

World Embrace by Bona Akah: A Critical Review

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ABSTRACT

Appreciation of beauty demands one's interest in expressing feelings towards a pleasant or positive appearance of a person or an object. This appreciation is guided by some set down principles of aesthetics. In this paper one sets out to find who Bona Akah is and what World Embrace is and attempt was also made to apply the said principles. It is not just the feeling of an accepted welcome implicit in the title 'World Embrace' that can be deduced from the sculpture piece but a lot more as one applies qualitative method accompanied appropriately with Iconography and descriptive exposition. It became obvious that there were hidden representations embedded in this creative sculpture. This paper seeks to analyze and review what the writer calls contemporary manner of expressions, which probably, could be synonymous to the conception of the work. The interpretation of the contents and forms obvious in this work was also be looked at. In a bid to translating the unnamed and unknown expressions of his use of forms and expression of feelings, the paper will further query the artist's great intensions at creating 'World Embrace', his expression of sympathy, concern, regrets and probably but not limited equally to anger. Conclusively, 'World Embrace' was thoroughly analyzed with different glimpses, even as contradictory as it is, may look at reflections on aspects of life in African continent as expressed by Bona Akah.

KEY WORDS: Creativity, aesthetics, expressions, iconography. World Embrace

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I. INTRODUCTION

Many years ago, people made sculptures of what could be termed tradition and culture of an area or community. Artists in different fields of art yearn to send interpretations to their experiences given that they either acquired such skills to do so or may have experienced certain revealing situations and are forced by circumstances to delve into this form of expression.

Stories of men and women who did exploits in the past were represented in paintings and sculptures on the walls of buildings by the limited materials available to the artists then. Murals and sculpture created to show some cultural affiliations and act in different communities at different times.

Fleming (1980), states that if one desires to know the spirit and inner life of a people, one must look at its art, literature, dances and music, where the spirit of the whole people is reflected. This further explains some influences of the mode of expressions prevalent in a people's culture represented by arts.

Being able to identify the *Bini* royal sculptures and *Ife* sculpture heads, are possible because of the iconology and cultural semblance of these sculptures as linked to various historical locations. It is quite symbolic to the Benin ancient kingdom to have their chiefs and titleholders utilize varieties of brass ornaments as part of the elaborate costumes for palace special occasions. These costumes are usually worn on the chest or hip region, which indicates the wearer's rank and in some cases, serves as a mark of allegiance to the Oba of Benin. Such objects were highly ornate, displaying the iconography of Benin leadership or a representation of the Oba himself.

Ife sculptures on another hand, are highly naturalistic in appearance. Khan Academy has it that artists of Ife developed a refined and highly naturalistic sculptural tradition in stone, terracotta, brass and copper and created a style unlike anything in Africa at the time. The technical sophistication of the casting process is matched by the artwork's enduring beauty. The human figures portray a wide cross-section of youth and old age, health and disease, suffering and serenity.

If sculptors therefore use historical examples and technologies to sharpen their vision and deepen their understanding of problems; they use tradition creatively.

Ekanem (2000), expresses that Art is a product of the capabilities of the environment on the one hand, and the environment on the other. He further describes the environment as "all embracing, including the light we see, the sounds we hear; the things we touch and smell. It includes our feelings, our emotions and our thought processes," though the artist will bring his know-how to play, he must also put his environment into consideration as he produces the art work. He sets out to create a sculpture, the underlying philosophy which

may have been built upon the artists experiences plays a significant role in shaping the form and content of his work.

Krauss (1977), echoes Lessing who asserts that sculpture is an art concerned with the development of bodies in space. He continues, saying that this defining special character must be separated off from the essence of those art forms, like poetry, whose medium is time. If the depiction of actions in time is natural to poetry, Lessing argues, it is not natural to sculpture or painting, for the character of the usual arts as they are static. Because of this condition the relationship formed between the separate parts of visual objects are simultaneously given to its viewer; they are there to be perceived and taken in all at once.

