

*Reflections on the Creative Cultural Art of an Ibibio (African) Artist - Sculptor
Sunday Jack Akpan in the Global Science*

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Abstract

The arts of the whole world reflect various unique cultures and creative ingenuity of humanity. Ibibio cultural art workers of sculptor Sunday Jack Akpan of Africa deserve being brought to limelight. Sculptor Akpan was born on August 1st, 1940 at his native home of Ikot Ide Etukudo, Ibesikpo Asutan Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria. His cultural artworks eloquently express the ideologies, beliefs, identification markers and customs of the Ibibio people who occupy Akwa Ibom and Cross River States of Nigeria in West Africa. The self-trained traditional sculptor specialized in cement sculpture which took him to different parts of the world such as Japan, Paris, Geneva and Berlin among others for art exhibition. He was trained in brick-laying for three years by Mr. Albert Edet Essien. His constant practice in sculpturing with cement brought him to prominence. Akpan had an uncommon naturalistic style in cement sculpturing and a compelling passion for preservation of Ibibio culture. He had the opportunity to exhibit his artworks in 1972 during the then Uyo Divisional Festival of Art. He did not have any formal art training nor a mentor but rather self-trained with strong Ibibio cultural influence which guided his visual works of art. Instruction in art was advocated as early as 1770 by Benjamin, but the type of art instruction then was based upon personal views and aspirations of individual teacher which actively commenced in the public schools in America in the first half of the nineteenth century.

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Introduction

The Ibibio art is uniquely influenced by the peoples' customs, beliefs, geographical economic life style, religion and general culture as exemplified partly by some artworks of sculptor Sunday Jack Akpan of Africa. Akpan was trained as a brick-layer for three years between 1967 and 1970 after his primary five education when he lost his father. His interest in art among his classmates enforces him into private cement sculpting practice which later brought him to prominence.

Akpan's works of art express the culture of the Ibibio and general environmental influence. He had no art mentor or formal training in the art of sculpting. This indeed attests to the popular view that there were artists and artworks before the advent of art schools and art mentors. Over the years and wherever sculptor Sunday Jack Akpan's artworks are found, they speak for themselves clearly. This is inline with the view of Martin Heidegger (1935) in Donald Preziosi (New Edition",

The artwork opens up in its own way the 'being of beings'. This opening up, i.e., this deconcealing, i.e., the truth of beings, happens in the work. In the artwork, the truth of what is has set itself to work. Art is truth setting itself to work. Which is truth itself, that it sometimes comes to pass as art? What is this setting-itself-to-work? [---].

Akpan's sculptures (artworks) in Japan, Paris, Geneva, Berlin and various parts of the world are self-exploratory and the unique approach or style identified with him. These works of art are indeed 'beings of the beings' in the collections of art works of sculptor Sunday Jack Akpan today and will still be tomorrow.

He adopted the concept of discovery learning where his persistent private practice in cement sculpting considering cement as his only medium of expression. He got his motifs from Ibibio cultural activities such as marriages, traditional coronations, dances, folklores among others. He became famous in portraits and full statues as well as tombstones of prominent people for funeral purposes. He was very dynamic and hardworking and duplication every artwork he did before delivery any commissioned artwork. The approach helps him to fill up his sculpture garden with numerous artworks. This self-trained Ibibio sculptor indeed trained many sculptors who today the legacies to Akpan's creative industry.

Concept and Motivation of Sunday Jack Akpan's Creative Art

The motivational force behind sculptor Akpan's exploration in the creation of unique artworks is identified in his inclination to Ibibio cultural influence and art philosophy. The concept of aesthetic in Ibibio is a crucial cultural issue. In Ibibio culture aesthetic is referred to as 'Uyai' which means beauty. The mark of beauty in Ibibio is known as 'mbon uyai'. If anybody thinks something is beautiful, the person must be required to point at the mark of what makes it beautiful. Sculptor Akpan lived in the euphoria and consciousness of creating his works of art to show the expected beauty at all times. Equally in Ibibio land if anyone claims to be beautiful or handsome, the person must be ready to show the marks to identify the claim, and of course in relation to know aesthetic marks of the Ibibio people.

