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Addressing the Misconceptions about Art and Artists in Ghana

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Abstract:

The role of art is indispensable in the socio-economic development of Ghana; but over the years, no efforts have been made to salvage the dwindling interests of the arts. This lack of interest for art has degenerated into what is called misconceptions. Study has shown that these misconceptions if not addressed timely, have the tendency of totally relegating art and artists in Ghana to the background, hence the need to carry out this research. The study was handled with a practical approach of finding out the actual causes of the misconceptions, the effects and the possible solutions thereof. In all, (65%) of respondents who participated in the study were males while (35%) were females. The descriptive (qualitative) research method was adopted to describe variables. A sample size of 300 was used for the study because that was considered to be a fair representation of the accessible population. The data gathering instrument employed was the survey technique where 300 questionnaires were administered to the sample population. A major finding of the study is that the misconceptions about art negatively affect the patronage of art works in Ghana and the respect given to artists in general. Another finding is that, lack of education is responsible for the misconceptions about art. The study therefore recommends massive education for the general public in Ghana about the benefits of art.

Keywords: Ghana, Misconceptions, Art, Education, Socio-Economic Development

1. Introduction

Art in Ghana is traceable to the prehistoric era where various kinds of relics including pot fragments, pieces of worn-out kente and dyed cloth were in abundance. For several centuries, Ghanaians have unknowingly benefited from art and the activities of artists. In Ghana, art can be classified into Visual Art, Verbal or Auditory Art and Performing Art. The Visual Arts are those that can be seen and touched such as Textiles, Paintings, Sculptures, Graphic Designing, Pottery and Ceramics and Calabash Designing. Verbal Arts as the name suggests, are artistic expressions which are verbal. Examples are poetry, dirges, lyrics, oaths, libation and story-telling. Performing Art on the other hand refers to art expressions that are performed rather than made. They include: music, drama and dance. Despite the abundance of artistic heritage of the country, some educated Ghanaians look down on art and artists (Amenuke et al, 1999). To them, people who study art are those who cannot cope with the so-called difficult subjects such as mathematics, engineering, science and medicine. Some people will even persuade their children to study science rather than art. As if that is not enough, only a few educated Ghanaians buy artefacts because they think they are valueless and should be given to them for free. Some also label art as idolatrous or fetishist and for that matter advise their Christian friends and colleagues to shy away from artworks. They even go as far as defaming the character of artists who produce such works labelling them as *juju men* or Pagans. Another misconception about art is that, “art is all about drawing and painting”. This is false because art encompasses other disciplines such as Textiles, Pottery and Sculpture as captured in the first paragraph. This particular misconception makes people to think that art is not difficult and involving. The consequences of the misunderstandings and misinterpretations about Ghanaian Art can be linked to the low patronage of Ghanaian artworks in general. Annku and Lodonu (2012) confirm that the consumption of visual art forms in Ghana by the indigenes has been on the downbeat in recent times. The effect of the misconceptions about Ghanaian art can also be felt in education. This has resulted in the low enrolment of students in art related programmes in both second cycle and tertiary institutions across the country. There is also a high level of discrimination and lack of respect for Ghanaian artists as they are considered as men without livelihood or outcasts. Most parents will not allow their children to marry artists because they are erroneously considered to be poor and dirty. These misconceptions have arisen as a result of lack of education to the Ghanaian public about the role of art and artists in the society. It is strongly believed that for a fair treatment to the field of art, the Ghanaian Educational System should be revised to include more art content at all levels of education starting from lower primary. The government should also promote the arts through more

innovative ways such as the organization of free exhibitions for public view and the resourcing of artists. Loans with flexible repayment terms could also be made available for artisans.

2. Literature Review

The ultimate objective of any art work is to communicate the philosophy behind it to others. The visual art forms help us to understand culture better and also guide us to create the means for improving the quality of one's life. Annku and Lodonu (2012)

This section of the study reviews literature related to the topic under discussion. Kariko (2014) explains that to show how bad the society's negative perception toward art is, some schools go as far as putting up a wall where everyone can post these negative perceptions that people have about art. They posted how artists are seen as drunk, poor, unrealistic etc.

