beauty" and propriety which have become universal. Even so, cultural diversities are very real. It is, paradoxically, because concepts of beauty and propriety are diverse that Africa enriches the world cultures. Inquiries into the characteristics of African art make stylistic analysis an essential feature of the search. Stylistic analysis has helped us to discover the characteristics and interrelationships, whether the art is in matter, sound or movement. Experience shows that we have major and substylistic regions in Negro Africa. These styles are influenced by specific or diffuse philosophies or values. By way of styles it is at least possible to begin an appreciation of the standards or worth or "beauty" or propriety which artists in various societies attempt to achieve and by which their works are judged by others in and outside their own societies.

Geographical, historical and linguistic approaches to the style areas of West Africa, for example, have been attempted by various scholars. Geographically, some scholars have suggested two regimes in Negro Africa; namely the art of Western Sudan and the art of the Guinea Coast. This division reflects a savannah, and forest dichotomy but also culture zones, of course these cultures are not absolutely homogeneous. The cultures may be seen currently as abstractions. However, there are groups within the zones who exhibit comparable features within specific areas in those zones. The more we study the styles of African art the more we notice a measure of stylistic oneness but also diversities.

Research suggests that to see only two stylistic zones in West Africa is to take no account of the historical dimension. For historical evidence, the specimens set in typologies are useful. Knowledge of the age and origin of an art piece may offer a standard or standards for comparative purposes. Technological differentiation may also help establish order in collections which may otherwise suffer poor classification and documentation.

In the West African zone, research has shown that although art producing groups of Western Sudan seemed to be hermetically sealed from those in the Guinea Coast, no such division ever occurred. Contacts through trade allowed for interaction between the two regions.⁽²¹⁾ It has also been suggested that "the rise of State-building peoples like the Asante; more limited population movements based on desire for new land; the dispersal of less organized peoples seeking refuge from more powerful neighbours; and mobility of small artisan groups like the Mande Mumu (blacksmiths) further insured that the relationships between the Western Sudan and the Guinea were extremely fluid".⁽²²⁾ Yet another stylistic region, the linguistic, has been attempted.⁽²³⁾ Historical circumstances can act against this linguistic art map. Hence, as has been suggested, it is necessary to check on this classification by historical, geographical and cultural material.⁽²⁴⁾

More research is essential into the creativity of traditional artists. Through oral tradition, works of art may be validated, so that art may in turn help to validate or invalidate oral tradition or history. Research into greater historical depth, and examination of styles of archaeological material may help to determine specific instances that are common to African art - and those that could be ascribed to individual idiosyncrasies or sudden innovations, may be incidental to the inspiration and creativity of individual artists.

History

Research therefore helps us to see the fact of history influencing styles. As already mentioned, the African styles have influenced other world artists even

as other aspects of African styles in sculpture, music and dance have been influenced by non-African forms. The story of how Renaissance art was held up as the standard by which African fine arts were judged is interesting. We find through research that such historical considerations help to explain the reasons for the evaluations of African art through the ages.

Historical research throws light on similarities of styles in different regions as we saw in the Ife and Benin sculpture earlier on. Besides the sociological purports of masks and mask dances in old and new Africa, the stylistics of these masks may have historical explanations. We are aware of how basic knowledge in styles have been useful in validating or invalidating oral tradition. (25) In this matter of stylistics and history, the example of the Nok culture may again be cited as a well-known one. Archaeology is science and history. It is one of the disciplines that must attract an art historian, art critic or sociologist who looks at society from art and its culture. Archaeology reveals material which recounts history. The story may be put together through the style of the material culture, collected.

Museums and cultural research

Obviously, ethnographic and archaeological museums offer us access to the styles and cultures of Africa. The Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies in Africa had far-reaching comments to make on museums and the part they may play in the study of art and culture. For the training of specialists in conservation, preservation and creativity in African visual art, the conference resolved that such centres as the Jos Centre must be established to achieve high standards. It was even suggested that the Jos Centre should develop into a regional institute for training museologists. Museums will also be an aid to Africans in the process of safeguarding African cultural authenticity. Research in museums and museums studies gives us authentic insights into historical and social functions of material culture. These in turn will throw light on the styles.

Sociology

Analysis of styles also leads not only to the historical placement of the objects but to their sociological significance. Styles or designs usually have historical or sociological content. Probably, in the African context, the sociological significance of art is very outstanding and vital. Social institutions, such as religion and magic, the lineage, family and marriage, politics and government are served by art. The importance and eloquence of court art and regalia speak. To make a meaningful study of African art its social framework must be considered. Hence research into the evolution of art, art and education, magic and religion, psychology and philosophy, becomes almost central in any serious consideration of the arts.