In art generally, the demand for elements and principles of art and design are appropriately required for aesthetic assessment. Akpan's inclination to Ibibio cultural concept of aesthetic boosted his construct effort to force ahead to capture motivation or realism in his creative artworks, which he gradually approached in parts or as a whole.

He worked greatly from known phenomenon which reflected his culture to others. The statues of traditional rulers, the 'abia idiong' or diviners and many others from his Ibibio cultural background indeed simply show his approach from the known to the unknown. His inspiration from folklores, moonlight stories and personal experiences boosted his creative endowment and confidence in capturing the nature of objects or figures.

He was determined to constantly practice and train others, and these elevated him to a high level of mastery and his artistic prominence globally.

Ibibio Culture and It's Implication in the Artworks of Sunday Jack Akpan

Ibibio art and its practice reflect the peoples' culture and beliefs. Their rich art and craft activities and products have developed concepts for aesthetic creation. The concept of 'uyai' for beauty, 'mbon uyai' for mark of beauty and 'uso' for craft or technology among others are stimulating factors in creative art and craft protection in Ibibio culture.

The geographical economic life style of the people has a lot of influence in their art production. The existing viewed trends of Ibibio art flourishing today within the country and the world at large deserve being appreciated.

It is worthwhile to know the background of the Ibibio people their root as exemplified in their art. The size of Ibibio as the fourth largest group in Nigeria and their varied art forms and culture with roots as far back as the prehistoric times are with noting. The area stretches across the entire Akwa Ibom State and today the lower part of the new Cross River State.

The geographical position of Ibibio territory has a great influence on her art and total way of life. The Ibibio occupies the South-Eastern corner of Nigeria. It extends from about latitude 4⁰N in the South to approximately 5⁰45'N in the North. It further extends from approximately 7⁰N40'E longitude in the West to about 9⁰E longitude in the East. It has a common boundary with the Abia and Rivers States in the West. Its northern boundary is the upper Cross River State, while the Southern border is the Bright of Bonny and in the eastern is bounded by the Republic of Cameroon.

There are great reflections on the arts and rich culture of the Ibibio occupying this lower region of Nigeria in the tropical rain forest, as a result of the unique physical region, structure, relief and climate of the area.

Prior to the importance of maintaining the Ibibio cultural heritage which the water supposes, it should be understood that culture does not only communicate but also serves as a reinforcement of social control and a vehicle for the transmission of moral

values including aesthetic appreciation from person to person and generation to generation.

Sculptor Sunday Jack Akpan imbibed his culture (Ibibio culture) as exemplified in his artworks found in various parts of the world to boost aesthetic appreciation of Ibibio art and culture globally. Akpan's artworks such as the traditional rulers are reflections of the different categories of traditional rulership in Ibibio culture. The true resemblance of this important sculptural works earned him the title "obot mkpo" which means the "creator of things". The title also attest to his great art talent and expression of things realistically the way they are in their cultural environment.

Theoretical Framework

The study attempts a theoretical framework that discusses views of the early masters and practitioners in the field. Giorgio Vasari (1550) in his work on lives of the painters, sculptors and architects, in Donald Preziosi (New Edition) observes that, "for to the achievements of the early masters they added rule, order, proportion, draughtmanship and manner: not indeed, in complete perfection, but with so near an approach to the truth that the masters of the third age, of whom we are henceforward to speak, were enabled by members of their light, to aspire still higher and attain to that supreme perfection which we see in the most highly prized and most celebrated of our modern works".

