

**Book Review**

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## Kathy Curnow's 'The Bright Continent- African Art History': A critical book review

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper was to provide a constructive and critical summary of Kathy Curnow's book 'The Bright Continent- African Art History' to assist students, researchers and educators of African Art History in their study of the History of African Art. As a good reading resource in the field, Curnow's book provides a nuanced understanding of the continent of Africa, its diverse art practice and material culture as well as the biting issues of gender and training regarding traditional and contemporary African art practice. This breathtaking book which was published in mid 2023 is making giant inroads in the African Art scholarship for teaching and research. The authors of this paper subjects the key thoughts of Curnow to a critical discourse and shares their experiential knowledge on the critical issues raised in the book. Although this research was conducted to give a chronological account of the history of Africa, the culture, and various art practices involved, the art practices in the period of Egyptian civilization were not given attention. This is probably due to some controversies revolving around the discourse of Egyptian civilization, which mostly, albeit, erroneously, put Africa in a disadvantaged position. Despite that Eurocentric undertone, the book still remains one of the most detailed and extensive chronological accounts of African art, recently published. It is relevant in the study of art at all levels in the academy.

**Keywords** – African Art History, Art History, African Studies, Indigenous Societies, Sub-Saharan Arts, Visual Arts

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper critically summarizes Kathy Curnow's book 'The Bright Continent- African Art History' to serve as a resource for educators, researchers and students of African Art History. The book was published in March 2023 with four chapters. Each chapter has a title, various themes, and subthemes. The first chapter with the title, 'Orientation to Africa and its Art' encapsulates the General Introduction, Gender, Materials, and Techniques in Traditional Art. This chapter also elaborates on Training and Patronage in Traditional Art. Curnow also used this chapter to highlight on Contemporary African Art, the Materials, and issues revolving around Gender and Training. Another significant area discussed by Curnow is the patronage of contemporary African Art. The second chapter is focused on Analysing and Discussing African Art. These analytical discourses have been classified based on; Elements of design, Principles and considerations of design, Rules for Traditional African Art, Stylistic Analysis, and Contextual Analysis. The third

section of this novel throws more light on various themes that the works revolve around. It goes further to explore the purposes for the creation or the uses of the works. However, Curnow captioned this, 'Themes in African Art'. Under this broader title are themes, and subthemes captured under each of them. These themes are; animals, Coupling Up, Motherhood, Art and Youth Initiation, and Art and Medicine. Other areas explored are; Art and Divination, Art and death, Portraiture, as well as, African Art as Inspiration. The fourth chapter which is the last in the novel discusses, 'The impact of Religion and Hierarchy on African Art'. Areas delved into are; Traditional Religion and Art, Christianity and Art, Islam and Art, as well as Art in nomadic Societies, Art in Small-Scale communities, and Kingdom Based Art.

## **2. CHAPTER 1**

### **Orientation to Africa and its Art**

#### **2.1. General introduction**

This introductory part probes into how people perceive Africa and the factors that shape this mental picture created about the continent. In other words, peoples' positionalities and how that creates various lenses through which Africa is viewed. Such a discourse could raise questions such as: (a) Do people perceive Africa based on their own immersive experiences or by information fed by others? (b) What attributes do people associate with Africa? (c) What does the name Africa conjure? (d) How may the answers to the questions herein be different when it comes to the discourses concerning other continents? All these questions are very important when one tries to explore individual's perspectives and understanding, as well as how they interact with Africa or the world as a whole. In resonance with Curnow's observation, there has been an age-long displacement of Africa's true identity by non-Africans. Metaphorically, these ahistorical perspectives of non-Africans that geographically view Africa as a recently discovered isolated small island, inhabited by uncivilized people.

However, Curnow used a 'Composite map of the Ming Empire' to disprove that misconception. Curnow moreover used imageries in the form of photographs and drawings (maps) to correct this misconception of the true geographical size of the continent, as well as the consistent development that is not in the public domain and hardly talked about in non-African countries. A composite map of the Ming Empire, described as the oldest map discovered, was used to prove the relationship, especially the trade relations between Africa and other continents like Asia and Europe. These trade relations could be traced back to the precolonial times, or possibly to the prehistoric era. However, many discourses concerning Europeans, and other continents' encounters with Africa are limited to the so-called era of the colonial encounter with Africa, which defines periods stretching from the late 15th century to the 20th century. Nevertheless, the history of colonial encounters with Africa seems to ignore the intrusion of the Greeks in the northern territories of Africa in 305 BCE which marked the beginning of the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt. Moreover, the encroachment of the Romans in 30 BC, that ended the Ptolemaic dynasty is also ignored.

Although the African continent was officially shared among the French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Belgians, and English around 1884-85, the encroachment and exploitation started centuries prior to the Berlin conference. This conference was aimed at splitting more organized states and families that resisted colonial oppression or suppression, apart. Sadly, the end of colonialism did not reinstate the precolonial African states, or their governance or principles. In other words, there was a total displacement of African identity in terms of internal geographical boundaries, governance, religion, education, and other systems. The reinstatement of the previous systems was seemingly impossible even after independence since the cultures and the allied practices of the colonies were strongly influenced by that of the colonizers, alas, which has resulted in unimaginable, and irreversible distortions. Foreign languages and curricula continued to serve as a model for all levels of education in the postcolonial period.

A recognized residue of the colonial encounter is the division of the continent into smaller segments of nation-states, as well as linguistic influence, leading to the classification of various states under Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone countries. Apart from the above-mentioned divisions, Curnow (2023) also highlighted another

geographical division of the continent into seven zones namely: North Africa, West Sudan, Upper Guinea Coast, Lower Guinea Coast, Central Africa, South Africa, and East Africa. All these divisions have resulted in the breakup of kingdoms, states, families, and ethnic societies that were formerly together. Each of the sectors herein has a predominant traditional art practice. For instance; masks and figurative sculptures are associated with the upper Guinea Coast, Lower Guinea Coast, and Central Africa, while textiles and body art are associated with Southern Africa. East African countries are tagged with diverse art genres, making it difficult to pinpoint the domineering one.

Interestingly, the traditional figurative art practice of North Africa and the western Sudan zone encountered very strong resistance and opposition due to the spread of the Islamic religion. However, scanty traditional art of this kind can be traced, alas, their art has nearly lost its originality due to constant evolution. Currently, the African continent is made up of fifty-four (54) countries. Each of these countries is inhabited with people of diverse ethnicities, and cultural practices. Some of these ethnic societies are dispersed with some living in other countries. Intermarriages and systems of inheritance had continued to create a more complicated division of these ethnicities, sometimes, making self-identification difficult. These ethnic societies are erroneously being referred to as tribes in many literature, and Curnow strongly opposed that pejorative term since that defines a small band of people living in an isolated area, or a small number of people with nomadic culture. She continued to elaborate that these language families could be compared to that of the Roman Languages, Sino-Tibetan languages, Dravidian languages Germanic languages, et cetera, that define people of the West.

### **2.1.1. How much history does African art have?**

As the languages and other cultural practices vary among ethnic societies, so is the art, in terms of form, meaning, and functions. The history of art in many parts of Africa is very limited due to the mediums used in the production. From Curnow's research, Ethiopia, Sudan, and North Africa are the few areas with an art history traceable or stretching to the prehistoric era. Artworks produced prior to the nineteenth century that have survived are those made of materials that hardly respond to organic deprecation, such as stone, copper-base alloys, and a few other materials. Due to that, there are huge gaps in African art history beyond the 19th century. Sometimes Ethiopia, Egypt, and other North African countries that are recognized for their early civilization are excluded from the history of African art due to the early contact, and the influence of alien cultures and religions. In the literature, the history of African art is mostly centered on Sub-Sahara Africa, especially those in the hinterlands.

The narrative is quite different when it comes to contemporary African art. Comparatively, contemporary African art and traditional African art have a strong relationship in terms of artistic direction, and form. However, functions and patronage have changed. Moreover, in terms of materials, training, or skill acquisition, technological advancement, as well as, exposure to foreign mediums and Western models has resulted in significant adaptations and broader expansions. A deeper exploration of the diverse art forms, materials, and techniques involved in the execution will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **2.2. Gender, materials, techniques in traditional art**

### **The part with roots: Traditional African Art**

#### **Sculpture, Blacksmithing, and Pottery**

The traditional African art practice recognizes gender specificity, and that varies from one society to another. To correct the age-long notion and negativity associated with this division of labor, one must understand that this had nothing to do with the hierarchy of importance, but rather the nature of the medium, strength, and skill required for manipulation, as well as the function of the art piece. For example, sculpture works that require a subtractive approach to create forms, such as stone, wood, bone, and ivory sculptures were restricted to the male division (men). They were in charge of cutting down trees and carving out rocks that would be used for these works. Moreover, blacksmithing and other metal art productions were also restricted to the male gender.

The most common sculptural material in sub-Saharan Africa is wood. The men carvers use simple tools such as adzes and knives to carve out these materials until the desired form is realized. An Ivory which is comparatively not as common as wood is regarded as a luxurious material, however, mostly patronized by the aristocrats. Traditionally, surfaces of carved objects were decorated with extracts or pigments from plants and other natural sources. Sometimes, continuous handling and the sacrificial patina by the owners also change the surface appearance of the works. In terms of the dating of the survived works, it is still difficult to determine the accurate age of the survived artifacts, despite the current radiocarbon dating technique. Obviously, this kind of scientific application, apart from the lack of accuracy, is limited to works produced from living things.

