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ART WORKS AS EMBODIMENT OF SOCIETY: EXAMINING THE WORKS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CREATIVE ARTS; ST. MONICA'S COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, GHANA

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Abstract

The study sought to showcase the creative resources of the creative arts department of St Monica's College of Education in Ashanti Mampong in Ghana and explain these art works and their relevance to Ghanaian society. Interview and participant observation were some of the tools used to collect data for the study, sampling methods for the study comprises purposive and snowball techniques. The study revealed creative works from both Visual and Performing arts with their philosophical meanings touching on themes of morality, religion, social, love, nature and academic. The study acknowledged that all the works and their meanings in Ghanaian context are relevant to society even in current times.

Key words: Creative, Visual Arts, Performing arts, society, Philosophical meaning

Introduction

Art works are part of society and are used for various purposes. They could be used as objects for decorations, adornment and worship and many others. According to Ndah et al (2021), Art and the related works are part of Ghanaian society; as they are seen through the life cycle events of Ghanaian. They opine that, the Art works could manifest in three forms namely, Verbal, Visual and the performing arts. Because of the usefulness of the art works to society, they are studied in Ghanaian schools to the tertiary level. And also, how these art works are used among the people of Ghana are well comprehended by the members of society.

St Monica's College of Education located in Ashanti Mampong in Ghana is a female institution established by the Anglican missionaries. The college could boast of Creative arts department where the learners receive training both in theory and practical. The focus of this study therefore is to showcase some of the creative works at the department and discuss their meaning and relevance to Ghanaian society. The office of the Head of Department of Creative Arts is seen on plate 1 below:



Plate 1: The office of the Head of Department of Creative Arts

Credit: Researchers

Statement of Problem

Many institutions offering creative arts in the Asante regions limit their exhibitions to only their campuses or within the communities at their jurisdiction. These courses could be faring well both in terms of theory and practical; but much is not heard and seen empirically of the creative works of the institutions especially St Monica's College of Education to the outside world. It is in light of this that this study is done to showcase the creative works at the department and also discuss their meanings and relevance to society; so that the people of Ghana and beyond could have the opportunity to appreciate the arts.

Objectives of the study

1. To showcase some of the art works at the creative arts department.
2. To interpret the philosophical meanings of the Art works at the department.
3. To discuss the relevance of the art works at the department to Ghanaian society

Research questions

1. What are some of the creative works at the creative arts department of St Monica's College of Education?
2. What are the philosophical meanings of the creative works at the St Monica's College of Education creative arts department?
3. How relevant are the art works at St Monica's College of Education creative arts department to Ghanaian society?

Review of Related Literature

Concept of Visual arts

Art works are expressed in many forms in society. According to Walden et al (2021), Visual arts are helpful in human setting. They explain Visual arts as those creative works that appeal to senses of people. Arthur (2009) as well shares that, Visual arts are tangible creative pieces that affect the senses of man. She cites some examples of visual arts works as painting, sculpture and drawing. She shares further that, all the forms of art works have central idea that communicate to society. According to Doughan (2009), Visual arts are the physical objects that are tangible in society. He adds that, those tangible objects include monuments, buildings and landscape that have meaning among the societies in which they are located. He gives example of the monuments at Mankesim in the central region of Ghana showcasing the leaders who led the people from Techiman.

Dramado et al (2013), equally shares that, visual arts play vital role in society especially during funerals. They opine that, the colours and their clothings used for the funerals in Ghana display the elements of Visual arts. Ndah et al (2021) also support that, the visual arts are the tangible artifacts found within the Ghanaian society. They give example that, the posters, costumes and decorations, and casket during funeral situation all portray the visual arts.

Concept of the Performing Arts

Performing arts are part of Ghanaian culture. Arthur (2009) explains that, performing arts represent issues put together and act in front of an audience. She states that, performing arts manifest in form of Music, Dance and Drama. According to Otchere et al (2019), performing arts represent all the creative works in which performers use their voice, bodies or other media to send artistic expression across. They add that, there is a central idea that is sends out to the audience after the performance.

Amuah et al (2003) as well define performing arts as the creative impressions that are put out before an audience with the sole aim of communicating an idea to them.

Relationship between society and Creative works

Creative works and society in which they are found are interrelated. According to Annkuti and Lodonu (2012), visual arts for example are helpful in teaching and learning to relate the abstract themes to reality.