In view of these revelations, it can confidently be said that the added rule, order, proportion, draughtmanship and manner to produce aesthetically good artwork is the basis for the generation of elements and principles of art and design for the contemporary artworks Sculptor Sunday Jack Akpan who emanated from Ibibio culture in Africa had no formal art training but always in search for realistic capturing of proper proportion and excellent draughtmanship of human figures and other things, indeed followed the line of early masters in art creation.

The sculptural works of Sunday Jack Akpan depict naturalism or realism in figure capturing. Among Akpan's artworks which situate on a patio outside of the United Nations (UN) building in Geneva are; the clan head, the chief powering libation, a dancer bent forward in motion, town crier, and a drummer. Observers of Akpan's artworks at the UN building have made creditable comments on his works of art and someone indicates that his works show as "one is invited to construct a life and to see life as a continuum of knowledge and experience".

Some other artworks Akpan produced and showcase at international scene include; anwana ekong, oboikpa, obong, abia idiong, peace, camouflaged soldier, Police general, lion on guard and many others.

Significance of the Study

1. The significance of this study lies in the advancement and importance of maintaining Ibibio cultural heritage which the writer supposes its preservation has long been ignored.

2. This study explores the rather fascinating Ibibio culture and social life expressed through the works of sculptor Sunday Jack Akpan as well as its place in the main stream global culture and social life.
3. It showcases indigenous creative art and craft of the Ibibio people and create a bond of unity among the people as well as enforces entertainment opportunity at the international level.

Exhibitions Attended by Sculptor Sunday Jack Akpan

- In 1972, the he attended his first exhibition held during Uyo division Festival of Art at Uyo, Nigeria and won prizes.
- 1977 – All African Festival of Arts and Culture – Lagos, Nigeria.
- In 1985, he was invited by L’ ASSOCIATION FRANCAISE D’ ACTION ARTISQUE to their exhibition in Paris.
- 1987 – Institute Goethe – Lagos
- 1988 – Ifa – Gebrie a stuttgart etc. Iwalewa –Haus a Bayreuth.
- In 1989 he was invited to exhibit in France at LA VILLETTE AND CENTRE GEORGE’S POMPIDU.
- 1989 Exposition collectives Les Magiciens De La Terre, Gronde Halle de la Vicette, Paris 1989.
- In 1991, he was invited to take part in an Art exhibition in London and through his friend Keith Nickling also went to Art Exhibition and Symposium in New York, USA.
- 1993 – Auf der suche: Afrika, Ludwig Forum for international Kunst, Aachen.
- In June 1994, he participated in an exhibition in Japan organized by Artitakowa at the Art Front Gallery.
- 1995-Dialogues of Peace. 03-07/24-10-1995 Palaisdes Nations Geneve.
- 1996 – Neue Kunst aus Afrika, Maison des cultures du Monde a Berlin..
- In January 2001, he attended an exhibition in Italy organized by SABA, SABA COLLECTION, in international Art fair in Bologina, Italy.
- 2007 – (15/10/2017) Malcesina, Lago di Garda, Italia, Lake Garda, Italy. (Castello Scaligero Scolligeri Caste).
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- 19996 – Neue Kunst aus Afrika, Maison des cultures du Monde a Berlin.
- In January 2001, he attended an exhibition in Italy organized by SABA COLLECTION, in international Art fair in Bologna, Italy.
- His Art works are also displayed at the front of UNN headquarters, Genieve and others.
- 2007 – (15/10/2007) Malcesine, Lago di Garda, Halia, Lake Garde, Italy. (Castello Scaligero Scolligeri Caste).

SOME CREATIVE ARTWORKS OF SCULPTOR SUNDAY JACK AKPAN



Figure 1

Artist: Sunday Jack Akpan

Title: Obong

Medium: Cement Sculpture



Figure 2

Artist: Sunday Jack Akpan

Title: Art works of S. J. Akpan showing different traditional rulers

Medium: Cement Sculpture



Figure 3

Artist: Sunday Jack Akpan

Title: Camouflage Soldier

Medium: Cement Sculpture



Figure 4

Artist: Sunday Jack Akpan

Title: Oboikpa (A Young Lady)

Medium: Cement Sculpture



Figure 5

Artist: Sunday Jack Akpan

Title: Akpan's Works showing traditional Rulers/police officers.

