

The Role of Art in Nation Building

By Beatrice Watson

Dressed in the regalia “Crown” of the royal father in his home- town, Winnipeg Artist Yisa Akinbolaji paid tribute to his Nigerian Yoruba speaking heritage as one of the speakers at the recently held CAPS conference held in Winnipeg on March 8 at the Masonic Temple. He spoke on the Role of Art in Nation Building. Yisa’s delivery was professional and academic in approach.

He framed the question on a historical anthropological perspective.

He said in Yoruba language Art is known as AWORAN and CULTURE means ISEDALE. Which interprets that there have been ART and

CULTURE with every people since the beginning of time? These two words AWORAN and ISEDALE were not fabricated from any other language. The Cree language has KASKIKWAASOWIN for ART and PIMACHIHOWIN for CULTURE. When human was created, ‘he’ was made to be able to think and communicate. Visual and sound were since the beginning of time the most effective means of interaction.”

Yisa said in contemporary society, a practicing artist is someone who thinks art and does it passionately and persistently. But said that if society as a whole does not become involved in art and culture that could produce negative consequences. “Just as we all ought to be interested in stock exchange, climate change, road safety etc., we all also should be involved in arts and culture”.

Yisa quoted Pablo Picasso as saying “All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up”. He added that children are fearless in their art and expression. It is as they grow that they learn fear and intolerance. He said in the words of William Saroyan an 18th century artist, “The role of art is to make a world which can be tolerated.”

Yisa said art and culture which include literature, theatre, music, cartoons etc. shine bright lights on what needs to change. “A society has to see how and what to adapt from different cultures for the purpose that will bring development and prosperity”.

Arts and culture contribute to a vibrant and active

community through wall murals, mosaic installations, street performances, block parties, Folklore, etc. we can make our community become an actively vibrant and prosperous society. To make this happen the society must be prepared to invest in sculptures and architecture that will draw tourists (examples are Statue of Liberty in New York, Sears Tower in Chicago or Leo Mol Sculpture Garden in Winnipeg).

How can professional planners and governments foster and support arts and culture? Through increased funding to public arts, meaningful dialogues, and more grants to artists. The product of the grant may lead to priceless masterpiece”, Yisa said and cited 10 of the most expensive paintings ever sold the highest went for \$140m for No. 5, 1948 by Jackson Pollock, in 2006.



Yisa Akinbolaji flanked by Jason Granger, E.D., Art City(l) & Michael Gordon, Vancouver planner(r)