

INTRODUCTION

Today, we live in a globalised world with generations of people born of one or more cultures and raised in another. Many countries are largely populated by people of various cultural or ethnical backgrounds, who are raised between a mix of cultures, that of their heritage and that of where they are being raised. These cultures often influence each other. The many groups of people that now make up a country are all influenced by their surroundings and this is a part of growth. As the countries grow, so does its cultural diversity. There are literally thousands of cultures on Earth today and each contributes to global diversity. One reason for the existence of so many cultures is that there are so many ways that Earth's 6.3 billion people can be culturally different.

Culture is fundamental in any society. It is the subtotal of a peoples' way of life in every aspect: customs, language, ideology, ritual, music, and art. This historical documentation of a peoples journey from the earliest recollection, is usually passed on from one generation to another for cultural preservation. In the process of preservation, when culture is being passed on, often begins a process known as cultural diffusion. Cultural Diffusion is the penetration of beliefs, ideology, rituals etc from one group to another. This mixing of the world's cultures from different ethnicities, religions and nationalities, has increased vastly since globalisation. It's no longer surprising that cultural groups rub off on and sometimes influence each other. Growing up in the diverse world we pick up the dialects, phrases, customs and traditions of the cultural groups that surround us. It is in this diffusion that the issue of cultural appropriations is born.

Culture Appropriation, in the words of, Fordham University Law professor and author of *Who Owns Culture? Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law*, Susan Scafadi is "taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else's culture without permission." It has also been defined as the "adoption/theft of icons, rituals, aesthetic standards, and behavior from one culture by an outsider often with little respect for the integrity of the source of appropriation". It often involves a more dominant society exploiting the culture of a less dominant society, often with little or no understanding of any of its history, significance, or traditional meaning. Accordingly, socially aware people tend to frown upon this phenomenon.

Culture Appropriation is a touchy topic, and is often the end result of appropriation in art and fashion. This paper intends to focus on culture appropriation in the fashion industry in the following categories:

- Globalization and its role in Appropriation
- Appreciation or Appropriation and its differences
- Ethics of appropriation and Motive Conscious or Unconscious actions
- Harmful Appropriation and the consequences
- Achieving Appropriate Appropriation
- Transcending culture to a more updated and relevant new phenomena

Chapter 1

(Appreciation vs Appropriation)

Right off the bat, I would like to be one of those people who takes a stance on, the negative that is, Culture Appropriation. However I realize we live in a world where information is thrown around everyday and globalisation by means of the internet and social media has made this accessible to everyone. So the question then arises is 'Who owns what?' Because once you put something out there it basically belongs to the public to interpret and use as they see fit. Now I obviously realise that specific looks, gestures, and attributes of a people is a sensitive thing, this is where I think issues can arise, but I don't know if I can necessarily say that nothing should be used. Cultural appropriation is such a hot and controversial topic in the fashion industry today because trends and styles seem to be increasingly inspired by different cultures. We designers have a lot of freedom when creating collections. The need for newness has become second nature to fashion and as such calls for crucial sources of inspiration. And because inspiration doesn't materialise from ether and the ideology 'nothing is new under the sun', designers often turn to culture as inspiration. Fashion for a long time has enjoyed the freedom, which allowed the borrowing and use of ideas without the fear of copyright, from the early 1900's with Paul Poiret and Orientalism. Since then a love affair was born between designers and consumers alike, and the unknown and exotic, which I find is a natural element in creation amongst creative people. However here is a significant difference between inspiration and imitation. A designer inspired by a pattern/print from a sacred/ceremonial attire differs immensely from one who exactly replicates that pattern for a clothing line. Designers who do not credit or pay homage to a culture by citing it as their original source of inspiration are the ones who then turn appreciation to appropriation.

An example of this is the Louis Vuitton Spring Summer 2012 menswear collection show casing the iconic red Shuka, belonging to the Kenyan Masai tribe. The collection (as shown below) was built entirely on this item, while Kim Jones, the designer at Vuitton, casually stated "*At its simplest level, it is about the idea of travel and what it means at this point in time. After all travel forms the foundation of the Vuitton brand. This is a fundamental part of the lineage and language of Louis Vuitton and is a central component of what it stands for today.*"



He did not mention once the major role that the Masai played in his original inspiration, despite the lack of nuance and tactless adoption of that particular clothing pattern. It was only after the backlash that followed did he then add the Kenyan Masai as his obvious inspiration and his love for Africa, having lived there as a child.