Goma (2010) itemised misconceptions about art as: 'art is a visual concept'. He further explains that this is not true because art is more of a combination of ideas, feelings, and meanings expressed with artistic means. He goes on to state another misconception as 'not everybody can understand art'. Understanding art is like understanding any other thing in life. It requires questioning and learning. There is no limit to learning; learning is a life-time process. According to Goma, another misconception people have about art is that 'the more expensive an artwork is, the better the quality'. He however disagrees with this misconception by saying that, the historical value of a piece of art work has nothing to do with the quality of the artwork. Furthermore, according to Goma, another misconception is that, 'the purpose of art is mainly decorative' he however states that this is not true because, although most artworks are used to help in both interior and exterior decoration, many art pieces are created as a result of different inspirations, personal feelings, emotions, passions, political and religious reasons.

Boyd (2000) decries how art is rated low in the school curriculum. He explains that from the time a child is born, he or she is introduced to the arts as the very foundation of their culture. Yet, as they grow older and enrol in school, the arts, which are the very hearts of our culture is undervalued. They become less important and less understood in educational context. The spontaneity of "home-taught arts" which is meaningful and imaginative is lost.

Adjei (1990) adds his voice to the low value given to art and states that, it is unfortunate to note that in Ghana, despite the official pronouncement on the relationship between art and culture, visual art has always been considered frill in the school programme, but not a priority area study, hence, due attention has not been given to its teaching and learning. This is because the Ghanaian believes that it has no direct economic value to the nation. It is also believed to be a subject which is understood by persons with low academic mentality.

Similarly, Eyiah (2004) advises that in order to curb the less recognition given to art, art should be made a core subject of the Teacher Education Reform Programme. According to him, this will help students develop more interest in art.

Taylor (2007) touches on the importance of valuing art. He states, "the trade and exhibition of African art on the international market is a large scale business on a scale; while it is undervalued and its importance overlooked in many African countries". Art is not simply a visual material; it has historically acted as a powerful outlet for a country's social history, cultural tradition, political views and changing civilization. Ghana's history has not differently been unofficially documented through architecture, painting, drawing, woodwork and sculpture, the world press has recognized the value and interest of documenting Ghanaian culture but it appears to have been disregarded in Ghana. As the country alters visually and socially, there is a danger that if art is not published and exhibited, the story told through it may be forgotten.

According to Balsley (2013), on his presentation about Art Education, some students think because art is not valued, art teachers are paid less than other subject teachers.

Grosso (2011) states that the life of an artist has many misconceptions, the mental state of the artist can be one of constant guilt and self-recrimination. According to him, 99% of artists all want the same thing. That is, more time, more exposure and more money, yet most of them are unwilling to change the one most important thing-their mindset." Progress is impossible without change: and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.

It is evident from the various books reviewed that people hold a lot of misconceptions about what art really entails. However, none of the authors was able to fully touch on the misconceptions of art and artists in Ghana. This therefore puts the research topic in the right framework to contribute to knowledge.

3. Methodology

3.1. A Brief Write-up about Ghana

Ghana, a former British colony is located in West Africa. Ghana's current population stands at over 20 million people with most of the populace being middle income earners. She has Accra as its administrative capital. Ghana is endowed with a lot of natural resources such as bauxite, manganese, gold, cocoa, coffee, crude oil, timber and rubber just to mention a few. Additionally, Ghanaians pride themselves in their arts and culture. In Ghana various artefacts including sculpture works, textiles, paintings, pottery and ceramics as well as graphic works are predominant (Figure 1 and Figure 2).



Figure 1: Sankorfa Figure 2: Drawing water

3.2. Research Design

Considering the fact that this study is multi-faceted, a broad based data handling approach was adopted. This is because “art” as a topic or field is very broad.

3.3. Location of Study

The study was limited to Ho Municipality in the Volta Region of Ghana. The reason being that, the limited time and resources for the conduct of this research could not make it possible for coverage of the whole Ghana. Apart from that, Ho Municipality is one of the hubs of art in the whole of Ghana. It houses the Agortime Kpetoe Kente Weaving Centre, the Takla Carving Centre and the numerous Tie-Dye and Batik Centres to mention just a few.

3.4. Target Group

The study was targeted at artisans, academicians and traditional leaders. In terms of number, the target group was pegged at 1000.