In metal art production, smiting and casting are the most applied techniques traditionally. All these two methodologies require much strength, however, restricted to men. The casting method recognized in many societies in Africa is the lost-wax technique. There are four main stages which are as follows: The first stage is modeling, thus, the creation of the desired form with wax. After, a mould is created around the built form, mostly with clay. After the preparation of the mould, molten metal is poured into it and left to cool and solidify. The mould is then broken off the cast object, and the surface is finished to the desired appearance. In smiting, on the other hand, the metal goes through repeated heating and hammering until the desired form is achieved. Common metals include; bronze, brass, and gold. Metalworks cannot be dated unless a clay residue (core) is left on any part of the work during casting. Possibly, this clay core could be dated using, thermoluminescence (TL-dating).

Another sculpture material commonly used in Africa is clay. This material is taken through modeling with fingers and simple tools. After the desired form is achieved, it is left to dry before it is baked. This technique is referred to as terra cotta. After firing, they either retain the natural color, or immersed in natural dyes, or are coated with natural pigments. Smoking is another common traditional finishing technique applied to clay sculpture and other works/forms from that material. Clay sculptures are mostly done by both men and women, depending on the society, while pottery is restricted to the female gender in most African countries. However, there are a few exceptions such as Mossi, Hausa, Dogon, and a few other societies where men are also allowed in the pottery sector. Thermoluminescent (TL-dating) is used to detect the age of the survived pottery, and other clay works.

### **Architecture**

Architecture is another significant area worth discussing as far as African art is concerned. In the architecture sector, materials, shapes, as well as decorations vary from one society to another. Apart from a few nomadic societies, the construction of architectural structures and the preparation of the materials are restricted to the male gender. Materials mostly used were wood, grass, and clay bricks. Stones were also used in some societies. After the building, paintings and relief decorations were carried out by both men and women depending on the society. These paintings were traditionally done with natural pigments until the introduction of industrial oil and acrylic-based commercial paints.

### **Painting**

Painting is another art genre that has its history traced to the prehistoric era. Some of the surviving works can be found on cave walls, and rock shelters in the Northern and southern parts of Africa. Examples are paintings discovered in Blombos cave dated to 73,000 years, as well as the other San rock paintings. Other prehistoric paintings can be found at Tassili n' Ajjer in Algeria, Tadrart Acacus in Libya, and other regions in and around the Sahara Desert. Apart from the prehistoric works, religious paintings also form the history of painting in Africa. Earlier types can be found in Ethiopia and the Northern part of Africa. These are in the form of panels of paintings, frescos, and those found on illuminated manuscripts and scrolls. Some of these are dated to the 4th century, contemporaneous with the institutionalization of Christianity, and Islam. Paintings are also done on walls, forming part of the architectural structure. This is common practice in many societies in Africa.

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**Textiles**

In textile production, weaving is mostly done by men, while women are mostly in charge of spinning the fibers into yarns. Weaving is done on a traditional loom operated manually. In societies where there are women weavers, their loom is different from that of men. Common textile materials are cotton, wool, silk, raffia, and rayon. Patterns and designs in some fabrics such as kente among the Akans of Ghana are created in the course of weaving, by interweaving the weft and warp yarns in a variety of structured formats that result in diverse forms of designs. Dyeing and stamping are also used, creating decorative motifs and designs on woven fabrics, and that vary from one society to another. Embroidery and sewing techniques are also utilized in the textile sector in Africa and were mostly done by men.

**Beadwork**

Bead making has been part of fashion in Africa as jewelry or elements in clothing. Its history can be traced to prehistoric times when stones, shells, and other natural objects were used. However, the emergence of glass beads making in some African societies could be traced to the 11th to the 15th century. Subsequently, plastic and other materials were also introduced. Beading is practiced by both male and female gender in many societies in Africa.

**Leatherwork**

Leatherwork is one of the oldest art practiced in the African art tradition. Leather art is practiced by both male and female gender, varying from one society to another. It is very common in societies with animal raising or rearing of farm animals as a major occupation. Some of the artifacts produced are; saddles, bags, scabbards, and many others. Leatherworkers employ techniques such as; sewing, appliqué, as well as cut-out decoration to create forms and enhance the visual effects.

**Body Arts**

Body art is among the oldest and most common art practices among many societies in the continent. It takes diverse approaches to alter various parts of the body, from the hair, skin, and even the bone. There are two main categories of body art and are; permanent alterations, and temporary alterations. These body decorations and modifications are carried out for diverse purposes such as communication, of one's status and ethnicity. It could also be for medicinal decorative or cosmetic purposes. The imagery, signification as well and contextual value vary from one society to another.

**2.3. Training and patronage in the traditional art****Apprenticeship**

In the traditional African society, art was studied through an apprenticeship system. This form of training starts from infancy, sometimes with male apprentices staying with their masters, preferably, someone who is not the biological parent of the trainee. This system of education, or training takes a long period, starting with menial jobs, and the complexity of their task increases as the years go by until the person becomes fully equipped with skills to produce works that are identical with that of the master. The trainee gradually rises to an assistant position before graduating as a master. After becoming a master, the person is free to come up with innovative creations in addition to those learned from the master, if the market demands. Formally, the aristocrats and the royals were the main patrons or consumers and commissioned the artists before production. There has been a paradigm shift as a result of the colonial encounter. Traditionally, full-time art professionals were rarely seen, but that has changed over the years.

**Stylistic Consistency**

Since all the apprentices adopted the approach, and style of their masters, the features of their works bear a recognizable identity that makes it difficult to distinguish between the works of members of apprentices under a

particular master. Works produced by a particular group share similarities in terms of proportion and many other features. Apart from similarities shared by members in a particular workshop, there are distinctive features shared by works from the same region or of the same ethnicity. Despite this fact, there are idiosyncratic artists who adopt multi-stylistic approaches and features, through diverse experiences from different regions and societies.

#### **2.4. Contemporary African art: Material, gender, and training**

Contemporary African art from the author's perspective is the category of works that bear traces of colonial experiences. These are works produced via adaptations of foreign materials and styles that attracted different patronage. The colonial encounters moreover, resulted in the adherence to foreign training systems and artistic functionality. This category of art was mostly practiced in the cities, and the author classified this into three namely: Academic and Workshop art, Export art, and Urban/Vernacular art.

##### **Export Art**

These are the works commonly referred to as Tourist art. The target patrons for this art are; foreign buyers, and brokers, who are interested in commissioning larger quantities to export overseas, as well as, tourists and expatriates who visit occasionally. The timeline given by the author for tourists' art is, art produced not later than the 19th century, contemporaneous with the era of colonialism. This period is characterized by the interrogation of some norms associated with gender, function, and patronage since commercialization and commodification became the main focus. Although some contemporary African arts were mainly for foreign patronage, some were produced for local functionality.

##### **Urban Art or Vernacular Art**

This kind of art emerged in the cities and was practiced by artists who had neither undergone traditional art training nor the Western system, although they also learned via apprenticeship. These works comprise of advertising sign paintings, cement sculpture, photography, and other works produced from foreign mediums but mainly for local patronage. This was a male-dominated art practice. This art practice that was initially produced manually has currently embraced technological modifications, however, requires lesser physical strength making it male dominated area. The artists (especially painters) mostly incorporate text in the composition to elaborate what they intend to convey. They render the idea in photorealism or caricature form, and these are traits lacking in the traditional art practice. Sculptors in this category create memorial statues for various purposes and are mainly made of cement. Although many of the urban sculptors did not take any advanced courses in art academy, they tried to achieve accuracy in physiognomies, and anatomical proportions. Urban architecture is inspired by the Brazilian style or colonists. Some are multi-story buildings, constructed in cement bricks/blocks, with metal roofs. Presently, the use of cement, and metal panels as building materials has become ubiquitous both in less and more urbanized areas in Africa.

##### **Workshop and Academic Art**

The nineteenth century marked the emergence of art-related courses in some institutions in Africa. This provided an opportunity for individuals interested in pursuing any of the art disciplines in schools and in universities. In the 20th century, some of these individuals traveled overseas to take academic art programmes in other countries. This is contemporaneous with the establishment of workshops and foreign residencies, to train people in various Western art genres, such as; painting, sculpture, et cetera. Some of the works produced by the artists in various workshops were exhibited in various countries outside Africa. The workshop artists were supplied with various western materials, tools, and equipment, such as; oil-paint, canvas, brushes, et cetera. In the academy, Western models, and curricula were used for all art programmes such as; painting, sculpture, ceramics, and architecture. Moreover, no gender restrictions were encouraged in the academic art sector. The boundaries of contemporary art have currently

expanded to incorporate installation art, performance pieces, and multimedia works. The 21st century art and the contemporaneity have blurred the boundaries of art from Africa, and that from other continents. There has been fluidity in the global art practice due to globalization, and intercultural cohesion, through residencies, fellowships, and competitions. This has heightened the progress of many African artists of today and also increased their prominence in the global art world. Despite the influence of foreign cultures, there is still Africanism intentionally portrayed in some works by artists of African descent.

### **2.5. Patronage in contemporary African art**

Contemporary African art is marketed to different categories of patrons who either buy directly from the artists or indirectly. For indirect sales, agents, and dealers, devise their own terms and conditions related to sharing of proceeds from any transaction. These agents could be brokers who commission works from artists, gallery owners, auctioneers et cetera. Different dealers have a different percentage of commission to be deducted from sales.

#### **Vernacular art: Signboards**

Signboard making is among the common contemporary art practices in Africa. The main patrons of this kind of art are business owners. They were produced to provide directions and advertise various businesses. However, foreign art dealers and museums became interested and began to collect them for different purposes. Due to that, some sign artists such as Cheri Samba of Congo and a few others made a complete transition from advertisement sign paintings to contemporary paintings purposely for collectors and museums.