Assenso et al (2020) equally explains that visual arts help to inculcate among learners how to appreciate their culture; which is embedded in the art works. They further cite example of how creative arts help to keep environment clean as well as conserve the environment. Arthur (2009) states that, the life cycle events among Ghanaian are always associated with art works. She explains that, all the events are associated with arts either

through Visual, Performing and Verbal forms. All social events make use of creative arts (Ndah et al 2021). They discuss that, events such as naming ceremony, initiation into adulthood, marriage and funerals exhibit the art forms in form of Visual, Performing and Verbal arts.

According to Ampomah (2000), performing arts are involved during funerals among Ghanaian. He opines that, among the Akan ethnic group in Ghana, funerals are mandatory events which need to be organized for a deceased; and this is engulfed in music and dance. Lodonu (2009) as well collaborate that, among the people of Hohoe in the Volta Region of Ghana, music and dance are highly involved when performing marriage rites.

Mereku et al (2016) share that, during teaching and learning situations in Ghana, music and dance is very helpful as it helps the learners to relate abstract concepts into reality. Nkansah (2008) as well adds that, visual art objects serve as objects of worship and honour. He cites example of stools among the Akan traditional setting and explains that, the artifact is highly revered and worshiped; because it is belief that it carries the soul and spirit of communities in which they are found. Adu –agyem et al (2013), also share that, artifacts in Ghanaian societies are used for beautification purposes.

The thoughts of all the scholars above come to proof the point that, creative art works benefit members in society in various ways.

Art works as embodiment of society

In all sphere of the lives of the Ghanaian, art works are seen manifesting in various forms during events. According to Ndah et al (2021), during all life cycle events among Ghanaian that are mandatory to be observed, creative arts associate with all the events. They cite example of posters, Costume and furniture as some of the ways through which visual arts manifest. They also state music and dance, poetry and appellations as some of the verbal arts. According to them, most of these art works communicate non-verbally to public.

Dzansi- Mcpalm (2006) also opines that, creative arts serve as a medium through which issues that go on in societies are expressed. She opines that, the expression could be in form of visual, performing or verbal arts. She was emphatic that, anytime art works are displayed, they represent the philosophies and thoughts of society.

Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature hence used descriptive technique to present the findings of the study. The target population for the study comprises the students and tutors of the creative arts department of St Monica's College of Education. The accessible population consists of 36 students and 4 tutors. All the tutors and students were sampled for the study through purposive sampling method. 2 cultural co –coordinators at the Mampong Municipal education office were equally sampled purposively for the study because of the technical know-how in the art related fields. In addition, 2 Ghanaian Language and culture tutors were as well involved in the study because of their expertise in the Ghanaian culture and customs; bringing the total population of the study to 44. Research tools used for the study were interview and participant observation. The explanation above could be clearly seen in tabular form on table 1 below:

Table 1: Population and sampling methods of the study

Target population	Accessible Population	Sampling method
Creative arts Tutors	04	Purposive
Creative arts students	36	Purposive
Ghanaian Language & culture tutors	02	Purposive
Cultural Co – coordinators	02	Snowball

Total population = 44

Results from data

The study involved creative arts lecturers, creative arts students, Ghanaian Language and Culture lecturers and Cultural co –coordinators in Mampong Municipality. When the question was posed as to what creative works are found at the St Moninca’s College of Education Creative arts department, all the respondents stated that variety of art works ranging from painting, sculpture, collage, caving, tie and dye. Departmental standing choir as well as cultural troupe was as well identified as assets at the creative arts department.

As to the philosophical meanings of the art works, the respondents clarified that, all the works at the department have some messages that are communicated to society focusing on moral, social, health, economic and academic issues.

As to whether creative works are relevant to society, respondents unanimously agreed that, the works and society depend on each other. They further stated that, without the art works in society, life would be meaningless among Ghanaian. An assertion that confirmed the stance of Otchere et al (2019) that arts and society are inseparable.

In responding to whether the respondents would advocate for the study of creative arts in Ghanaian schools, they agreed that, arts are very relevant hence they would support their inclusion and sustenance in the school curriculum in Ghana.

On how the creative arts could be sustained among students and members of society at large, they stated that, it should be made examinable and a core discipline at all levels of education in Ghana. They added that, the cultural festivals in schools should be strengthen in addition to exhibitions. They further discussed that; lessons in schools should be tailored towards practicality rather than theoretical.

