



The Influence of Folk Art on Contemporary Practices

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the profound influence of folk art on contemporary artistic practices, tracing its historical evolution and cultural significance. Folk art, characterized by handmade creations rooted in community traditions, serves as a repository of cultural heritage through various media. Contemporary art, emerging post-modernism, often incorporates motifs and themes from folk art, creating a dynamic dialogue between past and present. The paper highlights the systematic relationship between traditional and recent visual art forms, emphasizing the intentional repetition and reinterpretation of folk motifs in contemporary contexts. By analyzing key characteristics, themes, and examples from different cultures, this essay explores how folk art continues to inspire and shape contemporary artists, fostering innovation while preserving cultural identity.

Keywords: Folk Art, Contemporary Art, Cultural Heritage, Traditional Crafts, Visual Arts.

INTRODUCTION

Folk art refers to artistic expressions that have been traditionally created by hand in particular social settings, passed down through generations, and locally integrated into daily life. Folk art often emerges from communal practices and represents cultural heritage through various media—crafts, textiles, woodworking, pottery, and visual arts like painting or sculpture. Contemporary art is typically regarded as art that is created during the present moment in time. Literally, this means any painting, sculpture, or installation created after the end of modernism in the late 20th century. Although modernism is often seen as a search for innovation through new ideas and the use of new materials and techniques, postmodernism is distinguished by a great freedom in the choice of media, lack of concern for the finished product, and inclination toward capitalization. Contemporary art tends to rely on existing motifs and works. In this essay, I illustrate how traditional and recent visual art appearances which contain the same elements of folklore could be related in a Musae-like manner. Therefore, the general typologic distinction, sense, and role of each artistic appearance in certain socio-cultural settings should be accentuated in a chronological manner. At the very onset, the intentional repetition of a folk appearance in a new artistic context could be emphasized. Contemporary practices interpreted as the infra-structural element of folk art could be in additional socio-civic frames generalized under the concepts of folk and populism [1, 2, 3].

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF FOLK ART

The musealisation of folk art - that is, its framing as an aesthetic object and valorising of its properties, which has resulted in the establishment of ethnographic collections and museums, as well as art movements that were instrumental in the formation of the modern aesthetic canon of folk art - is examined on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb. The aim is to establish a systematic relationship between traditional and recent visual art appearances that contain elements of folklore, with a possibility of civic voicing or interpretation of local, rural but also transnational contexts of belonging [4, 5]. The emphasis on the visual aspect of folk art, ornamentation on material culture, crafts and public architecture, decorative handicraft and features of amateurism in painting, sculpture and architecture, as well as text-visual phantasmagoria, home universe landscapes, travelogues, and farm photography, is linked with the civic culture that emerged from the city and recognized the value of handiwork, stressed the aesthetic component of decorative folk art, and promoted the ideal of beauty as common benevolence. By exhibiting the customary beautiful objects and artefacts,

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an effort was made to ennoble the present. The specific objective of this paper is to provide a brief overview of the history of musealisation of folk art [6, 7].

KEY CHARACTERISTICS AND THEMES OF FOLK ART

The objective of this paper is to observe and analyse the key characteristics and prominent themes of folk art. The definition of folk art will be set forth noting its distinction from 'fine' art. The main aesthetic and cultural characteristics of folk art will be analysed. Subsequently, the most salient themes depicted in folk art will be elucidated with examples provided by the work of European-inspired American folk artist Joseph Pickett and African-American folk artist Horace Pippin. The reasons why many of these themes resonate with contemporary practice will be noted [1, 8]. Although ethnic art is sometimes described as 'folk art', in fact the artistic products of ethnic and tribal peoples are rarely vernacular. Folk art refers to the work of those who are said to be 'of the people', not 'of the court', 'of the elite', 'of the masters' or 'of the cognoscenti'. As such folk art constitutes the art of the common people. The key aesthetic and cultural characteristics and salient themes depicted in folk art are analysed primarily as they pertain to paintings. However analogous distinctions hold true for other forms such as woodblock prints, sculpture and textiles [9, 10].