3.5. Sample Population

Due to the heterogeneity of the target population, it was prudent to adopt the Random Sampling Technique to arrive at a more accessible population for the study. Thus 30% of the target population which Leedy (1974) considers to be ideal was used to obtain the sample population. This implies that mathematically, $1000 \times \frac{30}{100} = 300$.

3.6. Data Collection Procedure

The main research instrument employed by the researcher was questionnaire which was combined with observation and interviews. In all, 300 well-designed questionnaires were administered to the sample population as indicated in the table below:

RESPONDENTS	NUMBER OF QUESTIONNAIRES ADMINISTERED	PERCENTAGE (%)
Artisans	75	25.0
Academicians	200	67.0
Traditional Leaders	25	8.0
Total	300	100

Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution
(Source: Field Data 2014)

3.7. Data Processing

Data collected were edited and coded. They were also edited to ensure consistency and to check for omissions, validity and reliability before coding them. Non responses were taken back to the field for re-eliciting. This was done to allow for easy data entering and analysis.

4. Data Analysis

This section presents how Statistical techniques were used in analyzing data obtained from the administration of questionnaires. As stated above, the data collected were edited, coded and analyzed using the SPSS computer software and bar charts as follows:

4.1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

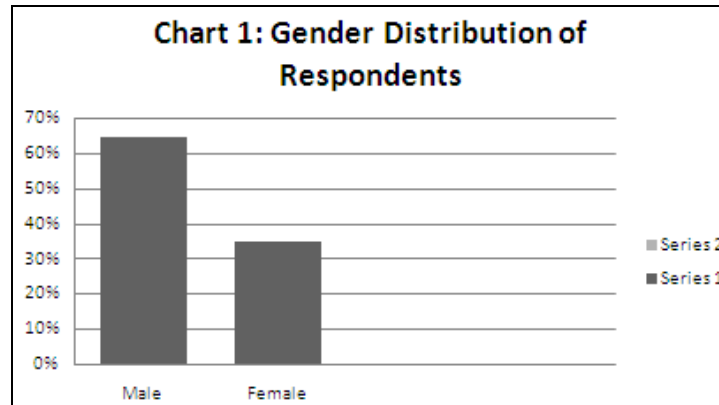


Chart 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents
(Source: Field Data 2014)

In all, 65% of respondents who participated in the study were males while 35% were females. This is a clear indication that more males are interested in art than females.

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
15-----20	20	6.0
21-----25	50	17.0
26-----30	80	27.0
31 and above	150	50.0
Total	300	100

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents
(Source: Field Data 2014)

Table 2 above presents the Age Distribution of respondents. The Age group (15-20) registered the lowest frequency of 20 representing 6% of the total number of respondents who participated in the study. Furthermore, the Age group (21-25) registered a frequency of 50 which represents 17% of the total number of respondents. Also, the Age group (26-30) registered a frequency of 80 representing 27% of the total number of respondents. Finally, the Age group (31 and above) registered the highest frequency of 150 representing 50% of the total number of respondents who participated in the study. This is indicative of the fact that respondents who are 31 years and above participated in the study than any other category of people.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Someone who only draws and paints.	25	8.0
A gifted person.	80	27.0
Someone who is creative.	165	55.0
A Spiritualist.	5	2.0
All	10	3.0
None	15	5.0
Total	300	100

Table 3: Respondents' understanding of the word "artist"
(Source: Field Data 2014)

It is clear from Table 3 that most respondents (165) accept the fact that an artist must be creative while a few (5) believe that an artist is a spiritualist. Some of the respondents (80) think that an artist is someone who is gifted. Others (25) also feel that an artist only draws and paints. Meanwhile some respondents (10) are of the view that all the responses concerning who an artist is are true. On the contrary, (15) respondents assert that none of the responses is true.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Art is all about drawing and painting.	23	8.0
Art is a creative activity which is aesthetically inclined.	45	15.0
Art involves designing, creativity and production.	175	58.0
Art is any activity that involves the expression of beauty.	16	5.0
All	35	12.0
None	6	2.0
Total	300	100

Table 4: Respondents' understanding of "art"
(Source: Field Data 2014)

In Table 4 above, majority of respondents (175) accept that art involves designing, creativity and production while as low as (6) respondents representing 2% of the total number of respondents believe that none of the responses explains what is meant by art. However, (35) respondents representing 12 % of the total number of respondents think that all the responses given are valid. Additionally, some respondents (23) representing 8 % of the total number of respondents think that art is all about drawing and painting. Other respondents (45) representing 15 % of the total number respondents accept that art is a creative activity which is aesthetically inclined. 16 respondents which make up 5% of the total number of respondents stated that art is any activity that involves the expression of beauty.

