

TRENDS IN CULTURAL AND SOCIETAL MANAGEMENT OF CEMENT MURAL IN GHANA

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Abstract

Cement mural over the years has trend with humanity internationally and has played matchless role in cultural and societal management in the definition of Ghanaian culture and traditions. It is an effective instrument for Ghanaian cultural meanings and interpretations based on philosophies, themes, concepts and its social significance of promoting one's self-esteem. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the trends in cultural and social magnitude of cement mural and analysed its traditional connotations based on Ghanaian beliefs and lifestyles. Descriptive research design, using case study was adopted at examining and analysing the trend of cultural and societal significances of cement murals in the Ghanaian tradition. The researchers tend to validate the trending nature of cement mural in these two realms of management on repercussions of its value. Based on the research approach adopted, it was deduced that murals express various traditional, cultural and social meanings that relates to the history, beliefs and personal philosophies of Ghanaian people. As trending, the aesthetic appreciation of cement mural is grounded on individual cultural and societal influences as it is mostly seen on walls, facades and columns of modern architectural edifice and houses in Ghanaian communities. The study concluded that murals tend to draw art lovers to the facility, beautify the structures and make the structures more of traditional or give it an African touch. Implication of findings drawn on individual's dictum revealed that cement murals done on individual homes or houses bring out the true persona of individual uniqueness and also create an undying bond between cultural and societal management as based on aesthetics.

Keywords: Cement mural, Ghanaian, Culture, Architecture

1 Introduction

Cement mural has been aesthetically used for many roles in the development of humanity from time immemorial. Looking at Qi's functions of modern mural art, Murals not only serve as "decoration" for beautifying people's living environment but also have especial social and cultural properties that meet aesthetic needs of the public and possess functions for reflecting the ethnic, folk, and contemporary culture trend as well as functions for socio-cultural welfare purpose. Artistic creation murals in harmony with environment can enhance the art value, cultural value of environment and add its functions. Murals of new era can also reproduce historical events, heroic deeds of historical figures, thus playing a role in narration. As people's living standards have been improved and aesthetic demands have increased, murals begin to enter small space such as private houses and therefore decorative functions of murals, decorative functions of murals become increasingly obvious (Qi, 2014).

In Ghanaian cultural setting, in order to appreciate these impacts of cement mural on architectural buildings, some basic factual elements on both cultural beliefs and major artistic lifestyles are necessary. The artistic lifestyles or qualities in these cement mural affirm that shared aesthetic conscience exists across cultural beliefs, expressed in distinctive and precise form, and that it can be jointly perceived by the creator as well as the perceptive observer. This cement mural is a metaphor for the African Ghanaian cosmology that dramatically harmonizes humanity and the environment, integrating individuals and art into larger structures of family, clan, communal groups, and tribal identity. Cement mural in Ghana is a truly diverse experience of the pleasing aesthetic creations that acknowledges the artistic impulse existed between mankind and his environment. It touches a range of human emotions, some subtle, some overt. Anthropological facts on mural may help every individual to understand the skills and may enhance the appreciation, but ultimately the aesthetic response rests upon the art form presence. Understanding this form of art means to stand the cultural and social significance before it and perceive it closely, being receptive to the emotions it generates.

The ecstasy in Ghanaian cement mural speak to its viewers, this is agreed on Evergreen (2015) statement as shared that “Cement murals – especially those in prominent and public buildings – are designed to interact with the viewer and the space in which they are placed. They often tell a bigger story; a story about a specific time, a specific place, and specific people.” However without a doubt, murals have been around as long as people, as a form of valuable testimony of life from the prehistoric time to today. From the cave paintings at Lascaux Grottoes in southern France to the street art murals of today, people have been leaving signs of their own existence in many places around the world. It is because of the earliest scratching, carvings, etchings and paintings that we now have priceless knowledge of our history and predecessors, and these murals hold great significance for mankind, as they depicted life activities, everyday scenery and usually religious traditions of the time they were created in, giving us a priceless look of the diversity of our cultures during different periods. Over the course of time, murals have covered the interiors and exteriors of many public buildings, such as palaces, temples, tombs, museums, libraries, churches and the houses of rich art patrons, spreading onto the streets and architectural elements more recently, all the while keeping their initial meaning and purpose: to paint a picture of society, created from stories, values, dreams, change (Kordic: 2015).