#### **Unusual Success without Formal Training**

The creation of large installations that target museum patronage is an uncommon practice among African contemporary artists who have not had any formal training. However, there are few artists who took such an unusual path. One such, recognized artist is Romuald Hazoume. He is an artist from Yoruba, recognized for creating large-scale installations for foreign patronage. Some of his notable works are made from plastic jerry cans and assembled to create a crowd of masks-like faces.

#### **Workshop-Trained Artists with Foreign and Local Clientele**

There are other contemporary artists who had their training in various workshops and are known for the use of Western approaches in their artistic creations. One such artist is Jimo Buraimoh. These artists create works that attract the attention of the government, the elites, as well as corporate entities. Their works include mosaics, sculptures, paintings et cetera.

#### **University and Polytechnic-Trained Artists with local clientele**

In previous decades, due to the limitation of galleries that host reviewed exhibitions in many parts of Africa, some of the locally academically trained artists had no global recognition and clientele as compared to their Western contemporaries. The livelihood of many of these artists mainly depended on the local clientele. Most of them depended on shops in hotels and some tourist centers for marketing their work. The current globalization and the advancement of technology have brought about a significant transformation in terms of the visibility and marketing of artworks.

#### **The Locally Trained Academic Exception**

Although many of the locally trained academic artists found it difficult to climb on the international art stage, there were few who were able to make it to the top. One of these exceptions is El Anatsui, from Ghana. With his recycled installation, he attracted international attention and hence has received prestigious awards such as the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Venice Biennale, and many other awards.

### **African Artists with Overseas Training**

Although not all, many of the Artists of African descent who had their academic training outside the continent stood a chance of gaining notable recognition, due to the exposure to the current trends and discourses in the art world. Those who continue to reside in the Western states have the opportunity to partake in residencies and esteemed exhibitions that increase their chance to maneuver their way to the top, as compared to the locally trained artists of African descent. One such artist is Yinka Shonibare, who through the reflections of colonialism and racial interactions has lifted the status of African art, recognizably, through installations of mannequins, dressed in wax print.

## **3. CHAPTER 3**

### **Themes in African art**

#### **3.1. Animal**

Animal imagery in traditional African art is embedded with symbolic connotations rather than mere representations of the natural world. These can serve as a metaphor to represent the status or attributes of the user. Some of these animals are leopards, elephants, porcupines, et cetera. Some reptiles and birds are also used in diverse representations. Abstracted animal imagery or non-realistic representations are in the works produced after prehistoric times, in comparison with petroglyphs and paintings discovered on cave walls, mostly around the Sahara. This clearly indicates a transformation from realistic representation to abstractions, which is comparable to the transformation from classicism to modernism in Western art history.

#### **Sahara Petroglyphs and Paintings**

Unlike the recent past and some current animal renditions in African art, the oldest discovered African art forms dating from 10,000 – 6000 BCE, portray animals in more naturalistic renditions. These prehistoric works are found on cave walls, and rock surfaces in the region around the Sahara, and are in the form of paintings, and petroglyphs. The animals in these compositions are both domestic and wild animals, depicted with sophisticated conceptual approaches. The continuous intensity of desertification drove the settlers who made these works, southwards. Moreover, the latter arrival of the Berbers in these regions distorted the naturalistic representational art tradition. Geometric representation became a common practice and subsequently influenced the entire art tradition in the region and possibly beyond.

#### **South African Rock Paintings: Game Pass shelter**

Rock art in the Southern part of Africa is predominantly paintings. The San people who are the indigenous population are the creators of these works. This had been a practice from prehistoric times, continuing to the 19th century when the white settlers took over their lands. However, there are some San people currently inhabiting areas in Namibia, Botswana, and some regions in the southern part of Africa. The animal imagery in the art in this region is predominantly, species of antelope, rendered naturalistically with diverse postures. The ubiquity of antelopes in the San rock paintings is associated with potency, and that makes them significant in that socio-cultural environment.

#### **The Ciwara of Mali's Bamana People**

The Bamana ethnic society is among the larger Mende-speaking people of Mali. They are known for the use of animal imagery in their art tradition. Despite the impact of Islamicization that significantly displaced a greater aspect of their culture, the Ciwara persistently remains their distinctive identity. This is an image of an antelope, but unlike that of the San people in South Africa, Bamana renders their image in abstraction, in the form of a headpiece, and used by male masqueraders for fertility rituals. This ritual is performed in honour of a supernatural being (half-animal, half-human) that taught their forefathers agriculture (how to farm). The ritual masquerade performance is carried out prior to planting, and prior to harvesting. Although they are commonly referred to as Ciwara or Chiwara masks, they are not actually masked but rather carried on the head with the support of the attached basketry cap. The ritual

was formerly performed in the fields, however, it later, expanded to the cities and towns where they became a form of entertainment, until recently when the field performance diminished.

The Ciwara crests vary in size, form, and style, typifying the artists and the region where they are produced. Moreover, they also vary in terms of gender. Thus, there are male crests and female crests which are clearly differentiated by the genital organ. Although Ciwara is primarily a wooden sculpture, feathers, metal, and other materials are sometimes incorporated, in diverse stylistic forms. Apart from the antelope which plays a central role, features of some animals such as; chameleon, aardvark, pangolin, pan few others are reflected in the decorative designs on some of the Ciwara pieces. Human figures are also sometimes introduced in the artistry. Apart from the Bamanas, this crest is also used in the neighbouring societies such as; Malinke, Wassalu, Marka, and Minianka societies. The Chiwara is one of the iconic African art pieces and has attracted a global collection.

### **Animals of the Present: Millie Bester's The Dogs of War and Trojan Horse**

This is an assemblage form of artistry made of machine parts, as well as metallic objects such as; batteries, tin cups, battered guns, et cetera, conglomerated to form an image of a dog. These particular contemporary works were created in commemoration of an incident that took place in South Africa around 1998 when some white policemen set their dogs on some black immigrants. Willie Bester used these as a symbolic representation of apartheid in South Africa and the racial segregation that put the black natives in a perpetual disadvantaged position. Other works from Bester that also seemed to advocate for anti-apartheid are Trojan Horse and many others produced from found objects and conceptualized as reminiscences of different events in the apartheid period in South Africa.

### **3.2. Coupling up**

This category of works encompasses various artifacts that represent male-female couples or works that are used as gifts for secret admirers. These could be figurative or symbolic patterns that represent relationships (either marriage or courtship). Such artifacts may vary from one society to another and could be in any form or material. Among the Akans of Ghana, female partners occasionally receive wooden combs from their male partners while in courtship or marriage. Another example is beaded necklaces that are made by young women for their male partners in the Zulu society in the southern part of Africa. These artworks sometimes have symbolic decorations underpinned with diverse philosophical interpretations. These gifts are sometimes kept unused. It is one of the practices that has existed through the colonial and post-colonial eras though has faced constant evolution and expiation. Currently, friends, family members, and other loved ones offer gifts to married couples during and after marriage. In the 20th century, the locally produced artifacts that were traditionally used were replaced by imported domestic equipment. Apart from gifts, body art such as costumes, coiffures (hairstyle), and even body ornamentations form part of art that is used to communicate marital status or male-female relationships in different societies in Africa.

The concept of a pair of male and female couple is not limited to only humans and other creatures in the physical world. Among all African societies, this concept of a couple extends to all that exists in the metaphysical world. The complementary genders are also portrayed in representational form dedicated to the ancestors and deities to convey the idea of completeness. Marriage is considered a symbol of adulthood and continuity of life in both the physical and metaphysical world. Africans believe that males and females are created to complement each other, however, this gender complementarity is portrayed in every aspect of the art tradition and the generic diversified cultural practices among all societies in Africa.

### **Rites of Courtship, Ceremonial Displays of Wedded Bliss: The Nomadic Fulani of Northern Nigeria, Niger, and Neighbouring Regions**

Apart from the visual art, there are distinctive courtship ritual performances carried out with special costumes, and accessories in various societies. Examples are the practices of the Fulani people in Northern Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and a few other neighboring countries in West Africa. The Fulani, just like members of some other societies in Africa,

put on special jewelry around the neck, wrist, and arms. They moreover, put on facial tattoos while performing various rituals that signify the statuses of both the male and female performers. Some of their performances are in the form of ritual combat where verbal and non-verbal (physical blows) exchanges are made with counterparts from another community. This endurance combat exchange known as *Sharo*, assists the young females looking for husbands to make the right choice, thus, men who can endure the blow of life. However, most of these traditional seemingly violent performances have currently been banned in various societies, since they sometimes result in death and various unexpected terrible deformities.

There are other forms of endurance practices that do not involve physical blows. An example is *Gerewol* in the Wodaabe Fulani society. It involves repetitive exposure to the direct sun as the performer continuously dances daily throughout the week. Similarly, *Gerewol* is also performed for courtship, marriage, divorce, and remarriage. However, the young men pay special attention to their appearance by putting on attractive costumes and accessories, as well as makeup, and intricate plaited hairstyles to enhance their natural features. Although this performance does not involve physical blows, there are verbal attacks from the old women from opposing clans/lineages that should be endured by the young men during performances. Both married and unmarried women who often display their wealth through clothing (attire) and belongings in calabashes have the liberty to make choices of men they are attracted to, either to dally or elope with.

### **Baule Spirit Spouses of Côte d'Ivoire**

Baule people of Cote d'Ivoire believe that there is prior existence in the spirit world for every human before migrating into the physical realm. However, every human has a family, including, spouses and children in this metaphysical world. In the Baule society, infertility is often associated with the jealousy of the spirit spouse. As a solution to the infertility problem, this spirit spouse is represented with the calved wooden sculptural figure, which is kept in the physical partner's bedroom, and presented with sacrificial offerings to be mollified (appease the anxiety). These sacrificial offerings include perfumes, eggs, coins, et cetera. Every week, one night is dedicated to this representational figure. A figure representing a male spirit spouse is known as '*Blole bla*' and the female spirit spouse is referred to as '*Blole bian*'. The influence of colonialism has significantly impacted these practices.

