

They Speak: African Art as Historical Evidences

Inaugural lecture

By

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Abstract

African art is a relatively recent discipline of academic endeavour. Since coming into being via the route of its western counterpart, it had been engaged the most by anthropologists and enthusiast-collectors with scant methodological knowledge either of the art itself or acceptable approaches to it. It is quite true that many things African, quite unfortunately, are often subjected to pejoration and negative dichotomisation to the extent of being treated as simply the poor 'other'. Recently however, experts equipped with the necessary depth and width required to handle the subject have started to emerge; many of Africans but indeed not limited necessarily scholars of African descent. The result is an evolution of a clear methodology for working African art. This is a major 20th century achievement and it is against this background that this lecture is set.

The lecture is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the early beginnings of African art and the shaping of the discipline including issues of naming and nomenclature. In this section, the lecturer traces the origins of Africa art as an academic discipline while interrogating the idea of an emergent and acceptable method for working it. In the second part, the author examines the theoretical frames that have guided and structured the discipline in the last century, assesses their appropriateness and successes and, adds voice to how he thinks African art can be approached, going forward. The third parts deals with the idea of art as history, and outlines the lecturer's contributions to the study of the Esie stone carvings and Northern Edo arts. Finally, the lecture, with regard to modern and contemporary art, speaks to the need for wholesale documentation of artists and exhibition of their works to build our own art history. He concludes on collecting, the need for museums and the ownership of Art.