The Ghanaian cement mural sculpture in its finest representations can be culturally and socially examined aesthetically in terms of form, composition, and presence. Again the art works in this rendition possess these characteristics, often in boldly innovative designs or geometric patterns incorporated with Adinkra symbols. Cement murals especially those in prominent individual and public buildings are designed to interact with the viewer and the space in which they are placed. They often tell a bigger story; a story about a specific time, a specific place, and specific people. The cultural and societal of creating cement murals on walls, facades, columns are considered by sculptors to be an integral part of building. As cement murals cover quite large surfaces that could be of different texture, constitution and attributes artists have developed several techniques adaptive to wall surfaces. One of these is plastering, which uses cement or mortar on walls or ceilings. In many cases the sculptural wall is also structural - supporting the rest of the building. Though these cement forms of murals are very trendy in Ghanaian culture, very little is written on the cultural and societal significances these cement murals possessed. The research thus intends to make available answers to the inadequacies as well as strengthen the cultural and societal management of cement murals in the Ghanaian setting.

2 Literature Review

Kordic (2015) again shares that the word mural originates from the Latin word “murus”, meaning “wall”. Today, we can define murals as any piece of artwork painted or applied

directly onto a wall, ceiling or other larger permanent surfaces, flat, concave or convex, to be precise. A favourite technique of many artists, including masters like Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarroti, the art of muralism flourished during the 1920s, after the Mexican revolution. It is during this time that murals got a new dimension as a powerful visual communication tool, meant to promote the opinion of the people and to transmit social and political messages towards unity. Through the large paintings of “the great three”: Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, murals became the most important form of expression, often the subject of controversy and always a symbol of solidarity, freedom and hope. The Mexican muralism art inspired the creation of many other similar movements around the world, the biggest being the Chicago art movement in the 1960s. Murals also represent one of the most important features of Northern Ireland, depicting the region’s past and present political and religious divisions. Since the 1970s, the country has seen almost 2,000 paintings dedicated to the fight against racism and environmentalism, among many other issues. Another famous place charged with political murals was the Berlin Wall, whose Western side saw many murals between its creation in 1961 and its destruction in 1989, including the works by artists Keith Haring and Thierry Noir. Staying true to their role of expressing religious and political beliefs within societies, murals represent a mighty tool of emancipation, freedom of expression and social activism and propaganda. Today, in many places around the world and mostly in South America, mural art is used to speak in the name of and depict communities, nations and cultures. At the same time, murals represent an aesthetic element which helps them integrate into their environments and turns them into true cultural artefacts and even monumental works. Apart from their well-defined meanings, murals are also created with other purposes, such as advertising or simply for the sake of a beautiful image on a wall. With street art becoming more mainstream, many big brands often collaborate with mural artists in creating promotional campaigns and designs, and many world-famous street art and graffiti artists successfully paint their murals everywhere, showing incredible skills and talent which formed their own highly distinctive artistic styles.

Jonsson (2015) is of the view that there have been murals on walls throughout the world for as long as there have been people on Earth. People scratched them, carved them, etched them and painted them. The history of murals and mural painting is rich and varied, from the prehistoric cave paintings at Lascaux, France, to the celebratory and ceremonial murals of ancient Egypt, Rome, Mesopotamia, Greece and India. According to art historians, mural painting dates back at least 30,000 years to cave paintings. (Other historians credit the Minoans and the Etruscans.) Some of these impressive works have been preserved, thankfully, by the very caves which they inhabit. These ancient murals typically depict the activities of a particular civilization’s people, encapsulating a moment in time, and range from scenes of hunting, gathering, and family life, to religious and funerary scenes. An interesting evolution continues in the world of murals. New ones are continually being commissioned and created while old ones are constantly being rediscovered and restored (i.e. ca. 100 AD Mayan wall paintings at the remote ruins of El Petén and San Bartolo in Guatemala, which were discovered fairly recently in March 2001). The purpose of murals varies from culture to culture, and from time period to time period. Several examples follow. Many murals in the Tibetan world, both ancient and contemporary, are created as part of meditative and reflective Buddhist practices. During the Baroque period in France, Germany and England, rich art patrons and royalty had Biblical and allegorical murals painted on the ceilings and of their luxurious homes and palaces. Patrons often had themselves painted into the mural, as a way of capturing their likenesses for all time. Mural art appears on the walls and ceilings of interior and exterior spaces, ranging from palaces, temples, and tombs, to museums, libraries, churches, and other public buildings. In our more contemporary era, murals have found their way onto a large variety of surfaces. An important point to finish this section with: Good mural artists will consider their mural in

relation to the mural's natural or architectural setting, allowing the piece to become an aesthetic, social, and most importantly, cultural, artefact. Worth noting...Murals date to Upper Paleolithic times, such as the paintings in the Chevaux Cave in Ardeche (southern France) around 30.000 BC. Ancient murals have also survived in Egyptian tombs circa 3150 BC, the Minoan palaces from the Neopalatial period circa 1700-1600 BC, and in Pompeii circa 100 BC to 79 CE (AD). These ancient murals were 'painted' with whatever materials, always natural, were available at the time.