The researchers being creative art educators through observation over the years concluded that, creative works at the department covers sculpture, painting, drawing as well as a standing choir and a cultural troupe catering for the performing arts. They colloborated that, all the creative works have their meanings in the Ghanaian context; which ranges from moral, social, financial and academic issues.

Discussion of findings

The study identified the following creative works at the creative arts department of St Monica’s College of Education. **Credits for all the pictures in the study are for the researchers.**



Plate 2: Sign post

This is a sign post which in itself a creative piece indicating the sections forming the creative arts department. It indicated to the left the visual art Section and to the right the performing arts section. The role of the post is to direct visitors to the department of creative arts without any difficulty.



Plate 3: Side view of the Visual arts section building

This side of the building is characterize with varied art works depicting activities that go on in that section, showing the use of the mind and the hands to achieve holistic education.



Plate 4: Side view of the performing arts section building

The paintings of this building showing playing of drums and xylophone. This signal that, there is music and dance as well as life at this department. The paintings equally show that the affective domains of individuals are built at this section.



Plate 5: Authority of Traditional leaders

This is an art work showing a picture of a stool and staff crossing the stool. The drawing signifies the symbol of authority of African and for that matter Ghanaian Traditional rulers such as Chiefs. This art work is very relevant to society because it teaches society to submit to their traditional leaders in their jurisdiction.



Plate 6: Stools as souls of Ghanaian communities

The picture above shows that, traditional leaders in southern part of Ghana are enstooled and the stools the leaders occupy are belief to have contained the soul and spirit of the community they preside over. The art work therefore encourages society to respect the stools that the leaders occupy in their various communities.



Plate 7: Beauty and hardworking nature of African Women

This creative piece showing beauty of African (Ghanaian) women and how hard working they are. The picture communicates that, in the midst of beauty, one must equally work hard to better her life and that of her family. The moral lessons one could draw from the art work is that, irrespective of one's status, he or she should be hard working in society.



Plate 8: love and affection

The above picture shows affection and love in Ghanaian society. It shows that, once you love someone, there should be something to show for it. The picture therefore encourages society to back their love with real or concrete material. The work equally encourages giving of arms in society.



Plate 9: Remember where you started

The creative work above shows an African Clay Stove and pot with fire wood; which in current times have been replaced by gas stove. The work is relevant in Ghanaian society as it communicates to society to remember its past, maintain its good culture even in the midst of modern technology.



Plate 10: Be happy in every situation

This collage work shows an African man playing a drum which is hanging on his neck. The situation above depicts that, in every situation, whether good or bad, one must be happy.

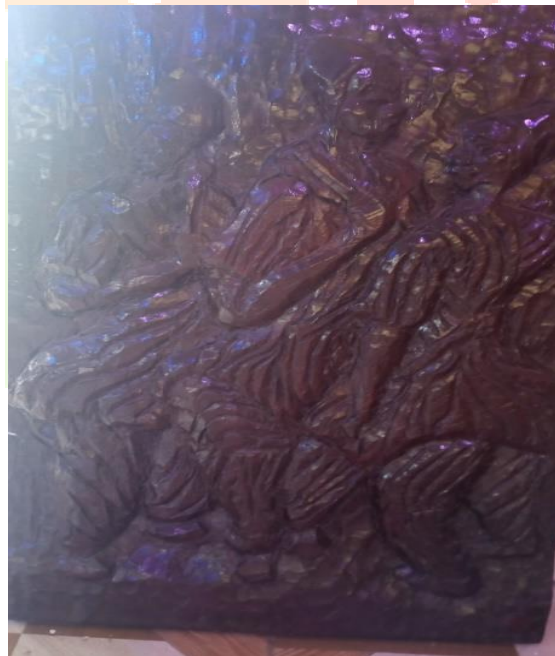


Plate 11: Unity is strength

A Sculpture work which shows that people in Ghanaian society depend on each other so they must work always in unity.



Plate 12: Ceremonial College Cloth for St Monica's College of Education

The College cloth and the Logo have been designed by the creative arts department. The letter M in the logo represents Monica, the missionary who came to establish the institution. On top of the M lies a crown, this signifies the reward that awaits learners after successful completion of college. The green colour signifies the growth of the institution whilst yellow stands for the value of the college and the violet colour in the letter *M* represent the origin of the church thus United Kingdom. The inscription “ **Mesom** ” in the cloth is in Twi language which means I would serve.

