

The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies



International Journal of Social Science

Volume 5 Issue 5, p. 1-9, October 2012

THE ORIGINS OF ART

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Abstract

In this work, the origins of art are being questioned. Since the beginning of the humankind and especially after using the hands as a tool, men have created many works of art consciously or not. In the primitive ages, the tribe magicians were known with their ability to create some statues or spells for a fruitful hunting or wellness of the tribe itself. Or in the Middle Ages, the artists of that time have created art to hail the religion. When we criticize the first pieces of art with our current knowledge of art history, we will fall into a big trap. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the social, economic and political conditions of the time periods in which the pieces of art were created. This article tries to analyze that process.

Key Words: Art, Creativity, Spells, Religion, Politics.

Öz

Bu çalışmada sanatın kökenleri araştırılmaktadır. İnsanlığın başlangıcından ve de özellikle ellerin alet olarak kullanılmaya başlanmasından bu yana insanoğlu bilinçli ya da bilinçsiz olarak pek çok sanat eseri üretmiştir. İlkel çağlarda kabile büyücüleri, bereketli bir avlanma ya da kabilenin iyiliği için heykel veya büyü yapma yetenekleriyle bilinirlerdi. Benzer bir şekilde Ortaçağ'da sanatçılar dini yüceltmek için eserler verirlerdi. Sanatın erken dönem ürünlerini günümüz sanat tarihi bilgimizle yorumlarsak, büyük bir hataya düşmüş oluruz. Bu nedenle sanat eserinin üretildiği dönemin sosyal, ekonomik ve siyasi koşullarını bilmek oldukça önemlidir. Bu makale söz konusu süreci analiz etmeye çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Sanat, Yaratıcılık, Büyüler, Din, Politika.

INTRODUCTION

When we observe the origins of art, we also have to investigate on creativity and the evolution of mankind. Even the ancient people, whom we consider as the primitive civilizations, have acted creatively whether conscious or not. (Thomson: 1998, pp.31)

Mankind had been creative in every situation during the centuries. Under the most negative circumstances, such as oppression and war, creativity has always found a path to develop itself. Although within our century art had been explained as neurosis, illness or the expression of sentimental impulses; when we investigate the history of art, it can easily be seen that the art had bared many different aims and meanings. (May: 1998, pp.61) Consequently, from the most primitive societies to our time art has always served for different aims and solely the impulse of creativity will not help us to explain the art history precisely.

In different time periods, art had appeared as a religious, mysterious and currently individualist attitude. In this article, I will try to examine the shift in the meaning and origins of art, parallel to the development of history of mankind and thought.

Conception of Art

Although there is no precise inference on the conception of art, the opinion that art had started with the usage of hands as a tool by mankind is very common. (Fischer: 2003, pp.18) Though it can be said that the first creative deed cannot be considered as the first piece of art, we can say that mankind's creation of first tool by using their hands is the first creative deed. By time, as the needs of people have increased, mankind continued the creative deeds in accordance with the physical development. While we examine the origins of art, we also have to examine the stages of mankind's development.

According to the theory of evolution, first put out by Darwin, the climate of Africa, which was previously heavily forested, changed after a giant earthquake and lemurs and deserts erupted. (Darwin: 2003) Mankind, who could climb up the trees and hide from his enemies now, had to stand up on his feet to see the possible threats moving towards him. We already know that the other creatures have also evolved during the history to fit within their environment. For example, according to a thesis, the hip bones of the whales indicate us that they were creatures who previously lived on the land. (Sutera: 2000, pp.36) So, the primitive human has started to grab the objects and food around him with his hands to fit in the environment. (Fischer: 2003, pp.21) As a result of this, as hands have started to act as the instrument of grabbing and holding, which were the functions of chin before, chin became smaller and more space on the skull occurred for the human brain to develop. Mankind, who had to stand on his feet and also had troubles to find places to hide and shelter, eventually migrated to north and harboured to the caves around France. Those caves are the ones at which we can see the first examples of painting.

