

Abstract

The need to satisfy an artistic urge has over the years pushed artists to get involved into creative trainings and art productions. Some of the end products of these artistic creations have captured the minds of people, with some of them becoming icons that are used to identify movements, cultures and locations. The artists on the other hand are noted as great artists. There are some value features which determine what art work is considered great, or which artist is worth celebrating as a master. Some of these supposed bodies include, curators, art critics, art historians, art collectors and the public. Lack of focus and vision on the side of the artist can equally hinder an artist from being a great artist. In this paper therefore, issues that surround the emergence of an artist to be known as a master, and a piece of art work to assume a place of a masterpiece are discussed. At the same time, it goes further to examine how an artist becomes a master and how a particular art work can be called a masterpiece. References are drawn from works that are tagged as master pieces and artists who are considered masters. The paper concludes by stating that, most masters grew from obscurity in training and practice to becoming great. Time and place at which an art work is produced determine the title accorded to it and vice versa. It is recommended that artists should practice art regardless of whether it is tagged master piece or not.

Keywords: Masterpiece, Master, Art

Introduction

The mystery of producing art works from the early ages has gone through series of refinements. Evidences of the early humans activities were documented on the walls of caves and other surfaces which could not survive weathering. However, the art works that survived the harsh weather revealed human's innate ability to create a product. This could be the reason which made Stockstad (2008) to state that, human beings have an inherent desire to decorate themselves and their surroundings, which is an aesthetic wisdom, inborn to humans. This therefore, suggests that the early humans could execute such an excellent art rendition despite their few available materials that could ease art practice.

The art works produced by early humans look great today in technique, materials, styles, forms, content and in some instances, the ability to apply light and shade in some of the paintings. An example of such recorded by Skelton (2014) is the, San Bushmen of Drakensberg, South Africa, which distinguished the artists that created them using polychromatic technique. This was not the only exceptional cave paintings in history, those found in Chauvet, France, showed a vibrant colouring technique too. It is established that these are examples of great works in the early stages of humans' artistic life.

After the cave era, humans began to settle in constructed shelters, and their artistic activities kept changing with their needs at any given time. In Egypt, the art forms became sophisticated in sculpture, painting, building of temples and pyramid which climaxed the artistic practice of ancient Egyptians. The Greeks followed the Egyptians and added some doses of innovations on what they did. This act of innovation made them excel in almost all fields of human endeavours, particularly, the arts. When the Romans took over in "ruling" the world, their art works were built more on what the Greeks did, but added immensely to it and the Greek art works were preserved through that of Romans. Progressively, there was a continuous development through the years in different parts of the world to this day.

This developmental changes in art brought about diverse art forms, groups and movements. It is the need for new ideas, forms and concepts that kept humans looking for more ideas on how to do things differently in unique ways. Through such activities, art works of great importance were produced and preserved for later generations, and some of these art works are seen today as master pieces created by art masters. It is against this backdrop that, this paper seeks to examine the issue of how an artist becomes a master and particular art works masterpieces. References are drawn from works tagged master pieces and artists called masters.

An Art Master

The phrase an art master, raises questions such as; Who should be addressed as an art master or when is an artist fit to be called a master? When and how can art work become masterpiece? At a start, a master according to Encarta Dictionary (2009) is seen as a skilled worker: somebody who is highly skilled in a trade or craft and is qualified to teach apprentices. He is also called a master craftsman, thereby placing him or her higher in skills, idea and practice not only to produce great works, but to the position of trainer of other persons. Myers (2013) suggests that, to be a master of art, it is the artist's job to plunge viewers into a world that the artist has built and should guide them safely through it. In doing this, the artist is said to master composition, perspective, value, colour and lighting; which are not strict rules that manipulate them to climb the ladder of greatness

To attain the level of being called a master incorporates many things an artist needs to be engaged in. McNee (2010) outlines some of these ingredients as follows: an artist makes art the core of his or her life. The artist wakes up and goes to sleep thinking about art, the artist understands how art business works in the art world. The artist has a strong work ethic, resilience which makes him or her to work without allowing mistakes to bring discouragement, instead of regrets. The artist focuses on solutions to problems, the artist spends time with nature and people who are hundred percent supportive of his or her art career. Commenting on this, Max in McNee (2010) sees the "measure of success in the art world as often determined by 'the art mafia' and a media focused on novelty and celebrity." This holds some facts but does not exonerate the artist from following those measures outlined earlier.

The issue of art collectors or mafia as expressed by Max is crucial to determine an artist to be a master or not. The example of Van Gogh is one, McNee (2010) reacts to this by saying, take a look at Van Gogh (Plate I) he was never considered successful or a master while alive. He struggled to sell one or two works only just because the art collectors felt different about him. This goes a long way to state that, to some extent, to be a master of art, one needs the help of media, art collectors, vendors, critics and curators. Adding a voice to this, Muller (2010) laments that, in South Africa, many galleries will not even take a look at one's art work unless the artist has a degree attached to his or her name. She went further to say that, there are plenty great works of artists that do not have the opportunity to show such works simply because they are tagged as self-taught artists. There are many closed doors for many artists who try to be famous, and these come from both local and foreign galleries as well as art collectors.