So all the elements in the cloth tell learners to serve well for the college to grow and gain more value so that crown of success would be worn at the end of the day.



Plate 13: Ghana Education Service (GES) Final Authority in Teacher Education

The art work above shows the power of the Ghana Education Service in relation to teacher education in Ghana. The service is the employer of the products that are trained in the various training institutions. The symbol therefore signals all the teacher trainees to keep in mind the authority of their employer. The creative work is therefore very relevant in the lives of the teacher trainees and other staffs being regulated by GES.

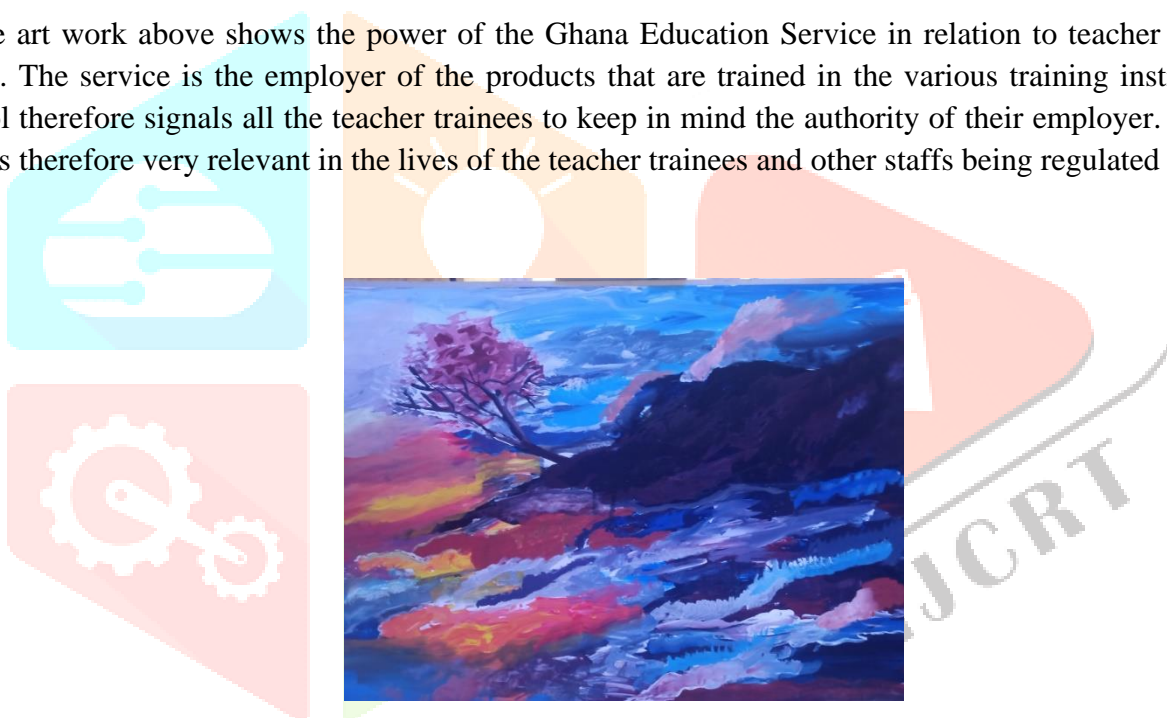


Plate 14: Keep nature safe

This painting depicts disaster in the environment. It is therefore giving a warning to society to be mindful of the environment and keep it safe to avoid manmade disaster which could happen to affect productivity. The creative piece is as well relevant as it helps society to be conscious of how they maintain safety in the environment.



Plate 15: Object from local materials in modern times

The creative piece above shows how local materials in one’s environment could be used to produce objects for everyday used at home. These products encourage society to make use of any items they think are waste and turn them around into producing something new for use.



Plate 16: Art and adornment

The art work above shows sandals that are made using residual or waste materials. The piece communicates to society that, there is nothing waste for a creative person. The work therefore encourages society to recycle all the waste that is generated in the environment into other artifacts that could benefit society.