Cultural and societal connotations conveyed by cement murals are beneficial to enhancing human mental minds and achieving dual functions of appreciation of aesthetic beauty and enlightenment, truly reflecting social value of cement mural. Diverse space environment and extensive aesthetic collections increase the demand for murals, and especially the increase in large public buildings provides greater prospects for mural development, and meanwhile brings more limiting factors for mural creation as well as imposing more requirements for selecting themes, expressing vectors of inner spirit. Therefore, the viewers' aesthetic ability and aesthetic taste should be taken into account during considering the diversity of space buildings. Murals can adapt to requirements for space functions and forms of specific environment, thereby achieving its own aesthetic perfection, so that people can enjoy the environment aesthetically and get spiritual enjoyment fully. At the same time they can achieve social functions of indoctrinating and promoting human relations, which can be best shown from the square in this respect, as the square buildings as micro-environment are more open and broader, who's various groups of appreciation have different levels of aesthetic standards and rich aesthetic tastes. It is important to reflect the openness and characteristic civilization of regional cities in medium environment (Qi, 2015).

Lau (2015) cites that many of the murals of Mohammad Mahmoud Street near Tahrir Square, created to commemorate the martyrs of the 2011 Revolution, can be observed to make remarkable use of symbols and motifs of ancient Egyptian art. At the same time, the continuing protests in Egypt have largely been divorced in Western academic discourse from any discussion of ancient Egyptian history. This pattern of disassociating modern Egypt from its ancient past has been prominent in Western thinking ever since colonizers first began to collect ancient Egyptian artefacts and documents in their own private institutions. When one of these institutions, the Institute d'Egypte, burned down in December 2011 together with many of its important historical documents, some in the West began asking questions about the Egyptians' irreverence toward their own history. In fact, however, history as cultural and social memory could not be more alive in the Egyptian Revolution and its aftermath. The Revolution has reinvigorated history on the street in a way that has the capacity to produce change in society. The most tangible evidence of this is in the street murals of Mohammad Mahmoud Street, which incorporate Egyptian art in a way that endows both ancient and modern history with new meanings and that invites participation from the street, empowering Egyptians on both the individual and societal level, and legitimizing the presence of the people at a time when the state has oppressed their very existence.

Cultural pride serves as a cornerstone of culturally competent social work practice. Cultural competence, in turn, also relies on a strengths perspective toward individuals and communities (Delgado and Barton, 1998).

Looking at these assertions from various authors as cited this literature, all the views are geared towards the cultural and societal impact murals have on the individuals and the community as well.

3 Research Methodology

Descriptive research design, using case study which allows examining and analysing the trend of cultural and societal significances of cement murals in the Ghanaian tradition was used. Case study research conducted for this study involved an in-depth study of individuals who owned private buildings and social business centres with cement murals. Case studies often lead to testable hypotheses and allow one to study rare phenomena. Case studies should not be used to determine cause and effect, and they have limited use for making accurate predictions (Halle, 2011).

The choosing of sample size depends on non-statistical considerations and statistical considerations. The non-statistical considerations may include availability of resources, manpower, budget, ethics and sampling frame. The statistical considerations will include the desired precision of the estimate of prevalence and the expected prevalence of eye problems in school children (Explorable.com, 2015).

On the other hand, the sample size obviously depends on the type of research. (Dawson, 2002). The research sample size of 50 respondents were contacted for this sampling procedure. These 50 respondents were comprised of five building industries as they were purposively selected for the research population. These were Akroma Plaza, Brown's resident, Frebe Mall, Naakoff Chinese Hotel & Restaurant both Takoradi and Adjei-Boye's Villa located at Dawhueya, Tema. Specifically, these five buildings were chosen for the study, based on the criteria that they contained the trendy nature of cultural and societal management pertaining cement murals done contemporary to suit the architectural edifice. Research was conducted by purposive sampling technique for the study. The sample is made up of 15 workers of Akroma Plaza, 5 workers of Brown's resident, 15 workers of Frebe Mall, 10 workers of Naakoff Chinese Hotel & Restaurant and 5 individuals of Adjei-Boye's villa.