Often an argument against the existence of cultural appropriation in the fashion industry is that wearing an item with cultural heritage is a sign of admiration for the culture in question. Sadly it is a much more complex issue than that. Lets look at culture appropriation across the board, off the bat, you have the big bad appropriating wolf, and a poor defenseless minority. Now as stated before, I whole heartedly believe in cultural exchange and appreciation and also realise there is a predisposed mindset in the whole appropriation blame game, but the fact of the matter and danger in culture appropriation is that those guilty of appropriating are, mostly, of white /Caucasian ethnicity and are representative of Western hegemony. They have a bigger audience, than the minority they appropriate from, and when they take cultural elements from minorities and use it without proper research or citation they end up trivialising the source and making something with significant value dwindle and fall into utmost normalcy out of context. And because the appropriating party have a larger audience, the trivialized version of the culture risks being seen as fact.

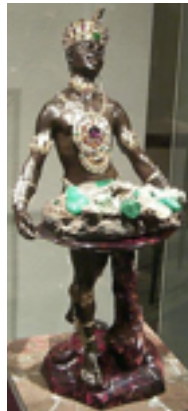
An Example of this is the 2009 collaboration between Jeremy Scott and Adidas.

Global sports brand Adidas in collaboration with designer, Jeremy Scott released a collection of original sneakers inspired by materials, designs and styles from around the world. But were not reverent in crediting the origin of the design correctly. The Nizza 2 Hi original sneakers was more a lift than a reference of the Kente cloth, a strip-woven cloth made by the Akan people of Ghana and the Ewe people of Ghana and Togo. The misconduct from Adidas did not end with the blatant imitation of the existing cloth, in the released statement to the press they stated the shoes were made from a unique cloth called 'Kenta'. This led to a rise of Africans and African enthusiasts on the internet and in the diaspora over this. Not only had Adidas stolen the Kente cloth from the Ghana people, and not given due recognition, but by changing the name and trying to pass it off as theirs. Adidas released a statement saying it was a gross typo error and unintentional. But in the collection of world sneakers, the country of origin of the 'kenta' design was not published.

Kente has been woven for centuries on looms by skilled artisans in Ghana and Togo - these designs are the daily bread of these Africans and the intellectual property of these artists and Nations as a whole and Adidas attempt to evade crediting the source also meant they evaded payment on the copywrite.



Another Example of Appropriation is Dolce and Gabbana's spring 2013 collection which featured Black-amoor earrings on the runway.



This is in my opinion a clear example of Appropriation reinforcing stereotypes and racism. Dolce and Gabbana tried to excuse their actions, after there was an outcry stating their love for Sicily and how the blackamoors have a rich part in Sicilian history, but they could have been more sensitive or thorough with this reference. Nostalgia and culture is often a soft spot to artist, but when the era in question is one of shameful western racism and colonialism, I think it's safe to assume it is time to move on. Ultimately it's a case of being well informed and respectful about the culture in question and what better way to go about this than to undertake thorough research and to be educated about the historical background of the culture serving as a source of inspiration, and to execute the referencing design with sensitivity and respect.

Ultimately, in the fashion industry, designers are allowed to harvest inspiration from other cultures so long as it's precisely that: inspiration, and credited properly. Explaining the role it played from inspiration to execution. If done properly fashion can be a powerful cultural integrator and can bring cultures together in beautiful and interesting ways.

Danish designer, Trine Linegaard for example, was so inspired by the Ghanaian Kente cloth, she travelled to Ghana and parts of Togo to meet local weavers, understand the various patterns and motifs and wove a new version of the Kente cloth, which she then used in her sports styled Spring Summer 2013 menswear collection. She worked with a family-run fabric weaver in Accra, Ghana which has been producing Kente fabrics since 1968. She made it her objective to work with local weavers. It was all about laying emphasis on the already existing fabrics and utilizing the materials in a contemporary manner e.g. by using a lot of technical and sportswear fabrics to give a contrast to the rich traditional Kente materials and by so doing, creating something which would appeal to both Western and African men. Her Spring Summer 2013 collection celebrates culture appreciation to the zenith.