Photography

Unsuspectingly, photography can be a very useful research tool for studying the various dimensions of art. In modern times the photographic camera may be used really as a research tool - and not merely as a means of illustrating points that have been made. The inductive method of reaching facts in research may be attempted through the use of photography. A picture may be taken whose details as presented may only be partially comprehended. It may be used to record something for later scrutiny. Informants may be used later to help throw light on the content of the picture. Such photographs may also be used for interviewing. It is a useful means of recording a complex drama of life or situation of a moment - its objectivity and accuracy is recommendable. Using pictures as visual material for questionnaires can be useful.

In the matter of stylistic analysis of visual art, photography can also be useful in the standardization of an objective interpretation of forms and data. Experience has shown in our field work that the "friendly use" of the camera in some of the communities does not create barriers for the field worker. Rather, it endears him to some people or the field worker may make gifts of the pictures taken to the people. Contacts are in many ways enhanced and made clear.

So the camera becomes useful beyond recording and documenting what is known to be significant. It is a useful instrument of research and appraisal of forms, techniques and a host of other facets of culture. For our purpose, this tool for anthropological, archaeological and art research is likely to reveal useful information on the characteristics of African art. When these characteristics are known and appreciated, the contemporary generation will be encouraged to do work which will enhance the preservation of creativity in the forms and language of the arts.

CONCLUSION

From our discussion, we present the thesis that there are cultures in Africa, but there are none the less cultural universals in Negro Africa which make it meaningful to talk of African culture, at least, in the making. Culture in the context of this paper refers to the very consciousness of a people. Just as we think there is a world culture when we refer to the cultural patterns being fashioned by the United Nations through its charters and agencies, so we may with justification identify an African culture.

We have suggested that geography, history and language contribute to the apparent diversities in African culture. In the matter of language, we notice that all the West African countries and indeed many countries on the African continent are multilingual. Three languages may be said to be dominant in Nigeria; namely Yoruba, Hausa and Ibo, but there are many subdivisions and dialects of these languages. Ghana with a population of about ten million has fifty-six languages. Since language is one of the principal carriers of culture - the way of life of a people - we notice the perpetuation of an aspect of the cultures through language.

Styles of political administration and social control have also been indices to cultural collectivities. So that, in terms of the rather simplified dichotomy of indigenous political systems in Africa, there are the centralized systems and the segmentary systems. The centralized systems, typified by the old Oyo, Dahomey (Benin), Asante and the Bunyoro, sponsored elaborate art and art institutions. Opposed to this, the segmentary type as exemplified among the Lega and Konkomba, did not encourage the spread of art. It would seem that each system reflected ideas of peoples' own particular cosmology.

With special reference to art in Africa, we have suggested that it is the most persistent aspect of the culture. African art is art for-its-own-sake but, more strikingly art for-living's-sake. It is man-regarding as well as spirit-regarding. Art has been the main method by which the aesthetic predilections, history and sociology of Africa have been recorded. There are of course known African major works published by A.D. 618-907. Picture writing and other means are known to have been used in recording history in Africa but it is through the arts - material culture, sculpture, music, oral literature and verbal art - that a lot of the African past and so its culture has been coming to light. African archaeology, the visual arts, oral history or tradition therefore need to be given great attention in African cultural studies. In this way, the people will come into contact with the roots and philosophy of the arts, and so with the cultures.

Negro African cultures are currently being rejuvenated through the spirit of cultural revivalism. This will be made even more effective through the accepted strategy of assertion of African cultural identity, which is regarded as an act of liberation. It is the first catalyst to self-determination. The final communication of the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies in Africa reports that assertion of cultural identity implies a firm grasp of the authentically African values which place a people's destiny in their own hands once more. It does not suggest isolationism but rather the placing of relations on the same pedestal for the mutual enrichment of cultures. Thus, the concept of African personality of Ghana and Negritude of Senegal or authenticity of Zaire are really expressions of the idea of assertion of cultural identity and should not be allowed to run riot in the interpretations to which they are subjected by different individuals or peoples.

The accident of history has also influenced the cultures of Africa - dividing cultures under certain circumstances as in the partition of Africa by the European powers after the 1914-1918 War. Under other circumstances, we may see the colonial powers as unifying cultures, as in the case of the visible two cultures of former French and English "regions" of Africa. If there is cultural co-operation, sound cultural universals should evolve in Africa.