A form of non-probability sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research. Some types of research design necessitate researchers taking a decision about the individual participants who would be most likely to contribute appropriate data, both in terms of relevance and depth. For example, in life history research, some potential participants may be willing to be interviewed, but may not be able to provide sufficiently rich data (Oliver; 2013).

In this fact, this purposive sampling as a feature of qualitative research, researchers handpick the buildings have cements murals on the basis of their judgement of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought. In this way, they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs. (Cohen et al., 2010).

Data collection tools were semi-structured interview, participant observation, focus group on discussions of personal viewpoints. Participant observation helped the researchers in some history, uses and purposes of cement mural done in Ghana. All collected data was validated using a triangulation method and analysed by analytic induction and typological analysis. The results are here presented as a descriptive analysis.

"Careful planning for data collection can help with setting realistic goals. Data collection instrumentation, such as surveys, physiologic measures (blood pressure or temperature), or interview guides, must be identified and described. Using previously validated collection instruments can save time and increase the study's credibility. Once the data collection procedure has been determined, a time line for completion should be established." (Pierce, 2009:159).

4 Findings and Discussion

The beauty of Ghanaian cultural and societal trends takes the standpoint of an understanding of contemporary Ghanaian society and culture that requires a good understanding of traditional institutions, beliefs and practices. This study therefore further goes on with aesthetic appreciations of cement mural works imbued with Ghanaian traditional culture, social organization, social institutions and world-view before tackling the influence of contemporary cultural and social changes on cement mural. Some important factors of change to be considered include: colonialism, Christianity, formal classroom education and monetization of the economy. Other features of modernization to be treated are urbanization, industrialization, migration (rural-urban), globalization and new and increasing advances in communication technology (Nukunya, 2003).

All these influences have taken roots in the Ghanaian arts and culture. Cement mural in places talks more about ones ideology, philosophy of cultural and social affirmation of life. These trend in cultural and societal management are a fundamental skill required of professional artists especially sculptors and in many other fields of art. In modern cement mural practice, an ability to create images and to encode them with meaning is central to the creative process. With an emphasis on design practice and analysis, this art form aims to develop ones understanding of the fundamentals of visual language and design principles. These visual languages and design principles come in a form of geometric patterns, shapes, lines and dots. This provides the public or viewers with a core knowledge base from which one can build visual problem-solving skills and enhance one's ability to plan, create and critically evaluate one's own image-making processes.

Looking at these visual languages and design principles that come in a form of geometric patterns, shapes, lines and dots. They have been used to form compositions that speaks and promotes Ghanaian tradition. Below are some aesthetic appreciations of cement murals in various forms of composition on buildings especially walls, facades and columns:

Appreciation 1: In Akan language "Ahyiabia" explains the etymology of the hotel, bar and restaurant name, "Akroma Plaza" as the meeting place. Akroma Plaza started operations in 2002 with the restaurant and catering business as its core business. With the motto "Attaining Heights in taste". Akroma Plaza climbed high in hospitality ladder to attain the status of the best restaurant of the Western region in the grade one category. With a high demand for conference facility and accommodation, Charlie Hall, the hotel and auditorium were added to the existing facilities. Rightly coined, "A world of comfort in the heart of town", there is no holding back on quality when it comes to Akroma Plaza. The composition of cement mural on the façades and pillars of the hotel brings the act or process of converging and the tendency to meet in one point. The work has representation of all human forms coming together under one roof. That is the point of convergence or meeting place within the work. The interplay of these element gradually bring the unfolding calescence. The meeting place symbolizes the coming together of different people in the contexts of harmony, joy, happiness, peace and relaxation under a comfort serene environment or atmosphere (below shows figure 1a and figure 1b - The meeting place).



Figure 1a. The Meeting place



Figure 1b. The Meeting place

Appreciation 2: Progression among humanity involves important ideas that are neither trivial nor obvious, these ideas need to be taught in ways that are interesting and engaging to mankind. The totality of concepts involved in this work of art means the gradual movement and development of human activities towards a destination of succession. This describes concepts and representations of relationship between man his creator, ancestors, deities and lesser spirits. In Ghanaian culture, an adage goes like “Enam dua so nti na ahuma hunu esoro” literally means one becomes successful through his fellowman’s help. Therefore this long stretched chain composition of distorted human figures seeks to reiterate the value of togetherness and the qualities jointly compose and execute by mankind to attain victory through endurance. Progression is a long stretched chain wall mural composition that has human figures arranged up and downwards, twisted and jointly executed together. The composition reveals various form poses of human figures in geometrical objects.