The Baule spirit spouse figure, just like other Akan sculptures possessed features such as a ringed neck, conjoined eyebrows, protruding buttocks, et cetera. These works are enriched with some characteristics attributed to an ideal husband or ideal wife according to their tradition. French colonization that shifted the concept of the ideal husband or wife also resulted in an evolution of imagery characterized by these pieces. Formerly, wealth was associated with one's success in farming. However, colonialism shifted the attention to professions that required Western education or literacy, as well as trading with the French. For the artists to immerse themselves in this ideological shift, the spirit spouse figures were also furnished with the current criteria for idealness. This is evident in the clothing and other foreign imageries possessed by, or that ornament these calved figures. This shift was not limited to the outward depictions, but also the functionality of the work, hence, resulting in variations in terms of patronage.

Apart from the spirit spouse figure, the Baule artists also represent nature spirits with sculpture pieces variously portrayed as inspired or revealed to them in dreams by the possessed spirits. Analogous to the spirit spouse representations, the nature spirit figures are offered sacrifices and honored. Despite the similarities in appearance, the differences between the spirit spouses and nature spirits could possibly be distinguished in terms of functionality, hence, the clientele.

### **Love in the Age of AIDS**

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) arrived in Africa in around the 1980s and quickly spread across the continent, affecting mostly the Southern part of Africa. To prevent its spread, there were diverse sensitization campaigns from the health sector and other fields in which art was. As a contribution from the art sector, concepts that revolve around the spread, consequences, and protective measures became a leitmotif in the works of African

graphic designers and urban painters. These works included banners, posters, billboards, et cetera. An example of such an artist is Cheri Samba, from the Democratic Republic of Congo. There were other numerous artists across the continent who used their creative potential as sensitization tools. Most of these works were figurative, and salaciously rendered in realism/naturalism or a caricature form. Most of these works were incorporated with inscriptions (text) in the form of cautionary messages to elaborate the communication.

### 3.3. Motherland

#### Training to be Mothers

In many African societies, fertility and the number of children a woman has elevated her status and respect in the society. Sometimes barren (infertile) women suffer mockery from friends and acquaintances. In the absence of the husband, women depend on their children, especially in their old age. However, those without children do not get the needed support when their husband dies. Because of stigmatisations associated with barrenness, there are various practices that serve as a cure or prevention especially for the female gender prior to marriage or during marriage. As part of these practices, there are doll-like sculptural figures that are specially presented to the female victims to care for as if it is a real babies. Among some societies in Tanzania, this fertility figure is referred to as “*mwana hiti*”. *Mwana hiti*, unlike the “*Akua ba*” among the Asante of Ghana, are solely female figures and are presented to girls going through initiation right to enter adulthood (prior to marriage).

#### Searching for Motherhood

In some African societies, there are masquerade performances carried out with the intention of enriching the fertility of those who come into contact with them. Among the Baga, the masquerade that epitomizes fertility is known as *D'mba* and is performed with an art piece that has imagery symbolizing the completion of womanhood. *D'mba* has a general fertility association that stretches beyond human fertility, hence including all aspects of agriculture. Another example is the *Gelede* masquerade among the Yoruba and Makende, which is performed with a headpiece and body plate with belly and breast. The protruding belly represents a late pregnancy, depicted with some verisimilitude. There are also figurative sculptural works that are produced purposely to cure infertility or provide fulfillment through maternity. An example is the *nkisi* figure among the Kongo and *akua ba* among the Akan of Ghana. These figures are dedicated to women who find it difficult to conceive. They are exhorted to take care of them until conception and successful delivery. Colonialism resulted in a significant evolution of this tradition in some societies in Africa. In the colonial era, when Catholicism was introduced in Congo, representational sculptural images of St. Anthony, holding infant Christ became common in Catholic churches and individual homes. Many Congolese Catholics perceived him as a focal point of prayers of women who sought conception because it was believed, his intercession could cure barrenness.

#### Parturition

A concept that seems atypical of those commonly associated with African art is the depiction of childbirth. Despite its rarity, some have been discovered Among Igbo of Nigeria, Zombo of Angola, and Jenne-Jeno in Mali. These take diverse forms, poses, and materials. Unfortunately, their functions or the purpose of their creation remains unknown, although is believed to have been for varied ritual practices.

#### Mother and Child

Mother and child or maternity depictions are very common in the African art tradition. There are variations in pose, material, as well as function. Some of the common poses discovered are; the child held in the arms, the child resting on the lap, sometimes, breastfeeding, and some are depictions of a child being carried on the mother's back. Some of these sculptural works are for ritual performances to welcome a newborn baby. An example is the Bamileke maternity figure used for rituals for newborn twins. Some of these works were also created in memory of a great

female ancestor in a family or society. Among the Senufo of Cote d'Ivoire, some sculptures of a nursing mother are dedicated to a newly initiated *polo* man. These sculptural pieces are being honored, since they represent a great female deity.

### 3.4. Art and Youth Initiation

#### Youth Initiation and Associated Practices

Some African societies in Central, South, and part of West Africa organize initiation rites for the youth which prepare them for adulthood. These rites are associated with different genres of art, including; body costumes and accessories, and other body decorations. Sculptural works, music, and dance, as well as masquerade performances variously play a significant role in these transitional rites. The cohort of initiates undergoes diverse training and exercises that cleanse them to be fully matured. These exercises depend on one's gender, however, there are separate camps for each gender, mostly, with the male isolated from the larger community. For the female initiates, some societies practice excision, albeit, currently abolished, and other body enhancements. They are also trained in domestic tasks and related matrimonial duties. The male initiates, on the other hand, experience circumcision, as well as matrimonial duties for men. They are also trained in war and hunting prowess. Moreover, vocational, and oratorical skills as well as history also form part of the process. After this educational and transitional period, they are reintroduced to the community, sometimes awarded with some mnemonic items.

#### Chokwe Male Initiation in Angola, Zambia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo

Although Chokwe people are currently found in three countries, before the division of the African continent among the Western colonizers, during the Berlin conference, Chokwe formerly formed part of the Lunda empire. In this society, the abrupt catchment of the young male to be initiated was carried out by masqueraders. The target age group for the "*mukanda*" (initiation) was about 8-15 years old and was performed in a fearful place away from their familiar environs. The masquerades are variously crafted with varied materials, portraying imageries of human, animal, as well as unfamiliar forms, that represent ancestors, as well as protective and aggressive spirits. Once the boys are sent to the camp, they are subjected to absolute discipline. They are taken through circumcision, war and occupational training, sex education, as well as local history and some esoteric systems. During that period, many secrets were made privy to the initiates. Both the humanoid and non-humanoid masks and the associated costumes are produced and kept at the camp. When they are reintroduced in their respective communities, they no longer sleep in their mothers' houses since they are considered adults after this transitional period.

#### Female Initiation among Cross River Peoples, Nigeria

These include societies in south-eastern Nigeria and South-western Cameroon. Among them are Ejagham, Efik, Efut Boki, and Ibibio, as well as some Ijo and Igbo people. This female initiation unlike the Chokwe male, is carried out at the initiate's home. However, the family prepares a special room for the initiate's seclusion. The target age for the commencement is about 12 or 13 years and the duration takes months or sometimes several years. This process formally starts with excision which has currently been banned. Throughout the period, the initiates are excluded from active chores. They are served with healthy meal and are encouraged to sleep, and that subsequently fattens their body, and enhance their beauty. They are pampered with massage and body decorations. They are taught a particular form of dance which serves as an exercise for them. Moreover, as a preparation towards motherhood, they are taking through sex education, and other matrimonial duties. After the seclusion, the maidens are taken out with all kinds of adornments. They walk through the marketplace in the company of younger female relatives, who fan, and cover them with parasols to protect them from direct sun glare. They become mysterious objects of incomparable beauty, and ideal womanhood, attracting admiration and suitors. Forms of art that are involved in this rite are; dance, body painting, hair design, jewellery, and other body adornments, especially for the female gender. The idealness of the maidens forms part of the concept in the local art tradition. There are representational dolls skilfully crafted with

an emphasis on the hips, and thighs, furnished with imageries that portray beauty such as intricate coiffures. There are also masks and headpiece crests that are made and used by both males and females in society for performances on various occasions. Imageries of this costume and the associated artworks have been a source of inspiration for the local artists up to this contemporary era.

### **Male and Female Initiation in the Guinea/Sierra Leone/Liberia Region**

Ethnic societies in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea have initiation rites for both male and female gender. Just like many ethnic societies in Africa, there are distinctive societies for men and women. However, the initiation serves as a transition or spiritual birth into the men's or women's society. The target age to be initiated into the Poro, the men's society, ranges from 8 and 14. The women's society which is known as "*Sande*" (in the Mende) or Bondo or Bundu (for Temne) targets girls closer to the puberty stage. Ethnic societies in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea, unlike the Cross River states in Nigeria and Cameroon, both boys and girls are sent to camps away from their communities for initiation. However, there are separate camps for male and female initiates. But similar to the Cross River people, each group of initiates has varied ages since the initiations are not held annually.

