

WEEK 2 LESSON

NIGERIAN TRADITIONAL ARTS

Meaning of Nigerian Traditional Arts

Nigerian traditional Arts refers to the art works and materials that originated from the inhabitants of Nigeria. Several years ago, even before the coming of the Europeans to Nigeria, Nigerians had been engaged in producing several works of art from materials such as copper, iron, bronze, clay, wood and so on. Some of these art works were used in religious places, homes, palaces and so on. They include human figures, utensils, royal items and so on.

Types of Nigerian Traditional Arts

Nok art

These are sculptures and other art works discovered by Bernard Fagg in 1943. It is named after Nok, a village in southern Kaduna. Some of the art works were later found around Abuja. The findings included human figures, animal figures and farm tool. A lot of terracotta works were discovered in this area. Terracotta is simply a work made of fired clay. Nok sculpture is considered the oldest in sub-saharan Africa.

Features of Nok Art

1. Many of the human figures are made up of fired clay, otherwise called terracotta.
2. Holes are made on the nostrils, pupils and mouths of the human figures
3. The art works are simple in nature
4. The eyes of the human figures have triangular shape
5. The discovered farm tools were made of metals.

Ife art

The Yorubas traced their ancestry to Ife, a place located in Osun state, Nigeria. Ife Art dated back as far 6th century AD. Sites where the findings were made include Ita Yemoo, Iwinrin groove and Odo Ogbe. Many of the excavations revealed terracotta sculpture, bronze sculpture, quartz stools etc. Ife art is natural in style and simple as well. The findings have been associated with efforts of Archaeologists such as Bernard Fagg, Leo Frobenious, William Fagg etc. The Europeans initially assumed that these arts did not originate from West Africa but came all the way from Greece, Egypt or Italy. This is due to the beauty and perfection of the Ife arts. It is expected that Ife arts were influenced by Nok art judging by the similarities in both arts.

Characteristics of Ife Art

1. Many of the sculptures are in life sizes.
2. There are lines run through the faces showing facial marks.
3. They were made of terracotta, bronze and wood.
4. Some bronze sculptures had no eye brows but rather had eyelashes which are cast with the aid of *cire perdue* process.
5. Sculptures had beads around their necks, ankles and wrists.

Benin art

These are ancient works discovered in Benin, Edo state of Nigeria. Their art works dated as far as 13th century. Many persons believed that they borrowed the art from Ife. Hence, there are similarities between Benin art and Ife art. In Benin, the largest sculptures were discovered than any other place in Nigeria. Benin art was dominated by a lot of royal or court. Hence, some scholars refers to it as royal art. These royal art works were linked with activities of the palace. They were mainly made of bronze, brass and ivory. They made a lot of sculptures of past kings called Oba. There were also some folk arts made of less expensive materials such as wooden masks. Benin art were often based on status symbols. After the punitive expedition of 1897, Britain took away many beautiful art works of Benin. A 16th century Benin mask was a symbol for Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) held in 1977 in Lagos attracting people from several countries.

Characteristics of Benin Art

1. Bronze, brass and ivory was used for many of the art works.
2. The technique of *cire perdue* was applied in bronze work production.
3. Beads were worn by many of the human figures.
4. The art works were heavily associated with royalty

Igboukwu art

This art was named after Igboukwu, a town in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra state. Sites where the findings were made in Igbo Isaiah, Igbo Richard and Igbo Jonah. The first was Igbo Isaiah where Isaiah Anozie stumbled upon bronze art works while digging a hole such as bronze heads, pots, spoons, bowls etc. More was discovered on the site later by Professor Thurstan Shaw. At Igbo Richards, items believed to be linked with Nri priesthood was excavated.

Esie art

These works of art were named after Esie, a town in Kwara state of Nigeria. The art works discovered were made of soap stones predominantly, making it the largest single stone figures in Africa. Up to 800 soap stones were found in this site.

Characteristics of Esie Carving

1. Both male and female figures were found.
2. Some of the figures had facial marks as found also in Ife art.
3. Some of the human figures wore beads and held objects in their hands
4. The hairdo of the figures were elaborately decorated.
5. Some of the human figures sat on stools.

Owo art

This art was discovered in Owo, a Yoruba town in Ondo state located between Ife and Benin. Little wonder, their art works has influences from Ife and Benin art traditions. Art works from Owo dated back as far as 15th century AD. Their art works were basically animal and human figures made of terracotta.

Mbari art

Mbari art is located in Imo state of Nigeria. This is a communal art. The art was made in honour, gratitude and piety to the gods and goddesses. They do this in view of the protection, mercies, favours and gifts received from them. Houses were built to accommodate the art works. Hence, it is usually referred to as traditional museum.

Tsoede art

According to the story, King Tsoede, a brother to the Atta of Idah loved art so much. Travelling along the River Niger, he founded the Nupe nation, carrying with him art works from Igala. He initiated brass casting among the Nupe inhabitants in the 16th century. These art works were discovered in Tada and Jebba village. The art is also called Nupe art.

Nigerian Traditional Arts and places of origin

NIGERIAN TRADITIONAL ARTS	PLACES OF ORIGIN
Nok art	Kaduna state
Ife art	Osun state
Benin art	Edo state
Igbo-ukwu art	Anambra state
Benin art	Edo state
Esie art	Kwara state
Owo art	Ondo state
Mbari art	Imo state
Tsoede art	Kogi state

Functions of Nigerian Traditional Arts

1. It promotes Nigerian cultural heritage
2. It establishes Nigerian cultural identity.
3. They help to preserve Nigerian history.
4. Some are used for religious purposes
5. Some are used for domestic purposes