The concept of style is indispensable for the study of art, and yet it can be a source of confusion because the word has so many different meanings sometimes style refers to the work of a particular historical period. It many refer to the art of a nation or several nations, or the art of a region within a country. Hidden representations embedded in art works, sometimes could be the artist's natural being, typified or a misplacement of sentiments. Therefore, an analysis of any chosen art work brings home to the viewers the contents that is the subject matter of art work.

Creativity and aesthetics

Works of art are looked at based on the creative ability of the artist to capture relevance on the said work, an evaluation of the visual appeal. The dynamism in the art looks of works of art are usually termed creative. One can be said to be a highly creative person, with regards to arts, when works attributed to the person are viewed in the context of aesthetics or what we call beauty. In appreciating works of art, the analysis and evaluation can be interpretative, involving the effort to understand a particular work from a theoretical perspective. We must learn to look or look to learn. Learning aesthetics is as a result of our upbringing and education. Aesthetics is a science of beauty in art and nature. Although beauty can be subjective, there are certain things – harmony, excellence and intelligence, that one can consider beautiful by everyone. (Tkachuk, 2018), Aesthetics therefore teaches us to think about the ideas that underline art works and the forms that express those ideas. It also helps us to discover how art makes us feel and affects our beliefs and attitudes. While we create, appreciate and analyze works of art, we develop aesthetics knowing which we evaluate in all realms of life. Creativity and aesthetics go hand in hand. Evaluation of creativity also requires a judgment of beauty.

Artistic Intension

Without artistic intensions, an art more or less lacks a purpose or message for its intended audience. Art is created for there to be something to look at for evaluation of creativity that requires judgment of beauty. In criticism and/problem of intention”, Richard Kuhus (1996), in Dyksta, (1996), identifies eleven distinct variations of meaning carried by the term intent, when it refers to artists and their works: these eleven meanings are put in the context of art conservation, demonstrating that talk about artists' intensions may refer to artistic biography or to competing theories of creativity and aesthetics. Artists' intensions can be confused with effects that artworks create on their own. In conservation contests, the different meanings associated with artists' intent, frame important questions about the concepts involved and their applicability to conservation work. Kuhus first addressed the idea that artists aim at a results, separating it into different sense related artists' motives and differing theories about the nature of creativity.

Bona Akah

Bona Akah is a sculptor with a whole lot of years of experience attributed to him. He has received so many awards for excellence from the time he was at the Institute of Management and Technology, (I.M.T) Enugu, until his practice in Osun state where he worked briefly at the state's council for Arts and Culture Oshogbo as the head of sculpture section, (1992-93).

Some of the works Akah produced during and after the period he spent in Oshogbo may have been influenced a bit by the Oshogbo art culture. The outfits worn by the figures represented in the sculpture 'World Embrace', are typical of those worn by the Yoruba of the western Nigeria. Credit for Oshogbo renaissance goes to the late Suzanne Wenger, Georgina and Ulli Beier for placing Oshogbo on the world map. They did not just start an art school or art movement, but started engaging young boys and girls who were in Duro Ladipo theartre group to do some art works during the long hours between play rehearsals. The experiment succeeded beyond Ulli and Georgina's wildest imaginations, as it created more art and culture on a global level. Akahs' sculptures graced many private and public spaces in Enugu and other states of Nigeria.



Figure I : Bona Akah, World Embrace, Fiberglass, ; 38cm x 48cm, ; 2002 Courtesy: Salt of the earth; women and children in the society, Alliance Francaise, Enugu, 2004.

World Embrace

'World Embrace', is a fiberglass relief sculpture, measuring 38cm by 48cm, produced by Bona Akah in the year 2002. The relief sculpture is composed of four visible figures arranged in its horizontal frame. The work depicts the map of the world. Placed prominently on the map is the map of Africa as if Africa is the only or rather the largest continent in the world. Present within the map of Africa are irregular shaped balls, stucked within the map to represent the people.