In the matter of African art and Europe, we see the remarkable impression Africa has had on European art through the agency of the colonial agents, missionaries and private collectors. Art imparts knowledge and shows the way of life of a people. So creativity in the sphere of art needs to be preserved.

At the final points of our paper we named or reiterated cultural involvements which might help the activation and preservation of art. Sound cultural policies as accepted by the African delegates at the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies and of course the different governments are likely to be useful in the exercise of creativity and preservation of art and therefore, by extension, culture in Africa.

The whole of culture is now recognized as worthy of consideration in social development. Development does not depend on economics only. Economics is only an aspect of development. No social development can be holistic until the culture as a whole is taken into consideration in the development strategies.

NOTES

1. See Quarcoo, A.K. - Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture. Colloquium paper: Black Civilization and the Arts. 1977.
2. The reference is to a well-known story of Governor Hodgson allegedly asking in 1896 that the Golden Stool of Asante should be made available to him to sit on. Obviously, the essence and real significance of the object of art was not comprehended then. To the Asante the stool was more than a mere object. It was the symbol of their solidarity - their soul and very being. It was something more than a throne, or coronation seat, or in modern times, we may say, more than a flag to them.
3. My recent researches on the black stool in what has been called ancestral worship makes me suggest that the ceremonies around the stools are meant to be reverential to a section of the lineage - the dead, rather than worship of them.

See Quarcoo 1972 - The Akan Stool Polity: A kind of political organization. Mouton Press.

Quarcoo 1972 - The lineage stool in socio-political organization of the Akan. Legon Family Papers. 1973.

Quarcoo - Socio-political relevance of chiefship in Ghana. I.A.S. Research Review. Vol. 10.

4. See - "Masks as agents of social control", Sieber 1962 in: Arts, Human Behaviour and African Studies Bulletin, Vol. V, No. 11, 1962.

Refer to song as means of social sanction - among the Dangme, Ga, Akan and Ewe of Ghana. For the Dangme see Processes of Social Control among the Dangme of Ghana. Quarcoo 1965. Northern and Upper Regions of Ghana - Gogge music and praise singers in the princely courts. See Quarcoo 1976 - Exhibition Brochure - "Spotlight" on the North and Upper Regions of Ghana.

5. Reference is to durbars (e.g.) at the close of Adaes in Akan and most festivals in Ghana.
6. Fogg William - Nigerian Images. Lund.
7. cf. The core of the resolutions of the Africa cult in Accra. 1975-1976. Accra.
8. (e.g.) Ghana Government Cultural Policies, Togo, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zaire and other African countries are ready.
9. Schools and Colleges of Art. Suggested Art Education Syllabus for 3-Year Post-Secondary "O" Level Teacher Training. Ghana Education Service. May 1975.
10. Music colleges include the:

Ghana Academy of Music, Winneba.

Advanced Teacher Training College, Winneba.

University of Cape Coast Music Department in the Faculty of Education.

School of Music in the School of Music, Dance and Drama - Institute of African Studies, Legon.

11. cf. Recommendation 19. Final Report Africa Cult 1975-1976.
 12. cf. International Music Rostrum - Africa region with headquarters in the Institute of African Studies, Legon.
 13. Institute of African Studies Development Plan 1969-1974. I.A.S. Publication.
 14. Cultural Policy of Ghana. pp. 43-44.
 15. *ibid.*, pp. 45-46.
 16. *ibid.*, pp. 47-48.
 17. Guidelines for Action Programme of the Arts Council of Ghana. (Arts Council Publication) 1978.
 18. Arts Council of Ghana 1978. p. 7.
 19. Arts Council of Ghana 1978.
 20. See Quarcoo, A.K. (1970): Scottish Religious Studies - Review of Father Kelvin Carroll's Yoruba Religious Carving.
 - 20A. Quarcoo A.K. (1977) "Visual Art and History", Sankota, Ghana, Archaeological Journal.
 21. Note the expansive and complex trading established and operated by the Mende Dyula and Solinke.
 22. Bravman Rene - West African Sculpture.
 23. Sieber and Robin. Paul Tisman collection exhibition.
 24. The Mo belong to the Gur language group but their current political art is Akan in many ways. Hence Bravman is right in suggesting a combination of all the factors - geographical, stylistic, linguistic and even historical factors in stylistic analysis.
 25. As in the Ikami and Kwahu terracotta heads. Relationship between Kwahuland and the Afram plains is demonstrated. Oral tradition from the Afram plains.
- (b) Art objects in the I.A.S. Museum. Akuaba dolls of Kwahu and Asante established stylistic and cultural relationships.

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