Statements	Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Only talented or gifted persons qualify to be artists	Strongly Agree	1	0.3
	Agree	2	0.7
	Strongly Disagree	244	81.0
	Disagree	53	18.0
Total		300	100

Table 5: another view on who an artist is
(Source: Field Data 2014)

The table 5 above presents different views about whether artists are only gifted persons or not. In all, as many as (244) respondents representing (81%) of the total number of respondents strongly disagree with the assertion that only gifted persons qualify to be artists. Furthermore, (53) respondents representing (18 %) of the total number of respondents disagreed with the assertion. However, only (1) respondent representing (0.3%) strongly agree with the assertion while (2) respondents representing (0.7%) of the total number of respondents agreed with the assertion.

Statements	Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
The field of art is not very much recognized in Ghana	Strongly Agree	60	20.0
	Agree	215	72
	Strongly Disagree	10	3.0
	Disagree	15	5.0
Total		300	100

Table 6: statement about the recognition of art
(Source: Field Data 2014)

Table 6 above summarizes various views as to whether the field of art is recognized in Ghana or not. The final results indicate that (215) respondents representing (72%) of the total number of respondents agreed with the assertion that art is not very much recognized in Ghana. Additionally, (60) respondents representing (20%) of the total number of respondents strongly agreed to the assertion. Meanwhile, as low as (10) respondents representing (3%) of the total number of respondents strongly disagree with the assertion while (15) respondents representing (5%) disagree with the assertion.

Statements	Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
The less recognition given to art affects the respect accorded Ghanaian artists.	Strongly Agree	150	50.0
	Agree	120	40.0
	Strongly Disagree	6	2.0
	Disagree	24	8.0
Total		300	100

Table 7: The effect of lack of recognition for Ghanaian artists
(Source: Field Data 2014)

In table 8 above, varied views of respondents have been presented on whether the less recognition given to Ghanaian artists affects the respect given to them. The results reveal that (150) respondents representing (50%) of the total number of respondents strongly agree that the less recognition given to Ghanaian artists negatively affect the respect given to them. As many as (120) respondents representing (40%) of the total number of respondents agreed to the assertion while (6) respondents representing (2%) of the total number of respondents strongly disagreed with the assertion. However, (24) respondents representing (8%) of the total number of respondents disagreed with the assertion.

Statements	Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
The less recognition for art negatively affects the patronage of artworks in Ghana	Strongly Agree	190	63.0
	Agree	82	27.0
	Strongly Disagree	17	6.0
	Disagree	11	4.0
Total		300	100

Table 9: effect on patronage of artworks
(Source: Field Data 2014)

It is clear from table 9 above that majority of the respondents (190) representing (63%) of the total number of respondents strongly agree to the assertion that the less recognition given to art negatively affects the patronage of artworks in Ghana. Furthermore, (82) respondents representing (27%) of the total number of respondents agree to the assertion while (17) respondents representing (6%) of the total number of respondents strongly disagree with the assertion. Finally, (11) respondents representing (4%) of the total number of respondents disagree with the assertion.

Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Are there misconceptions about art and artists in Ghana?	Yes	295	98.0	No	5	2.0

Table 10: Responses about whether or not misconceptions of art and artists exist in Ghana
(Source: Field Data 2014)

Table 10 above presents a clear picture about the existence of misconceptions about art and artists in Ghana. It shows responses from respondents concerning whether or not misconceptions about art and artists exist. The results reveal that as many as 295 respondents representing 98 % of the total number of respondents gave an answer of 'Yes' while 5 respondents representing 2% of the total number of respondents gave an answer of 'No'. This is a clear indication that misconceptions about art and artists in Ghana are very predominant.