### **Poro of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea**

The initiation process for the poro commences with circumcision. When wounds are healed, they are taken through the traditional education system, encompassing, occupational training, family management, medicine, history, and some esoteric knowledge. There are diverse art forms involved in this process, and examples are music and dance, as well as various masquerades distinctive to ethnicities. Most of the masquerades do not include wooden masks, however, variously created with materials such as leather, raffia, and some fabrics. The masquerades include headpieces and a costume decorated with mirrors and cowries. There are also talismanic amulets and other accessories decorating their bodies. Some of these masquerades are *gdini*, *goboi*, and *nafali*. Among the Mende societies, the only wooden mask currently recognized with the *poro* is *gongoli*. There are other masks in some ethnic societies but considered minor entertainment spirits. Such are; *gela*, *gbetu*, and a few others. Among the Toma of Guinea, there is a wooden mask known as, *landau*, representing a mythical ancestor, and is responsible for the catchment of the boys to be initiated. This custom is being practiced to date.

### **Sande and Bondo/Bundu of Sierra Leone and Liberia**

Sierra Leone and Liberia have two female secret societies and are; *Sande*, among the Mende, and *Bondo* (*bundu*) among the Temne and Bullom as well as a few ethnic societies. These female societies initiated girls at the puberty stage until 2007 when that was changed to 18 years for the initiates to be mature enough to have consent on the excision. There are female masquerades that escort the initiates to the camp, and back to the community after completion. Unlike the male society, the escort is not done in a fearful manner. The mask worn by the female masquerades covers the entire head. However, the necks of the masks are overly thick, so that the head of the user can enter. Some features associated with these female masks are; a creased neck, a tiny mouth, and large ears, inculcating into the initiate, the importance of listening more than speaking. Moreover, a broad forehead portrays honesty and generosity, while downcast eyes symbolize modesty. Just like poro men's society, *sande* women's society also has a special mask for masquerade performances, when a chief's child is being initiated. This special mask is decorated with a European-style crown, as an influence of the colonial encounters. On top of the crown is a miniature parasol, as a royal symbol among the Asante Kingdom of the present day Ghana. This symbol serves as a footprint left by the Asantehene (Asante King) who lived in exile in Sierra Leone, before being relocated to the Seychelles Islands.

### Other Aspects of Youth

Depiction of children as the main subject is uncommon in the traditional art of Africa. Most of the infants in African art are those in company with older women to depict the idealness of a mother and other concepts related to womanhood, fertility et cetera. Contrary to contemporary African art, some depictions of children or infants become the cynosure of admiration and subject matter, conveying messages of contemporary significance. Examples of such works are that of Yinka Shonibare, titled, "champagne kids" and others that depict children on their own or as the subject. Analogous to that of Peju Alatise's "Flying Girls", "High horse", "Orange scarf goes to Heaven", and many others. The depictions of children in contemporary art mostly convey messages that form part of the current socio-cultural, and political discourses around the globe. Apart from these two artists mentioned herein, there are many contemporary African artists from various countries who depict children to convey varied messages.

### 3.5. Art and Medicine

The Western interpretation of the phrase "African medicine" goes beyond the pharmaceutical preparation of some substances in a laboratory to form a mixture of compounds, that are processed into pills, capsules, syrup, or injection. Although the concept of medicine, as well as the African medicine in the Western context, cannot ignore the fact that all are preparations of efficacious substances from natural or artificial sources, there are variations in the preparation, resulting forms, and the processes of administration. One must know that medicine as an English word also defines substances prepared and variously administered with the help of some supernatural powers to effect change. Linguistically, various ethnicities in Africa have varied words that differentiate these preparations based on their function and how they are administered.

Although there are some decoctions and poultices that could be traced to the botany, and other natural sources and are used purposely to change health conditions, there are others with functionalities isolated from health. Other functions or uses of these preparations derived from the mentioned sources include; medicine that can make someone impervious to bullets, those that can make someone invisible, medicines applied to dispose of enemies, and many more. Other materials commonly found in such medicines include; animal skin, horns, teeth, metallic items, claws, and many more. These are prepared with diverse approaches and used or applied in a peculiar way to achieve the desired results. These preparations are applied in diverse ways including bathing, rubbing, and tying up around the neck, waist, and other parts of the body. There are others that are inhaled, blown in the air, or sprinkled. Some of the applications incorporate recitations and incantations. Sometimes a spiritual person need to be consulted to guide the user through peculiar procedure, as well as a revelation of some practices and things that must be avoided in order not to contaminate or prevent the effectiveness of the medicine.

#### Bamana Art and Medicine: the Komo mask

Apart from the *chiwara*, the *komo* headpiece is another recognized animal-like headpiece used in the Bamana ethnic society. However, unlike the *chiwara*, the features of the *komo* headpiece cannot be associated with a single animal, nor can it be solely associated with animals in a single category, or environment. Komo headpiece is characterized by real antelope horns, porcupine quills, bird feathers (noticeably; vulture, guinea fowl, hornbill), wild boar tusk, and many other features that can be linked with other creatures in different habitats.

Continuous sacrifices and residues of medicines create patina, and texture that do not invite or encourage touching. These masks are used with costumes made from hand-woven cloths decorated with feathers and many other animal parts for medicinal purposes. The *komo* headpiece possesses *nyama* (a spirit in all living and some non-living things). Its execution requires sexual abstinence.

These are produced and used by blacksmiths who also double as cavers in the Bamana, or the generic Mende society. Blacksmiths are highly esteemed in society due to their role as diviners and medical experts. They constitute the membership of the *komo* men's society and their wives are potters. In spite of the alien religious influences in sub-Saharan Africa, *komo* still remain active, and they see to the safety of the society. This practice extends beyond

the geographical boundaries of Mali, as the Tagwa Senufo in Burkina Faso is also recognized with the komo masquerade tradition. Komo masks (headpieces) are mostly buried after the owner's death.

There are other artifacts associated with Komo apart from the headpiece, and one of them is *the boli* altar. Comparatively, this is also characterized by ambiguous and mysterious features, such as that of the headpiece. In the Bamana society, both farmers and blacksmiths form the hunters association, who formerly doubled as warriors. Due to the possible encounters with the physical and spiritual dangers associated with their profession, hunters protect themselves with medicines prepared by blacksmiths and are sown in leather and other materials, forming talismans such as amulets, and many other accessories. These traditional arts and cultural practices have had a significant influence on the contemporary art practice in Mali. Artists such as Abdoulaye Konate and many others use the hunters' tunics and the associated decorations, as well as other art practices as inspiration, albeit, with contemporary relevance.

### **Nkisi of the Kongo Peoples**

Beliefs in supernatural powers as well as spirits possessed by the living and the dead have greatly influenced the production of art in Kongo. Artworks produced for protection, as well as in honour of these spirits are known as *nkisi*. Some of the *nkisi* (medicine) works are figurative with cavities created to house a prepared ingredient that assists in the invocation of spirits to occupy the artifact prepared for it. Some of these medicinal ingredients are also used as decorations for the carved figures.

There are also non-figurative works made from diverse items/materials, variously assembled together. The materials and the approaches for the assemblage as well as the forms created varied according to the function. These materials include; feathers, mirrors, nails, and many other materials from both natural and artificial sources. When this abstract form is created, apart from its spiritual connotations, the external features also have various symbolic meanings.

### **3.6. Art and Divination**

There are various ways through which different societies tap into the invisible realm to determine the causes of problems that seem impossible to solve through physical means. In African societies, there are specialists who are consulted when one wants to enquire about happenings in the unseen sphere. For one to become a diviner in Africa, one is required to undergo training for a period, mostly by staying with a master or an established diviner.

To be able to access a spiritual world, the diviner uses art objects such as sculptures, and artifacts produced from hides, leather, and many other materials. The diviners in Kuba in the Democratic Republic of Congo use friction oracle, referred to as "*itombwa*", which is a form of carving. These could take an image of a dog, crocodile, elephant, and many other animals. There are sacrificial offerings in collaboration with incantations and recitations, that help the diviner to chance on the information, or access revelations by the spirits.

Moreover, Chokwe people in Angola, Zambia, and Congo utilize baskets and some other containers filled with both natural and artificial objects in the performance of divinations. When these objects are tossed, their arrangements as they touch the ground convey peculiar information that can be read/understood, and interpreted by the diviner.

### **Senufo Divination in Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso**

Contrary to many African ethnic societies, the Senufo divination is practiced by female diviners. In resonance with that of many African societies, Senufo believes that nature spirits inhabit the world with human beings. However, for one to live healthily or successfully, it is advisable to establish a working relationship with these spirits. These spirits have the power to bless or to inflict harm/problems. When they are in conflict with humans due to some immoral practices on the side of man, such as; unsanctioned sexual contacts of matrilineage, they must be mollified and persuaded to re-establish friendly relationships. Due to the Senufo people's value for twins, especially, male-

female twins, and the mythology as progenitors of the human race, the “*sendobele*” (diviners) use twin images during the divination process.

### **Ifa Divination Arts among the Yoruba of Nigeria and Benin Republic**

Among the divination practices of Yoruba, *Ifa* is considered the most accurate practice. This involves the display of a number of artifacts with diverse value, and read meanings or interpretations connected to one’s success. They sometimes also use numerous non-art objects to explore interpretations of phenomena, based on odd and even numbers. Some of the artifacts involved are representations of human heads, wooden trays (opon ifa), and tappers (iroke ifa). They also use other figurative works in the form of both humans and animals in their divination practices. This practice is also common among the Edo, Fon, Isoko, Nupe, Itsekiri, and other neighbouring ethnic societies in the Benin Republic.

### **3.7. Art and Death**

In the traditional African societies like many other societies in other continents, death is not considered as the end of life, but rather a transition to the spiritual world. It is also believed that the deceased are reincarnated into their own families. However, those who have not been reincarnated remain as ancestors. Immoral behaviour by the living could incur the wrath of the ancestors, which could physically be manifested in the form of sickness and other kinds of misfortunes or even death. On the contrary, good or decent behaviour invites ancestral blessings. In times of misfortunes, due to ancestral anger, divinations are used to reveal the exact cause. These practices are performed at the gravesite or ancestral altars or some artifacts produced as abodes for ancestors, an example being, the ancestral stools among the Asantes of Ghana. Various sacrifices are performed with incantations and libations as communication with the ancestors for their forgiveness.