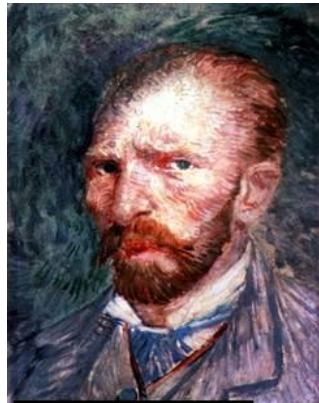


Plate 1: Van Gogh's Self Portrait. 19th C. AD. Source: Encarta Encyclopedia /Art Resource, New York.

The situation in South Africa reveals the complex nature artists face in Africa, however, McNee (2010) says, such practice is not in America. An artist in the United States of America does not need a degree attached to his or her name to be accepted by art galleries. Dhanak (2012) believes that, it is the work of art which counts. Historically, most famous artists were not appreciated in spite of their hard works. Even though commercialisation is crucial and necessary, the best works come only when one's mind is not expecting. Reacting to this also, McNee (2012) decries that, sadly history has proven that many great artists were not discovered until after their death. This calls for more awareness that, hopefully nowadays, the internet should be at a better position to help unknown artists today to become known.

To be a master as an artist, one needs to take art practice as a professional. According to Drew (2016), the artist needs to do what the professionals do in the field of art practice. It does not lie simply on having fancy business cards or making a lot of money, but by consciously taking the creative

obsession in the artist and turn it to be his or her career. By avoiding what amateur artists do; one waits for inspiration instead of doing something with art every day, constantly changing one's focus on styles, technique and medium based on mood, believing success happens quickly, needing not to work by schedule but by insightful learning. By focusing on the art and by being influenced by what other artists do. Such can put the artist on the ladder of proficiency, which leads to draughtsmanship in art. On this, Grillo (2006) concludes that, it is inconceivable that a Polytechnic or University graduate that is talented, would at that stage be called a master, not even after acquiring a PhD. What are the precise criteria and parameters used to determine a master? Under the traditional scenery, the title master was appropriately applied to respect experienced, often old practitioners under whom many had studied and now are professionals too.

The Issue of Masterpiece

The question what makes an art masterpiece is very important. Some of the issues connected to this question have been raised and discussed under the art master. That notwithstanding, a work of art can be a masterpiece or not depending on the circumstances surrounding the evaluation of the work. Euvino (2016) avers that, a masterpiece makes one forget the artist, instead directing one's attention to the artist's work. One may wonder how the work was executed, but for the time being viewers marvel so deeply that they are brought into this creation which consciousness is preserved. For instance, no viewer of Rembrandt's art works walks away without being influenced in one way or the other (Plate II). Expanding on what makes an art work a masterpiece, Euvino (2016) states that:

A masterpiece should transcend its subject matter, expanding the viewer's concept of art, becoming a marker, a buoy, a reference point. There's no better example of this than Giotto, who departed from stylized Byzantine conservatism and revolutionized the art world of his time by using foreshortening to create the illusion of depth. His use of perspective paved the way for all masters that followed, making him one of the founders of Western painting as we know it today.

In other words, for a work of art to be a masterpiece it should exceed what it intends to speak on. The viewers are brought into the activity by expanding what they see to feel another level of creation. One may ask, why is it difficult today to spot an artist that is acclaimed worldwide like the old masters? Beloin's (2015) view on this matter is simple, the knowledge has not been lost, but the virtuousness of appealing painting, and maybe never even existed. On another side, Gaugy (2015) remarks that, there are thousands of artists who today paint better than the 'old masters' ever dreamed of painting. So what is the point if an artist paints like that, it has been done before. Such paintings today are seen as "craft" in today's modern art. That is to say, there are many art works that are master pieces in their own rights as relate to what is practiced today.



Plate II: The Night Watch. Rembrandt. 1642. Source: Bridgeman Art Library, London/New York

The painting of Rembrandt in Plate II is a clear example of a master piece which existed during the old masters era of realism. The painting possesses the basic principles of art which gives the entire composition a story. The style speaks of the use of deep tones to highlight areas of interest in this representational art piece. This suggests that, a work of art to be a masterpiece, it has to fulfil the needs of basic principles, and at the same time meet the needs of the society of that era. In a blog, Valle (2011) asks a question on, features that make a painting a masterwork. One of the respondents Anna said, "Composition is what draws me to a work of art. Colour draws the eye, but the foundation of a masterpiece is its composition. Again Kat, another respondent simply puts it that it is the test of time. While Barbee says, all masterpieces seem to have a bit of mystique about them, which in turn makes the art critic talk about.



Plate III: The Last Supper. Leonardo da Vinci. 1495-1497.

Source: Encarta Encyclopedia EPA/ANSA/AFP 2009.

