

From Ritual to Entertainment: Echoes of Realism and Creativity in Costumes of Masquerades in New Nigerian Festivals

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Abstract : The masquerade, which is the most popular indigenous art form in Africa, is obviously identified by its elaborate, weird, and opulent costumes. The costume is the major essential accouterments in the art of the masquerade. From time past, masquerades have performed and enjoyed the freedom associated with its inscrutability and mystification solely because of its costumes. Noninitiates and women watched masquerades from a distance due to the reverence attached to its costumes and performances. In fact, whether in performance or as an item of art, the masquerade costume was seen as an embodiment of a tradition of liveliness, showiness, secrecy, and sacredness. This liveliness and showiness transformed masked characters who are believed to be possessed by spirits of ancestors and animals that inhabited the costumes. However, with the translocation of masquerade in new festivals such as carnival and state-sponsored cultural days, its costumes have been reduced to a mere item of entertainment and aesthetic values. The sacredness and reverence which hitherto elevated masquerade art to the point of wonderment have given way to an aesthetic appreciation of ingenious and individual creativity deployed in these festivals. This is as a result of the realistic and artistic creations that pervade masquerade costumes and masks in these festivals. It is a common sight to see such masquerades of animal and human genera like a lion, elephant, hippopotamus, and antelope; Agbogho Mmuo, Adamma, and Nchiekwa, respectively. This creative flair has emerged to expunge the ritual narratives associated with masquerades in the past. The study utilized performance analysis and aesthetic theory to establish that the creative ingenuity deployed by fine artists and mask designers who combine traditional artifacts to achieve modern masterpieces for the masquerades of the new festivals have reduced the ritual trappings and hype ascribed to masquerades in indigenous societies.

Keywords : costume and mask designs, entertainment, masquerade, ritual

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