When we examine the origins of art, it will be applicable to do it by dividing into three periods in accordance with the human development. As Freud had mentioned in his famous work "*Totem and Taboo*", mankind has been developed through pre-religious, religious and scientific periods and within these periods we face with different creative impulses. (Freud: 1998)

When we firstly look at the reasons of primitive people's creativity, we can see that there is a very simple and pure abstraction in their works, which made some researchers to conclude that the primitive civilizations have had a high amount of abstraction intelligence.



picture 1 Venus of Willendorf



picture 2 A Mural from Lascaux Cave

According to the data we have, the oldest traces about the tools created by mankind belong to the Palaeolithic ages. (Stringer: 2002, pp.2) These are simple tools are built by bones, stones and wooden pieces. The process for mankind to build works consciously is a very long time period. But we can say that with the first tool, the creative energy had already started. Even though we cannot speak about an artistic creativity here, those tools are important as the outcomes of the materialization of human thought. The primitive person has started to create when he acquired the skill of using his hands. With the usage of hands, human intelligence has also started to be used. We can assume that the using of a branch of wood to reach up to the trees or for protection from the wild animals is the first usage of a tool. As we can see, the usage of hands by the mankind is the date of birth for art. Therefore, many philosophers have insisted on the importance of hand and they advocated that using hands is the first day of creating the culture. Immanuel Kant describes hand as "*the mind which reached out*". (Karayağmurlar: 1993) According to Ernst Fischer, (2003, pp.18) hand "*is the basic member of the culture, as well as the launcher of humanization*". Thomas Aquinas had declared the special importance of hand with the sentence "*Habet homo rationem et manum!*" (Mankind has rationality and hand). (Fischer: 2003, pp.19) The building of first tool can also be called as the existence of first abstract art piece. By that, a simple branch of wood had been used for a different aim by man's thought and rationalization.

Man had started to create the culture by using his hands, but today only hand-based works are categorized as art craft and the function of human thought in the art is being emphasized. In our time, which is a period of debates on whether the end of art has come or not, the important thing is not creating nice and proper figures anymore, but rather it is to think and figure what you are thinking of. When we look to the origins of art, it is obvious that art itself had been transcended on different origins all the time.

The Evolution of Mankind and the Meaning of Art

We have discussed the primitive man and his creative deeds before. We mentioned that as man gained conscience and started to create first tools, it is applicable to talk about the first act of creativity. Then, by time, we see that the concept of magic is being established by charging of good or bad meanings by man towards the things he fears or sees as proper. This period is called as the animistic period by Freud. (Freud:1998) People have tried to explain the complex events and natural forces by good and evil spirits. By charging everything surrounding them with good and evil spirits, the concepts of magic and magician had appeared to protect themselves from the evil spirits and to call the good ones for help. Magic was performed to heal a sick person, to have a fruitful hunting or to be protected from any natural event. Magician was communicating with the spirits through colour masks and by dancing. (Örnek: 2000) This shows us that the magicians were the first creative artists within the tribe, as they have developed dancing figures and built colourful masks. Mankind had firstly developed painting through the magicians. Before the hunting, the magician was drawing the pictures of the hunt and therefore putting a spell on it and by hunting ceremonies, a primitive type of modern theatre was setting up. When we compare this with the games children play; we can say that the similarity of hunting ceremonies and the games of children which prepare them to the real life could be considered as a practice for all. (Karayağmurlar: 2004) We cannot explain the paintings of primitive men on cave walls with today's aesthetic principles and art theories. Considering the perception levels of the primitive men, we should examine those paintings as the simplified drawings of the external world to know it better.

With the introduction of religion, art had changed its shape and became a tool used to inform the ignorant, illiterate people about the religious events and to improve their religious feelings. The examination of art within religion can be separated as art in pantheist religions and art in theist religions. But, when we look from the general point of view, we see that painting had only been a tool for religions. For instance, art had been used as a story tool within the Egyptian civilization. (Dyke: 2006, pp.3-4) Paintings done inside the tomb walls were designed to tell a brief story of the dead person to make them remember themselves after their re-birth. The recurrence of figures and the schematic forms have made the Egyptian art to turn into a story-based outline. As in Christianity we see that the paintings have been used to draw people into a religious atmosphere. We cannot speak about any kind of personal creativity for both cases. All of those paintings were done by order and the artists had no chance to show their creative skills. In fact, Leonardo, whom we call as "the genius" today, had been ordered for his famous painting "Virgin of the Rocks" even with all the details and background hills, mountains and even the dress of Mary. Michelangelo's order for Sistine Chapel was deliberately more comfortable as only the subject was given to him and he had the chance to describe all the figures on it in his own way. (Shiner: 2004)