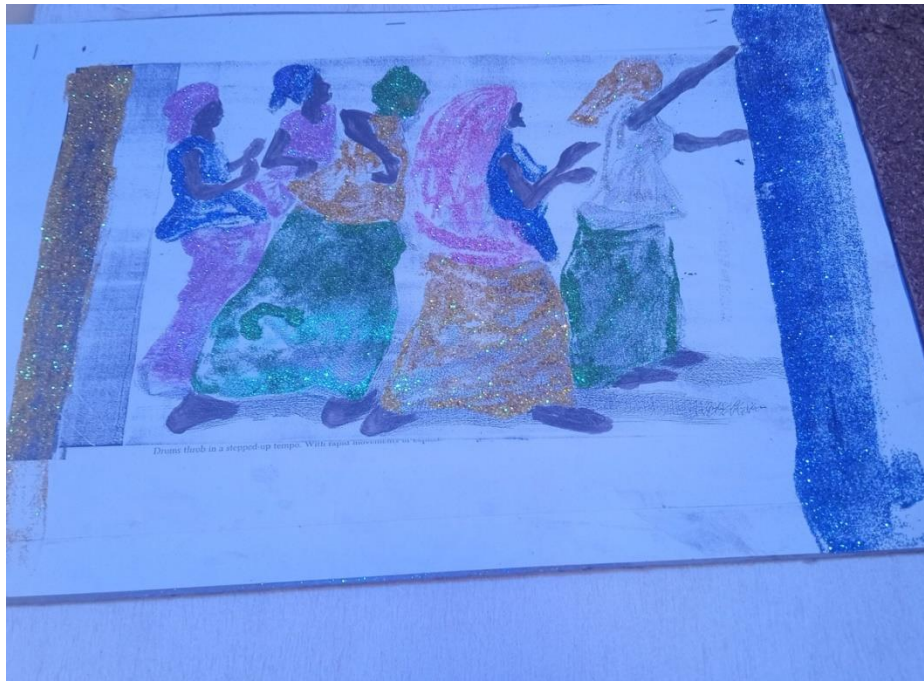


Plate 17: The good in a communal spirit

The creative work above shows people trying to support a load to stand. It therefore shows communal spirit that is typical of Ghanaian society. The work is to encourage society to work in unity to succeed in all endeavors.



Plate 18: Say *NO* to robbery

The collage work above is communicating to society to avoid stealing, robbery or any corrupt act because those acts violate the laws and conventions of the land; and when one falls short of the law in that regard, the law which is no respecter of person would take its own course.



Plate 19: Cultural troupe performing Kete Dance

Kete musical ensemble shown in the picture above. The ensemble and the dancer communicating with the audience through the variations on the drums and the gestures of the dancer respectively. This musical type is very relevant among the college society and outside the college as it performs to add colour to all life cycle and other social events in the jurisdiction. This confirms the assertion of Otchere et al (2019), Ndah et al (2021) and Dzanzi- Mepalm (2006).



Plate 20: Kete dancer in action

The picture above shows a dancer dancing to a Kete traditional musical type performed among Akan ethnic group in Ghana. The body movement of the dancer and the hand gesture are all non-verbal communication signals to audience and society at large.

Conclusion

The paper sought to identify the various creative works at the creative arts department of St Monica's College of Education, interpret these works hence discuss their relevance to society. The study revealed that, the department host art works Covering Visual and Performing arts. The details of the works are drawing, painting, sculpture and collage. In addition are a choir and a cultural troupe which perform to entertain the college community during especial events such as matriculation, congregations and other social events.

The study equally revealed that, each of the art works is crafted with a special message to the general public in the context of the people. It came out from the study that, these art works are needed in the life of the Ghanaian as art works are part and parcel of Ghanaian society; Confirming the stance of Ndah et al (2021) , Dzramado et al (2013) and Arthur (2009) that Ghanaian social life is characterize with Visual, performing and verbal arts.

Recommendations

1. Policy makers and curriculum planners in Ghana should pay much attention to creative arts at all levels of education especially at St Monica's College so that learners could harness all benefits that associate with the discipline.
2. Cultural festivals should be introduced in the colleges so that other departments would have opportunity to benefit from the exhibition of the art works of the creative arts departments.
3. Management of St Monica's College of Education should allocate special funds for the department of creative arts to resource them for their unique role they play in the college community and beyond.

4. The department should be fully resourced so that it could produce their works and market to outside the college environment to bring in more capital resources to increase internally generate fund of the college.

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