

Stylistic and Semiotic Change in Contemporary Painting and Sculpture in Zimbabwe: Some Perceptions and Perspectives

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Abstract

Style is a central construct in art historiography and the general conception of art. What constitutes style has been the subject of debate by connoisseurs, art critics and artists themselves. It is personally conceived and responds in tandem to the zeitgeist and is ever changing. This study sought to interrogate the notion of style and related semiotic change amongst post independence¹ painters and sculptors in Zimbabwe. The study was inspired by the general interest and rapid developments in the visual arts in the country in recent decades. A qualitative methodology involving interviews of an elite kind, observations and analysis of artifacts was employed, participants drawn from practicing artists, art educators, curators and art students. Data revealed differential conceptions of style, practice and evolutionary trends in both painting and sculpture. Socio-economic and political factors were among the significant factors that influenced themes, style and visual imagery. Since independence styles among Zimbabwean artists have been constantly changing. While style can be variedly inspired, artists need to develop personal styles that are commensurate with local and individual considerations also inspired by the zeitgeist.

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