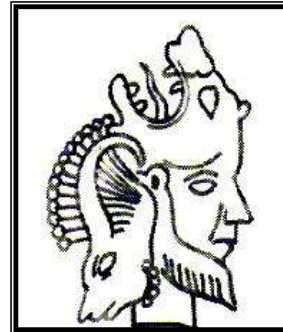


picture 3 Leonardo da Vinci: Virgin of the Rocks picture 4 Michelangelo: The Last Judgement

As we can see, until Renaissance, and even during it, we cannot easily speak about an artistic identity. During that period, a relationship based on master-apprentice is valid for painting education in workshops. Artists have been considered as workers with proper hand skills, worked for the bourgeoisie and painted decorative wall paintings to make their houses more arrogant. Besides, it is a known fact that a painting had been created not by the artist himself, but his apprentices within his workshop. Artists have been teaching their young apprentices in accordance with their own styles by making them to do the ordered paintings. (Steedman: 1996)

Almost until the end of the 17th century, we cannot mention about the recent creative-artist individual. This stems from the perception that the “*artist*” figure was considered as the magician, and then by times a “*craftsman*” or “*hand worker*”. These painting “*workers*” were a consistent group that cannot be differed from carpenters or stonemasons and who had to be bound to a guild to continue their work. Although the artists themselves did not have a specific guild, depending on the material they work on, they were bound to become members of specific material guilds. For instance, painters were members of the pharmacists’ guild as they were using natural painting materials. (Shiner: 2004)

As it is seen, explaining art itself solely with the impulse of creativity is deficient when we examine the general history of art. As a matter of fact, when we look at the Middle Ages, being different and/or radical was not being rewarded, rather it had burdens and risks of being accused as committing witchcraft. Also, it is a known fact that the lack of knowledge of mankind about the external world and fears has embittered creativity.



picture 5

Monster Figures from Medieval Art

Primitive men have charged good and evil spirits towards the creatures within his environment because he was scared from the external world, and then, he developed magic and spells to protect him from those. In the Medieval Ages, the ignorance and raw recruitment of mankind have resulted for him to fear from the external world and develop a strong sense of imagination. Because of the high level of ignorance by the standard Medieval men towards the external world, anything he was scared of suddenly became a monster. Those monster figures are recently considered as the most fabulous examples of Medieval sculpture. (Sütterlin: 1989, pp.67) We can say that the fear which came by the high level of ignorance has contributed to the development of mankind's creativity. Before the establishment of concept of religion, mankind was scared of natural events and his environment; but, as religion developed, mankind started to dread from God, devil and hell; and his expression style strengthened through painting and sculpture. Even though we can explain art and creativity by fear and religion to a certain level of time period, we have to place the concepts of art and creativity into a very different location today.

It is natural to treat every single event in history in accordance with the period in which it appeared; and the thought world, structure and living conditions of that period must be considered as our research variables. If we try to evaluate the ancient art pieces with our current worldview and thoughts, it is inevitable for us to try to analyze the Willendorf Venus with the impulse of abstraction. To analyze art solely with the fear against the universe and as a concept which expresses the minor spirit of mankind against the nature, may lead us to deficient results. At this point, it will be useful to explain several reasons of current artistic creativity which will help us to understand the impulse of artistic creativity.

Creativity And Piece Of Art

"Someone commented on Picasso's famous work named Office, which includes a table in the middle, a stage model on the table, a hammer and a broken arm at the sides: "This is the expression of an oedipal botheration. The stage life symbolizes that it is your son's turn to play in the game of life; as like King Oedipus you want to kill him with a hammer before he kills you, but you can't do that and your arm remains broken". Picasso smiles teasingly and answers: "Art comes before nature. Those are your own fantasies, I create just to create." (Doksat: 2002)

"What is creativity and why does mankind need to create?". The answer for this question is not found yet. Although creativity had been considered as a concept peculiar to

fine arts, present-day people have carried creativity to other positions. For instance, creativity is a very important concept for science and technology today. And even the scientists have tried to conceptualize it. Although creativity had been the subject of many researches and investigations, it is still not fully explained yet. It is still being examined if the concept has a correlation with intelligence or any other concept. At this point, psychology steps in and considers creativity as an area of its own research. But still creativity is being considered as mysterious and it is handled as a hardcore issue even the psychology cannot explain at all. The result of considering creativity as a multi-disciplinary attitude, and not solely interrelated with art, had been the search for multiple ways to investigate the concept.