These forms poses are embedded with geometric lines, dots, patterns and shapes which symbolize a comprehensive and representative state of humanity trying to be successful and help themselves to accomplish their ambitions (see Figure 2: Progression).



Figure 2. The Progression

Appreciation 3: Sankofa symbol appears frequently in traditional Akan art, and has also been adopted as an important symbol in an African American and African Diaspora context to represent the need to reflect on the past to build a successful future. It is one of the most widely dispersed Adinkra symbols, appearing in modern jewellery, tattoos and clothing. This work dialogues to its viewer the philosophical ideas and symbols of taking from the past what is good and bringing it into the present in order to make positive progress through the benevolent use of knowledge. The work is coupled with round objects, bigger dots and smaller ones which seeks to provide enlightenment of Ghanaian culture through educational, cultural, and social events and activities. The lines on the wings symbolizes the Akan people's quest for knowledge among the Akan with the implication that the quest is based on critical examination and intelligent and patient investigation. Thus the Akan belief that the past serves as a guide for planning the future. To the Akan it is this wisdom in learning from the past which ensures a strong future. The Akans believe that there must be movement and new learning as time passes, but as this forward march proceeds the knowledge of the past and must never be forgotten. Sankofa in Akan language literally and culturally means going back to fetch it, that is "se wo were fi na wo san kofa a yenkyi" (it is not a taboo to go back and retrieve if you forget). This symbol of made of cement on a wall proposes wisdom in learning from the past in building the future. The work is composed of a bird that has it head turned backwards with an egg in its beak touching the back. The work teaches us that we must go back to our roots in order to move forward. Visually and symbolically "Sankofa" is expressed as a mythic bird that flies forward while looking backward with an egg (symbolizing the future) in its mouth (see Figure 3: Sankofa).



Figure 3. Sankofa

Cement mural has been aesthetically used for many roles in the development of humanity from time immemorial, when people sculpted and painted depictions of their beliefs. Presently, people have begun to adorn private and commercial or religious structures with cement murals depicting lifestyle and religion and philosophical themes are incorporated.

The findings of the research study clearly revealed that cement murals in private or public places of building evolved generally as a solution to the cultural and societal needs of the individual and people of the community. In making this type of art form, cement is mixed with sieved sand or fine stone dust together with water as materials whereby they were used in the construction of cement murals. This does not only present readily available materials for practicing the above art form, but also made it possible for the aesthetics complement of the place. The cement murals clearly revealed the cultural and social thoughts and characteristics of the individually own buildings. This is in significant agreement with the research of Heather (2009), which investigated the 2500-year-old murals of the Mayan people of Guatemala. Hurst concluded that the creative process, content, style and materials had been adapted in line with technological advancements, social evolution and generational politics. There were clear periods of Mayan murals, such as pre-classic and classic. Cement murals found on these buildings thematically summarized the philosophical and cultural propensity of the buildings. Sculptors and building owners played an integral part in cement mural rendition, which clearly showcased their beliefs, concerns, interests, and aspirations. This lends credence to the findings of Wemegah (2013), who brought out the intricacies of mural decorations in the Sirigu Culture., since it served as a beautification of satisfying aesthetics and evidently showcasing the philosophical and cultural themes of the people.

It was also factual from the research findings that the role of the cement murals on buildings goes beyond adornment of the buildings. This is demonstrated on buildings where cement murals executions are highly propounded and displays the aesthetic values on the general spatial environment. Cement murals therefore, in this perspective, cannot be said to be only limited to the aesthetics, but also helps in cultural and societal therapeutic values on buildings. Buildings or houses with such edifices, are important instrument used in imparting our traditional values not only aesthetics but providing the cultural and social importance to the individual and the community as a whole.

5 Conclusion and Further Research

Based on the findings of the study, it therefore allowed to conclude that cement murals on buildings or houses in private or public places are not done artistically and aesthetically please the individual and the community but based on its cultural and societal connotations. This artistic rendition embodied great percentages of the cultural and social values based on personal philosophies of the people. The research obviously showed that materials used in the execution of cement murals were naturally materials with the exception of cement which is chemically oriented but environmentally friendly when it comes to working with it.

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