### **Coffins**

Due to the value attached to death as a transition to the spiritual world, funerals are performed in honour of the deceased. Artworks associated with death include coffins, various masquerade performances, as well as sculptures and textile works. Currently, fancy and luxurious coffins have been part of many ways of honouring the dead. After the burial grave sculptures and decorations on the tomb/grave have also been part of the contemporary art practice in many societies in Africa. Aside from the tomb sculptures and the coffin, there are other art objects associated with the dead. Most of the Akan people in Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire create terracotta pots for funerals and kept in a “place for pots” (asensie). The Asantes among the Akan ethnic societies also produce terracotta heads (portraits) for the highly ranked members of society. In the Dogon of Mali, funerary rites are associated with masquerade performances. This involves masks, costumes, and some accessories that decorate the masqueraders. Among the Yoruba and the neighbouring societies in the Benin Republic, Egungun ancestral masquerades are performed to escort the spirit of the deceased to the spiritual world.

### **3.8. Portraiture**

#### **What constitutes a portrait?**

Before the introduction of photography in Africa, there were traditional forms of portraiture in many African societies. Some of these works were realistic representations of people while others were portrayed in abstractions that do not replicate any individual. Among the Asante from the larger Akan society, memorial heads (mma) were produced to represent the royals, and other prominent personalities, while the Yoruba use ibeji figures. Many African portraits bear some markers as indications of those they represent. Similarly, rulers of the Kuba Kingdom as well as the leaders of Kalabari Ijo were represented in figurative portrait works.

Portraiture in Africa has significantly evolved due to the influence of photography and other Western art practices. Due to this foreign art and cultural influences, contemporary portraiture in Africa now includes life-size and monumental pieces in the form of sculpture, painting, mosaic, and other forms of art. An example is Nelson Mandela's monumental statue in South Africa, as well as the portraits of the past kings and queens on display in the Asante Royal Museum in Kumasi, the capital of Asante in Ghana.

### 3.9. African Art as Inspiration

African art has been a source of inspiration for Western art since the colonial era, and even beyond. Euro-American modernism which marked a significant transformation in Western art history serves as a shred of evidence of the influential role played by African art in Western art history. When the African artworks found space in Western museums, albeit, through looting and other illicit means, they became a source of inspiration for many European artists. Notably, that marked a transformation from Greco-Roman classicism, domineering with realism to more abstract and conceptual art. Apart from the forms created, there were also significant transformations in the medium and the approach to the execution of art. Mixed media and the incorporation of found objects that became a significant strand in Dadaism, Fluxus, and conceptual art, contemporaneous with the Modernist period had long been characterized by the art of Africa.

## 4. CHAPTER 4

### 4.1. Traditional Religion and Art

Comparable with diverse art practices in various ethnic societies across the globe, the traditional art of Africa reflects the socio-cultural, as well as the religious practices in the society of its origin. Every African society has a belief in the existence of the Creator God, as well as deities and spirits who have the power to bless or curse. There is a belief in the ancestors and the existence of spirits world. All these religious beliefs and the perception of the world around us have had a great influence on the art practice in numerous ethnicities, variously executed or practiced based on functionality. Nonetheless, the colonial encounters and the associated socio-religious practices have greatly impacted the traditional religion, hence, the art practices in various ethnic societies across the continent of Africa.

Two main alien religions that continue to squeeze the traditional African religious systems are Christianity and Islam. Although some people/societies continue to adhere to the principles of both traditional and any of these foreign religions, some however, have completely rejected the traditional religion. This has significantly negatively impacted the associated art practices, sometimes leading to a complete diminish or disappearance of this aspect of culture.

Linguistically, some local names are associated with the High God, and some appellations are still used to represent the Christian High God. For example, Edo of Nigeria refers to the High God as *Osanobua*, and that is still used to represent the Christian God, despite the diversified or contrasting perceptions of this God. For example, while the Christian religion holds the belief that the High God has only one child, thus, a son, named Jesus Christ, *Osanobua* among the Edo is believed to have three children, namely; *Obiemwen* (in charge of farming), *Olokun* (lord of the sea), and *Ogiuwu* (lord of death).

The Bwa of Burkina Faso and South-eastern Mali are among the ethnic societies that continue to merge their traditional religious practices with Islam and Christianity. The name given to the High God the creator is "Difini" or "Dobweni". There are various masquerade performances and other art practices in honour of this God, and other deities, as well as the ancestors.

Among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria and the neighbouring societies in the Benin Republic, High God is referred to as *Oludumare*. He is called upon during periods of distress. Lesser spirits, such as ancestors, and the pantheon of deities known as *Orisha* also assist humanity in diverse aspects of life, however, making it rare for people to deal with or communicate directly with the High God.

There are various art forms, as discussed earlier, related to the divination and other practices associated with the social, and religious lives of the people of Yoruba. Every individual deity among the pantheon of deities (Orisha) is called upon or interacted with uniquely, through peculiar art forms and practices. Some of these deities are Ogunremi (god of war), Oshun (river goddess), and hundreds of others. There are various shrines built for various Orisha deities, decorated with a variety of art forms, ranging from abstractions to naturalistic representations.

#### **4.2. Christianity and Art**

The encounter with the Europeans and the associated Christian religion had a significant influence on the art of Africa, including the imagery, techniques for the execution, as well as iconography. An example of the European influence on the art of Africa can be identified in the Coptic art of Ethiopia, and other forms of art related to Catholicism. Due to the age-long cultural and trade connections with the Western world, as well as the Mediterranean regions, Ethiopia was one of the earliest societies to embrace Christianity. Hence the Byzantine art tradition. This resulted in the representations of Christian religious imagery, as well as manuscripts with vibrant colorful paintings in churches and other religious sanctuaries.

Despite its foreign orientation, some of the local artists portrayed these Christian mythological scenes and the characters from their traditional or local perspectives. This however conversely influenced some of the European artists and their artistic depictions. In other words, Conversely, some of the European artists adopted some elements related to Ethiopian culture (Fosu, 1986, pp. 19-21), however, they were adaptively depicted in the Christian religious mythological scenes. This was done purposely for elaborative interpretation from the cultural perspective, however was sometimes idealized with European features. This resulted in the displacement of the originality of some of these imageries and elements, mostly from the perspectives of non-Ethiopian African Christians who lack knowledge of their true origin, and significance.

#### **4.3. Islam and Art**

Although Christianity arrived in Africa before Islam, which arrived in the 7th century, Islam quickly spread across the continent, especially, the northern part of Africa. The spread of Islam was due to the trans-Saharan trade of the merchants from North Africa. Due to the embracement of this alien religion, most of the traditional religious practices and the associated art forms have completely diminished in most of the regions in northern Africa, including; Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, Algeria, et cetera. As a result of that, many art historians erroneously classify the art from these regions under Islamic art, while refusing its inclusion in the generic African art history.

The Islamic religion greatly influenced the architectural landscape of Africa, especially, where its practice is in dominance. Zaria Friday Mosque in Nigeria, Jenne main mosque in Mali, and many other temples, as well as the architectural style of some individuals, are examples of this religious influence. The use of mats, as well as ablution, and the costume and the Arabic language also evidently portray the influence of Islam on the socio-cultural and religious practices in Africa. Due to these influences, most of the cultural practices discussed earlier in the third chapter, and the associated art have faced evolutionary changes, and significant transformations, while others have completely disappeared.

#### **4.4. Art in Nomadic Societies**

Nomadic societies are known for continuous migrations and repeated resettlements. Due to that lifestyle, their art practices are predominantly items that are easy to carry along to a new location, whenever there is a need for resettlement. These arts incorporate costumes that serve diverse functions, and accessories. They are also known for various body art and makeups, including; face painting and coiffures for both male and female genders as discussed in chapter three, using the Fulani ethnic society as a case study. Fulani is one of the recognized nomadic ethnic societies in Africa. Their architectural structures are usually of less permanent materials. One must note that there

are also semi-nomadic societies that comparatively, use semi-permanent materials for the construction of architectural structures since they settle for a longer period and only move based on some circumstances. Most of these nomadic societies have spread across many countries, due to the experience of colonialism, that resulted in the split of many families and societies in Africa. They are sometimes recognised with different names, yet, their language and the socio-cultural practices bond them as one people. An example is Himba and Herero of Namibia who are also found in parts of Angola and Botswana. Despite their dispersal in multiple countries, they are recognized with their language, and some customs shared.

Some of these societies sometimes change their nomadic lifestyle and build permanent settlements when circumstances demand. The Tuareg people who are a far-flung Berber group, and were formerly nomadic have changed that aspect of their culture in the past five decades, and now live permanently in towns in parts of Mali and Niger. They formerly lived in tents built with wooden pegs and textile materials bought from other neighbouring societies. Although they practice polygamy, each wife lives in a different tent located in a different compound. Other artworks associated with these societies include; boxes in which precious ornaments for women are kept. Moreover, they also produce leather bags, jewelry, and many others.

Part of the Zulu society formerly lived a nomadic lifestyle, however, they currently occupy urban areas in Johannesburg and Durban, as well as some other cities in South Africa. However, some aspects of their culture and art practices were influenced by their nomadic lifestyle, although they were transformed into more permanent and advanced/modernized versions to suit their current urban socio-cultural system. Some of the artworks associated with the Zulu people are headrests, wooden milk pails, meat platters et cetera. The architectural style associated with the Zulu is circular settlements, encompassing several round houses, made of wood, hides, and other materials from nature. Other art practices include pottery, bead-making, as well as various performances variously carried out with peculiar costumes and accessories.