Misconceptions	Frequency	Percentage
Art is a profession for lazy people.	10	3.0
Art is Just a hobby.	7	2.0
Art is a work for people who cannot think fast.	92	31.0
Artists are crazy people.	25	8.0
Artists are daft.	20	7.0
Artists are regarded as super natural beings	130	43.0
An Artist is a pagan.	16	6.0
Total	300	100

Table 11: Respondents' view about the misconceptions of art and artists in Ghana
(Source: Field Data 2014)

Table 11 presents a fair distribution of views of respondents concerning the perceived misconceptions about art and artists in Ghana. Majority of respondents (130) representing 43% of the total number of respondents stated that artists are regarded as supernatural beings because of the powerful spirits they possess. A few of the respondents (7) representing 2% of the total number of respondents agreed that art is just a hobby while (92) respondents representing 31% of the total number of respondents state that, one of the misconceptions about art and artists is that art is for people who cannot think fast. Additionally, some respondents (10) representing 3% of the total number of respondents think that art is a profession for lazy people who sit at one place. Surprisingly, (25) respondents representing 8% of the total number of respondents believe that artists are crazy people while (20) respondents representing 7% of the total number of respondents assert that artists are daft. Finally, (16) respondents representing 6% of the total number of respondents believe that artists are pagans.

Solutions	Frequency	Percentage
Through education of the general public.	140	46.0
Art courses must be introduced at the elementary stage.	20	7.0
Making Art compulsory at the basic level of education.	60	20.0
Art exhibitions should be organized for artists to showcase their works to the public.	50	17.0
More Art Colleges should be established in Ghana.	10	3.0
Artists should promote art through the way they carry themselves in public.	20	7.0
Total	300	100

*Table 12: Solutions to the misconceptions about art and artists in Ghana
(Source: Field Data 2014)*

Table 12 above captures respondents' suggested solutions to the misconceptions about art and artists in Ghana. It revealed that, 140 respondents representing (46 %) of the total number of respondents suggested that one of solutions for curbing the misconceptions is through public education. 50 respondents representing (17 %) of the total number of respondents suggested that art exhibitions should be organized for artists to showcase their works to the public. 20 respondents representing (7%) of the total number of respondents however suggested that in order to do away with the bad perceptions about artists, they should be seen at the forefront conducting themselves in a manner so as to attract respect from the public. 60 respondents representing (20%) of the total number of respondents were of the view that art should be made compulsory at the basic level of education in Ghana. Similarly, 20 respondents representing (7%) of the total number of respondents also suggested that art subjects must be introduced at the elementary level. 10 respondents representing (3%) of the total number of respondents were of the view that more Art Colleges should be established in the country.

5. Major Findings

The study has been able to reveal some hidden facts about the research topic. It has succeeded in exposing Ghanaian art to the outside world and increased the interest of readers to know more about art. It has been able to clear the misconceptions about art and artists in Ghana. The following major findings were recorded:

- More males are interested in art than females.
- The misconceptions about art and artists in Ghana are prevalent.
- Most Ghanaians are not aware of what art entails.
- Artists are not spiritualists or "jujumen".
- Art is not only about drawing and painting.
- Artists are not poor people or paupers.
- The misconceptions about artists in Ghana affect the respect accorded them.
- Lack of education is responsible for the misconceptions about art and artists in Ghana.
- The misconceptions about art affect the patronage of artworks in Ghana.

6. Conclusion

The technological and artistic advancement of any country is not the priority of only the government in power but also its citizenry. Countries such as China, South Africa, Japan and Malaysia have not chalked successes in these areas without giving priority attention to the development of their sciences and arts. This study shows that there is less attention given to the field of art in Ghana. Factually, this less attention given to art can be linked to lack of education to the public about art which has resulted in some misconceptions and negative perceptions about art in general. Based on the findings and in order for Ghana to rub shoulders with her compatriots, it is necessary to take some measures to curb the misconceptions. The following recommendations have been offered in that direction:

- The general Ghanaian public should be educated about what art entails.
- Art courses must be introduced into the school curriculum at the early stages of education to build a good foundation of students in art.
- If possible, art should be made one of the core subjects at the Senior High School to boost the interest of students in art.
- Art exhibitions should be held regularly for artists to showcase their works to the general public.
- Artists should promote art through the way they carry themselves in public.
- A Ministry of Art and Culture should be set up to promote the arts.

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