The views expressed about what makes an art work a masterpiece are pointers to the fact that, the work should fulfil basic principles of art. It is the appropriate usage of these principles combined with creativity and draftmanship that distinguishes an art piece from another. An example of such a painting is Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* in Plate III. In describing the Last Supper painting, Magurn (2009) points out that, the grouping of the disciples creates a great scene and interesting story. Christ is left alone as the disciples engage in serious discourse which erupted from the statement that Jesus made about his betrayal by one of them. Both the composition, story, technique and style make this work out to be a master piece.

Another classical example of a work becoming a masterpiece is a sculpture in Dakar, Senegal titled, *African Renaissance Monument*. Attaway (2016) describes the sculpture as the tallest statue in Africa created in bronze and was completed in 2010 by the Senegalese Government amidst many protests. The work is about 160 feet high, half of the size of the Statue of Liberty in America. This sculpture in Senegal is meant to address the corruption that bedeviled the country and Africa at large. What makes the sculpture unique and a masterpiece is the energy and seriousness depicted in the composition. The size, material and story also added to the value of the work.



Plate IV: African Renaissance Monument, Dakar, Senegal. 2010.

Source: www.blackhistoryheroes.com

Another example of a large sculpture which meets the possible criteria to be called a master piece, is a giant statue of a woman situated in the central commercial city of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. The sculptural piece shows a pregnant woman in motion, holds a baby by her right hand side. On her head is a tray with few food items which suggests the struggle of a plateau woman to fend for the family. This giant sculpture was completed in the early 1990s during Governor Fidelis Tapgun's regime. It has served as one of the major attractions for tourists coming to the state. However, during Governor Jonah Jang's regime, the statue was pulled down for un-obvious reasons. This has generated reactions from people within and outside the state.



Plate V: Female Statue, Funmilayo, 1992. Jos, Plateau State.

In a nutshell, the statue of Sango in front of NEPA house, now Eko Electricity Distribution Company, Lagos, reveals an energetic figure raising a staff of power. The sculpture assumes a place of masterpiece not only because of the technique used, but for the strategic positioning of the work. It is a busy area in Lagos, Nigeria's biggest commercial city where many businesses have their head offices. It is also the nerve of Nigeria's economy and through which imported goods gain entrance into the country. The mystical interpretation of Sango as mentioned by unravellingnigeria.com (2016) is that, Sango has the ability to turn normal substances into elements which are pure and valuable (Plate VI.) The Yoruba see Sango as a symbol of power, hence the need to be used to represent light which birthed the creation of the Sango statue in front of electricity company's main office.



**Plate VI: Statue of Sango, Eko Electricity Distribution House, Lagos, Nigeria.
Source: unravellingnigeria.com 2016.**

Conclusion

The discourse that involves elements which turn an artist into a master and a particular art work a masterpiece, brought into play many issues surrounding such. Many authors have divergent views on what makes an artist a master. To some, it is the constant practice of art that makes the magic, while some hinge on the style, technique and the ability to manipulate them into creative art products. As a whole, an artist to be great involves commitment, drive, interest and understanding of what to do at a particular period. An artist that is aspiring to be a master, must put off all the elements of an amateur artist which are highlighted in the body of this paper.

Conclusively, this paper wishes to posit that, to be a master of art, an artist needs to be purposeful. He or she should know what to do and at what time. The inspiring artist must always update himself or herself with developments in the field of art. This calls for the artist to mingle with other artists in the society, which will create exposure to what is new. Again, to be a master of art, the artist should be resilient, in that artists are bound to make mistakes in producing works of art but it is not enough to be discouraged rather, the artist sees it as a challenge to bounce back with new ideas and techniques to approach the problem. It is equally important to read about masters, and their works, to see the challenges they also passed through before becoming great.

In the place of a work of art becoming a master piece, the art work should possess the basic qualities of art principles. When these principles are lacking in an art work, it will be difficult to attract viewers

which in turn, becomes hard to satisfy the need of the people within that period or era. Apart from an art work possessing those principles, the art work should be able to create a story that goes beyond what the common person sees. It should reveal some deep, conceptual and contextual meanings to the work, this will add to the value of the art piece. An art work that creates an unforgettable experience to the viewer, has the ability to be a masterpiece. Viewers keep coming back to it without knowing why the work was done that way, and examples of such art works are those done by the old masters. That is not to say that, art works today are not masterpieces rather, there are great artworks that have fulfilled all the necessary requirements of masterpieces but, because of dearth which exists in reportage has denied such works from being recognised as master pieces.

Recommendation

The issue of denying artists exhibition spaces in galleries should be salvaged by the use of the internet. Artists are therefore, encouraged to create blogs for their artworks or send such works to vibrant bloggers who are willing and eager to market art products. Other social media like facebook, instagram, twitter, to-go, whatsapp and the likes should serve as good avenues for advertisement. As such, they should be explored and used to advertise hidden artworks done by known and unknown artists. With this, the monopoly of gallery owners will be challenged and interesting art works will flood the market. When this is done, the art collectors, critics, and historians will have new materials available for scholarship discourse, in turn, more master pieces will come to limelight.

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