#### **4.5. Art in Small-Scale Communities**

There are small-scale communities with their own rulers and cultural practices. Due to the lack of resources and the absence of a wealthy court, the artists are limited to non-luxurious materials as compared to the larger societies. Examples of such societies are Dan of Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, and the Igbo of the southeastern of Nigeria.

##### **The Dan of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire**

The Dan society has an artistic tradition that reflects the relationship between man and individual spirits. An individual relationship with supernatural beings and interaction results in success in a particular profession, such as farming, weaving, music, or any other area one wishes to accomplish/excel. Dan society strongly believes in spirits that inhabit the forest and are referred to as Genu. Genu are the intermediaries between humans and the spiritual realm. These spirits are interacted with through the use of diverse art forms including masquerade performances, which incorporate many other art forms. Each spirit has a distinctive form of veneration that requires peculiar forms of art.

##### **The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria**

Although the Igbo society is densely populated, they regard themselves as people belonging to diverse ethnicities. Some of the Igbos were part of the Benin empire. Most of the Igbo traditions are borrowed from the neighbouring societies, however, sharing distinctive traditions that make them closely related to the alien allies as compared to other Igbo members. Due to this and other circumstances, there are always variations in the style, forms, and practices throughout the Igboland. In 1967, the Igbo declared itself as an independent nation with the name, Biafra, which prompted the Nigerian civil war. This war also resulted in the looting of artifacts in the shrines, palaces, and other places, selling to interested collectors overseas. Their art practices include bronze sculpture, wooden sculpture,

pottery, terracotta works, beading, altars, and masquerade performances. Altars of accomplishment known as "ikenga" was one of the major art forms in the majority of Igbo territories.

#### **4.6. Kingdom-based art**

Before colonialism, there were larger established states or kingdoms, reigned by monarchs in Africa. A number of these kingdoms were those located in the savannahs such as Mali, Bornu, and many others. There were also larger wealthy kingdoms located in the forest zones such as the Asante, and the Benin Kingdom. These forest kingdoms were rich in goods such as kola nut, ivory, and many valuable minerals such as gold, bronze et cetera.

They are known for the production of artworks from wood, terracotta, and luxurious materials such as ivory, gold, bronze, and fabrics that reflect novelty. European colonialism and the associated continuous exploitation resulted in the fall of many of these kingdoms and the reduction of their power, hence, the dilution of the art and generic cultural practices.

##### **The Asante State**

Asante is one of the best-known kingdoms in the sub-Sahara Africa. Their art practices excluded masquerade performances. The Asante art tradition however, incorporates both figurative and non-figurative sculptures, jewellery from precious minerals, terracotta sculpture, pottery, novel hand-woven textiles, and many other genres of art, including music and dance. The Asante state was formed after the defeat of the Denkyira in the 1600s, which brought unity among the Akan smaller states. This was led by King Osei Tutu, the Asantehene (Asante king), with the help of a traditional priest named, Okofo Anokye who was a friend to the King.

This Kingdom gradually expanded to the present-day Ivory Coast, Togo, and beyond. However, colonialism and the enforcement of unfavourable laws resulted in the reduction of the territories, and the dispersal of its people. Nevertheless, the Asante still remains one of the most powerful ethnic societies in sub-Sahara Africa with global recognition. One of the common materials for artistic executions is gold. Gold is used in the production of the regalia of the royal court. These works include stools, umbrellas, rifles, jewellerys, ceremonial swords, and many others. There are also artifacts produced from brass, however, classified with the term "gold-weights" due to its use as a standard for the determination of the value or cost of gold. This was formerly used by the Asante, as well as most of the societies that form the Akan group at the time when gold dust was used as currency before it was abolished in the late 19th century, after the last Anglo-Asante war which spanned from 1895 to 1896 (Thompson,1995).

Asantes also practiced wood carving, creating various types of stools, wooden combs, figurative sculptures (for example is Akuaba fertility doll), and many other forms. One cannot talk about the art of Asante without highlighting the rich and novel hand-woven textile, globally recognized as "kente" and the pantheon philosophical symbols named, "adinkra".

##### **The Benin Kingdom**

The kingdom of Benin was among the well-established states in West Africa until its invasion by the British conquest in 1897. The British looted thousands of artifacts made of bronze, brass, and ivory from the rulers' palaces and other places and exported them to Europe. The invasion was due to the refusal of the exclusive trading right proposed by the British. Benin is known for the production of naturalistic bronze portraits, plaques, and other ornaments for decoration of the royal court and palaces. They also produce works from ivory adorned with low-relief imagery, and also from other precious materials with diverse functionalities. Their rulers' regalia includes beaded accessories, ivory ornaments, et cetera. The Benin arts were formerly in the collection of the local aristocrats. However, when they were looted, shipped to London, and placed on auction, they ended up in private and public collections across the globe. These looted artifacts included bronze and brass portraits and plaques, ivory works, beads, and many others. After the invasion and the exile of Oba (the King), his son was enthroned as the new Oba. He rebuilt the palace, albeit, smaller in size, however, marking the revival of the Benin art tradition.

It has been their custom since the 15th century for every monarch to build a new residential courtyard, and each is buried in his built courtyard when dead. Ancestral altars are constructed where rituals are performed occasionally in honour of past kings. Apart from the monarch, ancestral altars were also constructed for other prominent personalities in the society. The availability of new materials, as well as the exposure to other cultures have resulted in evolutionary innovations, and transformations in the architectural styles of various successive kings.

Apart from the architecture, the brass and bronze heads of monarchs also faced chronological anatomical evolution. Most of these were not made to give a vivid representation or as an exact replica of any individual monarch. Some were executed to serve emblematic purposes. There are also bronze plaques that serve the same purpose. However, the evolutionary change is deliberately to emphasize innovativeness, rather than misrepresentation. This stylistic distinctiveness underpins the classification of works produced in different centuries. Comparatively, their ivory tusk carvings also faced similar stylistic progression.

Red beads are also common in the Benin art tradition. These coral beads play a very significant role in the ornamentation of the regalia of Oba, other chiefs, and the aristocrats. Commoners also use beads for various accessories worn on different parts of the body. The quantity of coral owned by a person determines that person's status and wealth. However, it is believed that no other person owns or wears more coral than the Oba. Marine and stone corals are used for various ornamentations that make up Oba's royal regalia such as crowns, bracelets, crossed chest bands et cetera.

In the Benin kingdom, various masquerade performances form part of the festivals and the rituals in connection with the ancestral spirits and other supernatural spirits. Examples are Ododua masquerade, ovia masquerade, and many others. Some of this Edo masquerade include wooden masks, worn by the performers. Some also incorporate feathered headdresses. An example is Ekoko n' Ute which pays a visit to the palace annually.

The Benin traditional art has been a source of inspiration for many contemporary artists in Nigeria. There had been naturalistic depictions of the past rulers in the form of public sculptures across the state. There are also other forms of sculptural works, some being representations of bronze and brass heads, however, rendered in monumental public art, erected in various prominent areas across Benin city and beyond. Images of some traditional artworks are sometimes used as motifs in textile designs and other artifacts for commercialization.

## **5. CHAPTER 5**

### **5.1. Analyzing and Discussing African Art**

This chapter of the book discusses various principles involved in the analysis of African art and art in general. It highlights some key areas that need consideration in the interpretation of both two-dimensional and three-dimensional artworks. The analysis of two-dimensional work, such as painting, primarily focuses on the basic elements of design namely; line, shape, colour, tone, texture, and sometimes depth. In the case of three-dimensional art, the analysis extends beyond the basic elements to include other elements/principles such as; form, light and shadow, and mass. However, detailed information on the basic elements and principles of design have been elaborately outlined in the chapter. The necessary skills required in the study of art history were explained in detail, providing some vocabulary in the field of art history. Moreover, this chapter provides art historians with the necessary tools and procedures one must adopt to be a good analyst, hence, to have a grounds for appreciation of the art of Africa.

### **5.2. Elements of design**

Elements of design are the basic discipline-based vocabulary that is used to describe the way objects appear. The application of these elements varies depending on the form the work takes. Forms that can be measured via length and width are referred to as two-dimensional forms, while forms that can be measured by their length, width, and depth are referred to as three-dimensional forms. Each of these forms determines the elements that should be looked out for in the analytical procedure.

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**Two-Dimensional Objects**

Two-dimensional art commonly practiced in Africa includes; drawing, painting, prints, collage, textile works, and many others. Contemporary art studies in academic art have exposed artists to more areas that were traditionally not part of African art. This primarily is a result of the advancement of technology. Some of these areas are photography, graphic design, et cetera. The analysis of such works requires in-depth knowledge and identification of basic elements in art, and how they were utilized in the work.

**Line**

Lines are created as the artist moves a tool from one point to another leaving a mark. This mark could be a curve, straight, in a vertical, horizontal, or diagonal rendition. These variations determine the physical form, philosophical underpinnings, as well as the emotional feeling the artist aims to insert into the work.

**Shapes**

Shapes are contours of an object as against the background. It could be accidentally or deliberately created by the artist. Mathematically, shapes can be regular or irregular depending on their preciseness. Shapes considered to be precise geometrically are circles, ovals, squares et cetera.

**Tone**

The tone is the relationship between lightness and darkness. The rendition of colour helps the perceiver to determine the contrast and relationships between objects based on how the colours appear in light to sight. Tonal gradation affects one's perception of depth as well as the mood (emotional impact of an artwork) based on the perspective of the perceiver.

