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## AFRICAN ART AS A SOURCE OF CONTEMPORARY FASHION DESIGN

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### **Abstract**

*The fashion design is one of the arts that has a prominent role in expressing the renaissance and nature of societies, and this art increases in prosperity with the development that it brings about in achieving the aesthetic and functional needs of the people of various sects of society, and given that it is one of the plastic arts that the artist designs in the form of clothing designs that the artist derived from one of the other artistic sources. In view of the wealth of African arts, it is clear that it was characterized by diversity and plurality in addition to the fact that it relied on its own symbols of artistic styles and trends that appear in its multiple decorations in various fields of arts. Despite the richness of this art, few designers tended to take advantage of its own aesthetic values and symbols which made the current research seek to identify some examples of African art to derive a set of contemporary fashion designs.*

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### **Keywords**

*African Art, Fashion, Design, African Masks, Contemporary.*

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## **Introduction**

African art is a distinct art in itself and has its own character, and this goes back to prehistoric times, as the various paintings and rock art scattered in the African deserts date back to the ancient Stone Age (Jawdat Youssef: 6512).

Fashion design is also one of the arts that have a prominent role in expressing the renaissance and the nature of societies, and the flourishing of this art increases with the development that takes place in the fulfilment of the aesthetic and functional needs of individuals in various sectors of society. Since it is one of the plastic arts that the designer formulates in the form of clothing designs that the artist derived from one of the other artistic sources, and by considering the wealth of African arts, it becomes clear that it is characterized by diversity and plurality, in addition to being dependent on its own symbols of artistic styles and trends, which are evident in the multiple decorations.

African arts and crafts have been represented in a variety of artistic works, as African masks are one of the terms of African culture, with its climates and symbols that carry a tremendous accumulation of beliefs, customs and stories about the African Continent (Ezz El Din Mirghani: 4201).

African masks have gained their place, especially because they play a functional role in African society, as they work to establish religious and social values to emphasize the customs and traditions of this society, as a confirmation of what was stated by (Saad Al-Khadem 6512) when he mentioned that African masks contribute to preserving African

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customs, customs and traditions and contribute to the continuation of African myths and magical rituals, as they are an expression of the entirety of the African human life and his relationship with the universe around him.

And there are previous studies that dealt with this unique type of African art, such as a study (Rabab Hassan: 2011), which drew inspiration from African masks designs for women's clothing with the implementation of a group of them and surveyed the views of a sample of specialists and consumers towards the proposed models.

The study (Amira Ahmed Muhammad: 2009) used the African masks to decorate the walls in a contemporary way, and the study (Moataz Fathy Hassan: 2000) to synthesize the different materials used in African masks in the field of Handicrafts.

The study (Amira Fouad Soliman, Nermin Farouk Hussein) was about the interrelation between the design of the printed and metallic fabric for the walls of tourist villages to open up a field of experimentation and take advantage of the expressive values of African art to design printed textile pendants to beautify the reception halls of hotels with an African character.

As well as the study of (Ayman Farouk Abdel-Azim) on the plastic solutions of symbols in the arts of Africa as a source for enriching decorative designs with the aim of identifying the distinctive plastic features of the arts in West African societies.

From the above, it is evident that some previous studies used the African mask as a rich source for inspiration for various decorations and art products, and despite the richness of this art, few designers tended to take advantage of its aesthetic values and symbols, and this led to an attempt to invest this type of art as a source for designing models for fashion design.

### **Research Problem**

1. What are the distinctive technical features of African masks?
2. What is the possibility of inspiring contemporary fashion designs from African masks?
3. What are the opinions of experts and specialists towards the proposed costume designs inspired by the African masks?

### **Research Objectives**

1. Determine the technical features of the African masks.
2. Design a group of contemporary costumes inspired by the African masks.
3. Opinions of experts and specialists towards the proposed costume designs inspired by the African masks are positive.

### **Research Significance**

The importance of the current research is determined by the fact that it deals with one of the rich artistic sources in the study, which is (African art), and the results of the study can

contribute to presenting proposals that may shed light on African arts.

This research also agrees with the social events in Egypt that are moving towards interest in Africa and the emphasis on community cohesion within this continent and the interest in and support of cultural aspects, in addition to that the current research is concerned with studying the social heritage of one of the African societies which leads to an emphasis on social identity.

### **Research Limits**

1. Models of African masks in the western region.
2. Contemporary women's fashion design.

### **Research Methodology**

The current research followed the descriptive method in order to describe and analyze some technical works that were inspired by the proposed designs, which were carried out according to the following procedures:

1. Determining the source of the inspiration from African art.
2. Analysing of specific models (inspiration sources).
3. Developing the idea of the proposed designs.
4. Characterization of the proposed designs in terms of (elements and principles of implementation).
5. Presenting the proposed designs (6 designs) to a group of experts in the field of design and fashion design whose number reached (3) experts.
6. Evaluation of the proposed designs by using an evaluation form that contains three main axes (design relationship to inspiration sources, design achievement of elements and foundations and design and modernity compatibility), the scale of assessment for the questionnaire is three, appropriate, inappropriate, and somewhat appropriate.

The results showed the suitability of the proposed designs, as the arbitrators' agreement reached between 48: 68%.

Among the recommendations of the research is to encourage researchers to study more African arts, their decorations and symbols.

### **Results**

To answer the first question, that states:

- ❖ What are the distinctive technical features of African masks?

They are as it came from the analysis of some of the opinions of experts and researchers in the field of design, which were determined as follows:

1. **Realistic Trend:** It simulates nature

2. **Unrealistic Trend:** It is a distortion of the mask shape in an abstract or imaginary direction.
3. **Semi-Realistic Trend:** It is a combination of the first and the second.  
Among the methods used in formulating the mask are the following:
  1. Distortion, exaggeration, and distance from the natural form to highlight some meanings, emphasize them, and agree on them among members of the group, such as exaggerating the size of the mouth, tongue, or teeth to express intimidation and terror (Ehab Bismarck: 2003).
  2. Flattening and neglecting the third dimension in some masks in which the African artist uses his imagination.
  3. Formal deception, in which the African artist resorted to various methods to format masks for expression using the exchange of shape and ground using dark and light areas, thus showing the characteristic of the figures in one picture (Sabri Abdel-Ghani: 1982).
  4. Elongation and symmetry, in which the African artist cares for each of them in designing the mask to achieve complementarity and balance (Ehab Bismarck: 2003).
  5. Decorations used (geometric shapes - shapes inspired by nature).
  6. Colors are limited to the colors of the basic materials, which are red, yellow and blue, in addition to white and black, and they refer to religious, social and magical meanings.
  7. Using various environmental materials that have been combined among them, such as wood, ivory, and metallic materials such as gold, bronze, brass, red and silver which symbolize social status, in addition to some complementary materials such as beads, animal skins and snails.

### **Recommendations**

1. Encouraging researchers to study more African arts, their decorations and symbols.
2. Employing African art of various kinds in designing costumes for different social groups.

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