Freud considers creativity as a defence mechanism against the “*libido*” energies which result with subconscious conflicts. (Wiebe: 1962, pp.391) According to him, mental diseases and creativity have the same origin. Although the creativity was tried to be explained as an illness, it is also known that a certain level of IQ and EQ is required for a creative attitude. But, when we examine the reasons for individual creative attitude, we face with different headlines.

Those headlines can be counted as:

- “*Ability*
- *Intelligence*
- *Emotional intelligence*
- *A trauma generally experienced during the childhood and left an important trace*
- *An individual to support and to guide”* (Karayağmurlar, 2004)

Many thinkers have developed different ideas about the origins of art piece. An artistic work exists as a result of the expressions of the artists under the influence of many external conditions. It will be wrong to think about the artist as someone outside the society. When we examine the history of art in general, we can see that the artist and the social events and the artwork and the environment of the artist are all interconnected. Historical events have somehow effected the art movements.



picture 6

Picasso, Guernica

Heidegger takes the concept from a different point of view and wants to draw attention to the art work completely. *“The element that the artist has to use to illuminate the problem or the question is the work of art itself. Because the works of art depict the absolute truth which exists all by itself, independent from all kinds of political, religious, mental, social or economic preconditions.”* (Heidegger: 2003, pp.89) If we interpret this point of view as the construction of an identity for the piece of art after it is created, then this could be seen only as a hypothesis. But, the work of art stems from many political, religious and mental events surrounding the artist. Artist, although he is not completely a part of the current life, is a very good observer and he reflects the impressions he received from life. And, as the piece of art is accomplished, it gains a separate identity from the environment and its artist.

It is not possible to distinguish the artist and the way of art from the social environment and events. Although the individual creates his art for himself, the experiences from the external world are somehow reflected in his art. Artist cannot be thought separately from the society in which he lives. Therefore, although the art trends appear within the same time period in different regions, big differences can be seen among them. For instance, German and French Romanticisms must be examined under separate headlines. Islamic Art, which conceptualizes the attitude of abstraction under the pressure of religion, must be distinguished from other abstraction trends. Umberto Eco explains his opinion about the Medieval Ages art with these sentences: *“Encyclopedist Honorius of Autun who reflects the sensitivity of the period says that painting has three basic aims: Firstly, painting is used to embellish the house of God, secondly to remind the lives of the saints and lastly, as the painting is the literature of anti-religious groups, to help the non-educated to get pleasure.”* (Eco: 1999, pp.33) Art and artist have always been burdened with different roles during the history. Therefore, we must say that although the piece of art had been considered as independent from the outside effects; it is almost impossible to consider it without treating the social, religious and political events as important reasons.

Conclusion

As conclusion, when we examine the historical process, we face with religious feelings, fears, superstitions, and fanciness, to teach and to express the feelings as the origins of art. The result we reach is that we cannot consider art as an independent event from the ideas and life styles of the periods which it appeared. Each period's culture, structure of thought and history constructs its own understanding of art eventually. Therefore, we cannot reach to a general conclusion about the origin of art.

Art develops with the human mind and takes its place within the history as a part of culture. So, we must take into consideration the inevitability to examine the period of time and the social and political structure within that time period, when we examine a specific piece of art belongs to that time.

When we compare the development of a child with the development of mankind, we can easily see how the creative deeds have evolved from the primitive men to present time. Mankind, after being able to walk on his two feet has started to show creative deeds. It is obvious that the perception of the world through the eyes of a primitive man and a modern man is completely different and therefore trying to explain the creativity of the ancient civilizations with recent views may never be applicable.

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