Medium: Cement Sculpture



Figure 6

**Artist: Sunday Jack Akpan
Title: The Clan Head
Medium: Cement Sculpture**



Figure 7

**Artist: Sunday Jack Akpan
Title: A Paramount Ruler
Medium: Cement Sculpture**



Figure 8

**Artist: Sunday Jack Akpan
Title: The preacher
Medium: Cement Sculpture**



Figure 9

**Artist: Sunday Jack Akpan
Title: Some Akpan's art works outside the United Nations building and a man pouring libation
Medium: Cement Sculpture**



Figure 10

**Artist: Sunday Jack Akpan
Title: Works of Sculptor Sunday Jack Akpan
Medium: Cement Sculpture**



Figure 11

**Artist: Sunday Jack Akpan
Title: Portrait of some prominent people
Medium: Cement Sculpture**

Literature Review

This study lays emphasis on the creativity and Art of a self-trained artist who excels across the globe with his experiences from his cultural background and constant practice. According to Braimoh (1984) “Culture plays an important role in regulating, modifying, accepting and providing for adequate information flow, with vertically or horizontally with a rural setting with the advantage of immediate feedback”. Sunday J. Akpan’s creative works adapt Ibibio cultural values, such as symbols in his art expression. His philosophy behind his concept of art is to communicate and give credence to indigenous cultural values of Ibibio in particular and Africa at large.

Giorgio Vasari further looks at the ideals of the early masters who considered rule, order, proportion, draughtsmanship and manner to attain perfection as reflection in most of our modern works.

Methodology

The research methodology of this study is discussed under the stylistic, historical, technical and functional approaches to guide the activities of the investigation.

The use of research instrument such as interviews and discussions, photocopy, journals, magazines, unpublished works and internet were considered in gathering necessary information for the study. The thrust for this research is to investigate the creative art of an Ibibio artist, sculptor Sunday Jack Akpan in the global scene. The cultural background, concept and motivation of the artist, Ibibio culture and its implication in the art works of Sunday Jack Akpan were taken into account during the investigation.

Data collected revealed that the Ibibio concept of aesthetic-beauty (Uyai) mark of beauty (Mbon Uyai), craft or technology (Uso) and Ibibio Culture generally were influential factors which propelled Sunday Jack Akpan as a self-trained sculptor, working hard enough to showcase himself and his artworks at the global scene. Photograph of Akpan’s artworks were used in this research. Eye witness accounts and relevant information from primary and secondary sources were also used in this study.

Conclusion

It has been realized that some insight to the unique influence of a cultural environment in the expression of creative works of art indeed boost creation of a modern ethnic heritage for global interest. Sunday Akpan’s works of art in various places in the world today boost the Ibibio cultural heritage of Africa and increase entertainment windows for recreation and awareness.

The popular view that probably Ibibio land has the highest number of cement tombstones among other places in West Africa could attest to their significant effort in cement sculpture which adopt direct modeling techniques and casting. Sculptor Sunday Jack Akpan of Africa as an Ibibio man was a specialist in tombstone making

and also known globally for his sculptural figures which situate in Japan, Paris, Berlin, Geneva, Italy and other places in the world.

Recommendation

- In developing talents, constant practice and following the trends of the early masters remain the panacea for success, and therefore every artist should adopt the same.
- Creation of awareness of the people's culture to showcase the civilization of the different parts of the globe for adaptation and entertainment.
- In a globalized and increasingly cosmopolitan world, indigenous art and craft boost the fusion of cultures with stylized tribal influence and the creation of a modern ethnic heritage, and this should be encouraged.

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