

Abstract

This research paper attempts to define what constitutes towards an 'African aesthetic' and how this can be applied to character designs so as to have an African identity in animation. The African continent has a multitude of diverse cultures that have a distinct visual language. The research investigates how culture and religion influence these motifs and how they are given meaning. The Yoruba people are an ethnic group that resides in West Africa and they have one of the oldest art histories on the continent making them ideal to reference in this paper. There is a very limited amount of archived information on African art in the pre-colonial era especially when it comes to specific visual reference, so the research also explores how mythology and oral tradition can be used by an artist as inspiration. There are difficulties in defining an African aesthetic due to the diverse number of cultures; however, many scholars like Susan Vogel and Rowland Abiodun, have come up with elements that they found common in most in African art. These elements are also investigated as part of this report and analysed to see how they can be implemented in character design.

Psychologists believe that people can identify an individual's personality from their behavioural traits that create a general impression. This is due to human social interaction. Part of this research will look at the theoretical principles of character design and how visual stereotypes are a great tool for an artist to use, to get an idea across. The paper will break down a character's physical features in terms of shape, colour and proportions and discuss how these can contribute to a character's visual design.

The case study in this research paper will examine the work of Kenneth Shofela Coker, who is an African character designer and animator who is currently based in the United States of America. It will mainly concentrate on the character designs in his two animated short films entitled *Oni Ise Owo* (2007) and *Iwa* (2009), and how he implemented some of the principles discussed in this paper.

This research provides a platform for African artists to explore the possibility of an African character design style and encourages more scholars to study what constitutes an African aesthetic so as to build a more comprehensive visual archive.