**Texture**

The texture could be how things actually feel or illusionistic reflections created to give an impression of the surface of an object.

**Depth**

Depth refers to the distance relationships of objects. This can actually be perceived when objects are placed in an actual or physical space. Virtually, it could be illusionistic based on the clarity of the appearance of objects within the space. Such illusions of diverse positioning could be created by colour, size et cetera, and is scientifically referred to as perspective.

**Three-dimensional objects**

Three-dimensional art is very common in the African art tradition. Examples are pottery, sculpture, basketry, and many more. Unlike two-dimensional art, this type of creation is not merely flat, however, could be situated in the natural world. Its analysis requires further consideration of other elements such as form, mass, light, and shadow.

**Form**

The form is a representation of a shape in solid objects. The form is used in the description of three-dimensional art such as pots, architecture, statues, et cetera.

**Light and shadow**

Although light and shadow are rarely discussed when analyzing three-dimensional art, they are either deliberately or not deliberately created in some three-dimensional works. This enhances the features by providing a naturalistic atmosphere that portrays how light interacts with objects from various directions.

**Mass**

From an art perspective, mass synonymous with weight. A comparative analysis could be made based on how massive the objects in question are being perceived. Sometimes weight of an art could be linked with the compactness of the components, thus when dealing with the same material.

**5.3. Principles and Considerations of Design**

Having identified the basic elements that are encapsulated in a work of art, the next step is to have an in-depth knowledge of the principles that are followed at the execution phase. Some of the principles followed in the construction of a design are balance, symmetry, rhythm, and many others, as will be explained in the following chapter:

**Unity and Variety**

Although unity and variety are two contrasting words, they are equally important in the composition of a work of art. How unity and variety are utilized and balanced in a work/composition enhances the visual quality. There should be visual cohesion however, variation of various compositional elements also reduces insipidity, hence, enhancing admiration.

**Symmetry**

Symmetry is one of the ways of achieving balance in the organization of elements. It is a principle of achieving balance in similar forms on both sides of an imaginary axis, sometimes, creating a mirror-like reflective effect.

**Asymmetry or informal balance**

Contrary to symmetrical principles, asymmetrical compositions eschew sameness, yet, balance can still be achieved through mastery utilization of various elements such as colour, shape, texture, tone, et cetera. This kind of balance is informal since it does not involve two items of the same kind. However, some elements are introduced in some areas that seem to be overshadowed by others, hence, assigning a coeval attention to all the areas within a composition.

**The focal point and moving through the composition.**

Although symmetrical compositions acknowledge even distribution of various elements, artists can skilfully force the viewer to look at a particular area first. This area is referred to as a focal point. It is created through contrast or the use of various elements to direct the viewers' eyes.

**Rhythm**

Rhythm is a kind of movement or an effect of motion created with the repletion of a particular kind of element or variety of them. This feeling of motion could be regular when there is an equal interval, intensity, and size. However, there could also be irregularities, when the above characteristics are lacking.

**Scale**

Scale in art is related to how the size of an object is perceived. Scale affects the mood of a work, thus, the mood is imposed on the viewer.

**5.4. "Rules" for Traditional African Art**

Africa is a continent with heterogeneous societies. Each of these societies has its unique traditions and cultural practices that obviously affect their artistic expressions. Since every African art is meant to serve a peculiar purpose in the related culture, there are rules that are followed in the execution of every piece of work. Any deviation from the required principles may result to awful consideration of its worth.

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**Human-centered**

The art practice in most societies in Africa is human-centered. Every aspect of art in Africa promotes the health or enhances the progress of the human race. In terms of function, artworks are meant to serve a purpose in religious practices or for various ornamentations, and are utilitarian, domestically. Moreover, human beings and animals are dominant in the depictions of art in various ethnic societies in Africa. However, sometimes, human forms are furnished with animal imagery, but, sometimes not species-specific to represent spirits and deities.

**Frontality**

Frontal depictions of human figures are characterized by a perfect alignment of the head and the spine. Globally, most of the depictions of deities, and other supernatural beings that form a pantheon of spirits in various religious practices follow the concept of frontality. It is also employed in the representational depictions of rulers.

**Stillness**

Stillness depicts dignity and permanency. Since movement portrays temporariness, the stillness concept is adopted to emphasize the innate quality that forms part of the attributes assigned to supernatural beings.

**Self-composure (Expressionless)**

One of the common characteristics of traditional African art is the lack of emotional facial expression, to depict mood. Such facial gestures are not desirable publicly, especially from people of high status in society. However, that is adopted in African artistic expressions to avoid misinterpretation of the gesture.

**Ephibism**

Age is valued in the traditional African societies. Adults are venerated, however, depictions of adults are very common in the African art tradition. Sometimes artists depict children with characteristics of adults with features such as beard, breast, et cetera. However, wrinkles are mostly avoided, while youthful musculature is emphasized as a portrayal of physique. In some instances, infants held by their mothers are portrayed with the features of a fully grown person.

**Abstraction**

Traditionally, African arts are primarily not meant for art's sake. However, the artist does not emphasize the naturalistic proportions, but rather the function they are intended to serve. The "akuaba" figure among the Asante for example, is characterized by an oversized head, and other anatomical inaccuracies to emphasize the philosophical underpinnings. One must note that abstract expressions and distortions characterized by the art of Africa are deliberate, however, should not be misconstrued.

**Generic Physiognomy**

Since most of the figurative human forms in the African art tradition are not intended to resemble specific individuals, facial features of art from a particular society become consistent. This sometimes makes it difficult to differentiate works from different artists in the same society. Apprentices use the features of their masters' works as the standard/criteria.

**Hieratic Scale**

In the African hierarchical scale for art, as was adopted in the early Egyptian art tradition, the size of figures is related to the social status of the persons they were meant to represent. This has been the standard for the art practice in many societies in Africa. This principle is solely applied to works depicting two or more persons. In such compositions, a person of high status is depicted prominently, and it follows in that order.

### **Distorted body proportions**

As explained earlier, figurative representations/expressions in African art tradition are predominantly in abstraction. This deliberately disproportionate anatomy is principally, to emphasize the philosophical underpinnings. Moreover, representations of spirits, such as deities, conform to the features described by the person they reveal themselves to. However, some depictions are not species-specific.

### **5.5. Stylistic Analysis**

There are various analytical procedures that are followed in the art of historical writing. One of the standardized procedures is stylistic analysis. Stylistic analysis is primarily, based on the comparison of two or more works, highlighting the similarities and differences, or relationships in the utilization of various elements and principles of design. It moreover, requires the knowledge of the rules involved or the standard traits for the artworks being analyzed. This type of analysis helps the viewer to situate the work within a particular art tradition without further contextual knowledge required.

### **5.5. Contextual Analysis**

The contextual analysis normally encapsulates stylistic analysis since the stylistic elements identified lay a foundation for the analyst to further enquire about the history, philosophy, and function. The stylistic analysis could be applied to objects with less or no knowledge of the functions, and historical underpinnings. Contextual analysis, on the other hand, requires in-depth knowledge of the sociocultural practices of the society the work originated from, and as the term implies, the context in which the work was created. That would provide grounds for how the work should be perceived, hence its appreciation.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This book is a paragon of a novel repository, and an amazing ethnographic piece that brings to bear some detailed information on history, and cultural practices in many ethnic societies in Africa, as well as the art genres involved in these practices. The book is divided into four chapters. The first chapter which orients the reader on the perception of Africa and its art, based on the perspectives of both Africans and non-Africans, was perfectly positioned to deal with some ambiguities about the continent and its culture. Interestingly, chapter two which was supposed to be placed next to the first chapter was rather positioned last, probably due to the uniqueness of its content. This chapter ushers into the field of art by providing basic information relevant to both artists and non-artists who seek to study or understand a work of art. This provided a peculiar lens through which a work of art could be seen and analyzed critically, however, in this context, to enhance the appreciation of African art.

Curnow analyzed some works based on the context in which they were created. In the analytical stage, the medium/materials, the technique or the approach, as well as the function of the works were highlighted. African art, just like art practice in many other societies on various continents, has gone through chronological evolutionary and Transformative stages as a result of diverse influences. Some of the Transformative factors and the magnitude of their impacts on various areas such as training, materials, patronage, gender, and many others were also elaborately discussed. The principal factor to which many other external forces were linked, was the colonial encounters. This greatly impacted the entire structure of the continent of Africa, breaking the family systems and the system of governance in various societies. These impacts as well as the cultural paradigm shifts, religious indoctrination, and other forms of brainwashing, forcibly broke the foundations of the age-long art traditions of various societies in Africa. These are some of the areas captured in the third and fourth chapters. The residue of these encounters created the post-colonial art tradition in Africa, encapsulating modern and contemporary art practices. Although some aspects of the ancient traditions are reflected in the so-called modernity in terms of material and form, the contemporaneity can still be acknowledged based on patronage and functionality. This is due to the continuous

diminish and complete disappearance of the greater aspect of culture of some societies, however, resulting in such paradigm shifts in this post-colonial era.

Although this research was conducted to give a chronological account of the history of Africa, the culture, and various art practices involved, the art practices in the period of Egyptian civilization were not given attention. This is probably due to some controversies revolving around the discourse of Egyptian civilization, which mostly, albeit, erroneously, put Africa in a disadvantaged position. However, just like many other authors for scholarly papers on African art, Curnow focused on the research on sub-Saharan Africa. Despite that Eurocentric undertone, the book still remains one of the most detailed and extensive chronological accounts of African art, recently published. It is relevant in the study of art at all levels in the academy. Moreover, curators and all interested individuals could rely on for a deeper insight into the field of African art and art in general.

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