EXAMPLES OF FOLK ART FROM DIFFERENT CULTURES

The Mexican Baile de los Morenos en El Primer Viernes de Marzo Dance originated in Tzintzuntzan, Michoacán, Mexico, and was created at the basis of the Purépecha culture. The dance is inspired by the Hunting of the Morenos men, the symbol of nature's forces, and is performed on the first Friday of March as an offer to the gods. The Greeks, in turn, are best known for their national folk costumes and traditional dances brightly laced with dignity and femininity. Vestiges of rich folk culture manifest themselves in folk art masterpieces, such as elaborate pieces of jewelry, dresses, skirts, belts, headdresses, and textile designs, which all can signify a person's social status, age, place of origin, belonging to various religious communities, or profession. In Russia, it is reflected in the variety of folk art and in each region's distinctions, such as the designs of bobbin-made lace, hand-made and painted clay toys, and painted wooden spoons. The exaggerated and mismatched costumes of the Russian Carnival express its fertility symbolism underlying humor and merry-making. The Mexican Carnival depicts festivities of colorful costumed marionettes, cart-wheel performers, dancers, and musicians celebrating throughout the streets painted in exaggerated colors symbolising the beauty and joy of life. In Poland, folk art is reflected in costumes of "baba" actresses performing traditional village folk rituals of the countryside. Their costumes are accompanied by their own draught, elaborately designed costumes worn for folk artist markets in towns with adjoining operettas of love songs striving for good luck and riches. In Korea, the folk is reflected in bright colors worn mostly on the first day of the lunar new year to symbolize joy. No wonder folk art has permeated forms of contemporary art and design, whether design of fashion shows, film costumes, music videos, theatre or opera scenery, painting, graphic art, sculpture, installation, or architecture [11, 12, 13].

CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS INSPIRED BY FOLK ART

The impact of folk art on the work of contemporary artists such as Jonathan Jones, El Anatsui, and Shantell Martin is multidimensional. Folk art has influenced the concepts of artists, the aesthetics of their work, and the ideas behind or that one is meant to take away from their work. There are also different ways in which one can categorize folk art, such as attending to skill level, originality, group identity or social class, or materiality [14, 15, 16]. For Jones, a member of the Wiradjuri people, the use of glowing red ochre as paint elicits a "direct connection to country" on lands taken from his ancestors. He sees Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artistic traditions as having an independence from Western disciplinary hierarchies, and they express their people's elaborate systems and intercultural communication. His art, like figure eight lines, is "fluid and collaborative... elliptical rather than linear," which counters Western conventions in art as practice (dominant individualism). The asymmetrical relationship is widened by the fact that these artistic systems were used to negotiate and communicate normalcy, care, conflict, and clear praise in times of uncertainty pre-colonization. Inspired by the beaded textiles of his home region, Anatsui repurposes thousands of bottle caps to create monumental works of shimmering color and texture like New World Map, which questions the social consequences wrought by imported products. Martin also embraces freedom, experimentation, and spontaneity from folk traditions instead of rigid, prescriptive elements of art often attributed to "high" Western art. Her doodled lines prompt viewers to trot through the emerging landscape of entirely different dimensions. All these artists lead viewers to stories, memories, and ideas about potential futures, along trails not dictated by Western conventions in art [17, 18]. Rather than "folk art," "folk" ought to be used as an analytical approach that insists on neither the use of the concept, nor an object of study defined by purity of tradition or

authenticity. Scholars should rummage for the out-of-the-norm, the experimental, the individual in the group. There is a need to question mass consumption or the interaction between arts and the state. The potential of great innovation should always be expected from those dwellers outside the norm [19, 20].

CONCLUSION

The essay underscores the enduring relevance of folk art in contemporary artistic practices. By bridging the past and present, folk art offers a rich repository of motifs, themes, and techniques that contemporary artists draw upon to create innovative works. This cross-temporal dialogue not only preserves cultural heritage but also enriches contemporary art with a sense of continuity and depth. The examples of artists like Jonathan Jones, El Anatsui, and Shantell Martin illustrate the diverse ways in which folk art can inform and transform modern artistic expressions. Ultimately, the study calls for a broader recognition of folk art's role in shaping contemporary practices, highlighting its potential to foster creativity and cultural understanding in an increasingly globalized world.

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