

Masquerade and “What Comes Behind Six Is More Than Seven”: Thoughts on Art History and Visual Culture Research Methods

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Abstract : In the 21st century, the disciplinary boundaries of past centuries that we often create through mainstream art historical classification, techniques and sources may have been eroded by visual culture, which seems to provide a more inclusive umbrella for the new ways artists go about the creative process and its resultant commodities. Over the past four decades, artists in Africa have resorted to new materials, techniques and themes which have affected our ways of research on these artists and their art. Frontline artists such as El Anatsui, Yinka Shonibare, Erasmus Onyishi are demonstrating that any material is just suitable for artistic expression. Most of times, these materials come with their own techniques/effects and visual syntax: a combination of materials compounds techniques, formal aesthetic indexes, halo effects, and iconography. This tends to challenge the categories and we lean on to view, think and talk about them. This renders our main stream art historical research methods inadequate, thus suggesting new discursive concepts, terms and theories. This paper proposed the Africanist eclectic methods derived from the dual framework of Masquerade Theory and What Comes Behind Six is More Than Seven. This paper shares thoughts/research on art historical methods, terminological re-alignments on classification/source data, presentational format and interpretation arising from the emergent trends in our subject. The outcome provides useful tools to mediate new thoughts and experiences in recent African art and visual culture.

Keywords : art historical methods, classifications, concepts, re-alignment

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