The drama being unveiled here seem to show a nuclear family unit, representing the populace at the verge of embracing the world conversely, as the female figure, representing motherhood places a hand over the map of Africa, while the other hand acts as a support to her represented children. The male figure which appears as the husband, flanks the female figure and children. The sculpture is more of a stylized realism than being realistic. The sculpture is equally cubistic in nature. The vibrant flow of contours in this sculpture appeals to the intellect and one wonders if the journey of this world is as smooth as Akah has sculpted as shown by the nuclear family of the man, wife and kids. The nuclear family is represented by the emerging figures from the right hand side of the composition, where the figures assume positions suggesting that they are not fully emerged. It appears as if the figures are moving towards defending Africa from probably an impending shake-up in the area of agriculture like the actions of the Biblical Joseph in Egypt, who acted as a fore runner to salvaging his people of Israel, (Genesis, 45).

The emerging nature of the figures tends to breed harmony in this composition and create balance. Obviously, one can see that the artist captured a rhythmic flow with the placement of the stylized human figures as it relates to the spherical world map in this composition. The subtle look and texture of the sculpture suggest love and tenderness, which can be classified as beautiful.

Inyang (2001:72) referring to what Runcimant stated to Pontius, states:

... the value of the emotion engendered by art lies in the comprehension that beauty is not concerned with material forms, but with eternal concepts ... beauty is that which radiates symmetry rather than symmetry itself...the form exists in the artist's mind before he executes the work of art.

The artist here has skillfully combined the four figures to create harmony both by choice of the forms and surface finish, that can be studied, found in the early types of some reminiscences of constructive details. This work in view was given an antique highlighting by the artist to really make it strong and aged, thus Goodheart and Wilcox (1973) declare that antique highlighting is applied to a stained finish to give the piece the appearance of wear, such as would come about naturally through many years of regular usage. Though the sculpture was produced in year 2002, it wears the look of a work done about twenty years earlier. This shows the ability of the sculptor to capture aging in his mastery of the act of sculpting and presentation.

Further studies of this composition, 'World Embrace', reveal a situation of either an abandonment or ostracism from a particular domain in Africa. It appears also as if the family represented here is yearning to live in Africa, but cannot catch a grip on Africa. They really appear pensive like an ostracized group from the continent of Africa. They also appear as asylum seekers elsewhere in the world due to oppression they faced in our dear Africa, hence struggling to embrace other parts of the world.

The artist may have also represented this 'World Embrace' psychologically or ironically, portraying mental deviation from an African passion; culture and tradition, as could be seen exhibited by different groups of people, who cling to the western culture by way of food, fashion and western lifestyles in general. This sculpture is a significant one, given that Akah's use of stylized realism and his geometric placement of forms which create a balance proportionate to the area of work presented and therefore pleasing to the viewers.

Fashion Expressed in World Embrace

There are four figures in World Embrace with African attire exhibiting family togetherness. The male figure representing the husband has the African loose gown for men and the cap typical of African male attire for middle aged men whose dressing cannot be complete without adorning matching cap. The mothers' dressing is so typical of African dressing for a married responsible woman with children but the issue of tying the wrapper across the breast is what is done inside the house not outside, the textile texture assumes a rough texture in the blouse which visibly showed some accessories of beads and angle bracelets. The two visible children attires are not really defined as they show a flow of long gowns,

II. CONCLUSION

Bona Akah has creatively maintained current manners of expressions, which are synonymous with his great intentions to pass his message via 'World Embrace'. The subject matter of this sculpture was properly harnessed in the bid of the artist to translate the unnamed and unknown expressions of his use of forms and expression of feelings. This work has therefore queried and at the same time analyzed the artists' intentions at creating 'World Embrace', his expression of sympathy, concern, regrets and probably but not limited to anger.

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