Nigerian Designer Maki Oh, I think however, is the most exemplary of Culture appreciation and harvesting inspiration. The British trained Nigerian born designer is completely and entirely inspired by her home country. A trait that I personally identify with. In every collection she hand-dyes all of her fabrics with natural indigo leaves and paints on prints with a cassava plant paste, a traditional Nigerian practice called 'Adire'. When asked why, she said "We used Adire because we believe in ethical sustainable practices, and more importantly, we believe in keeping our cultural heritage alive," Oh explains. "Adire is a beautiful art, but it is also a dying art."

The designer Maki Oh is one who uses culture and its appreciation as a tool to initiate cross cultural communication allowing for learning and understanding from and about each other, the right way.



Africa, is already a misunderstood, over exploited and misrepresented continent. If conglomerates like Adidas or Louis Vuitton wish to take inspiration from African art and textiles for their products, If they are unable to go the more in-depth and respectable route like Trine Linegaard and Maki Oh, the least they could do is provide an accurate historical description of the 'borrowed' design.

Chapter 2

(Ethics Of Appropriation)

The ethics of culture appropriation is one based on more a moral discourse than anything else. As artists, I personally believe we have a moral obligation to fair and honest portrayal in any and every work we do. Influences we have should be harnessed and, regardless of the circumstances, should be as honest and pure in its presentation as much as in its representation. Regarding this I refer now to subject appropriation.

Subject Appropriation is an interesting aspect of appropriation, in the sense that unlike other forms of appropriation, it does not necessarily involve any taking or borrowing from a minority. Instead it's the representation of a minority culture, by one not off that minority, and this is a very morally murky line. Cultures that germinate on the street are often the result of cultural diffusion and enculturation. They are often a thing of their own and they bond and bolster a people who have been ostracized. They are referred to as sub-cultures. Representing a subculture is an art that requires as much research, respect and understanding as representing a culture as a whole, because most subcultures are inherently a branch of culture.

Fashion photographer Vivian Sassen's approach on subject appropriation is the reason she is one of the fashion photographers out there who I revere and admire. Her portrayal of Africans in various contexts is honest, crisp and clear. Fashion is so obsessed with iconography that essentially becomes stereotype, but she's an artist that ignores the white noise and shoots her subject with a respect that others don't. I suppose part of the reason she can do this is because she has lived the culture up close but also has a deep love and appreciation that often transcends in her work, capturing her subjects in such a realistic way that the average African can relate to and become part of the story. She does not take anything from the minority; she captures a reality and beauty. Sassen's work and portrayals are devoid of any stereotype perpetuation as she captures all her subjects in the same style, regardless of race, sex or social status.



Some artist are about beauty. They approach subject matter based on the notion or concepts of beauty, much so that the beauty surpasses the message or the beauty becomes the message in a rare and awesome symbiosis.

Swiss- Guinean photographer, Namsa Leuba, is one of these artists. Her work is not easily definable. A conceptual master, Leuba examines themes of construction and deconstruction. Her use of unidentifiable locations and props, unique colours and configurations that may not have a lucid order. Leuba's technique has been described as 'elemental compositing', as she disassembles cultural paradigms and re-builds them through staged interventions. Her recent works focus on African identity from an Occidental viewpoint. Leuba's visually pleasing, and beautiful and probing dialogue of imagery is as a result of her guarded distance in reinterpretation of ceremonial objects or practices she finds inspiring. She brings the viewer to occupy a seemingly exploitative space but we are aware that she has art directed each image, it becomes a contextualised projection of her own experiences, set out to delineate stereotypes often formulated from a western perspective. When asked about her recent works focusing on Africa, she said:

"I have studied ritual artifacts common to the cosmology of Guineans; statuettes that are part of a ceremonial structure. They are from another world, they are the roots of the living. Thereby, I sought to touch the untouchable."

Leuba is critically seasoned and a refreshingly complex artist. Having been likened to contemporary artist Viviane Sassen for her ability to hover between documentary and composed styles. Leuba's work doesn't just challenge preconceived notions of Africa, from a Western view but the aesthetics of abstract configuration and the beauty that lies in it.



Not every artist is morally obliged to follow fair and honest portrayal. Some portray their subjects in their own representation or in a representation they think is regarded more controversial and thus lucrative.

South African Photographer Pieter Hugo is known for the searing controversy surrounding his representation of Africa. He once said ‘the power of photography is inherently voyeuristic’ and that is what he has in turn done with his representation. His work has been criticized as sensationalizing and portraying Africa as a freak show especially in his black subject matter. I find it extremely distasteful when an artist reacts to a certain race always in a certain way. His portrayal of the ‘exotic’ and ‘ethnic’ subject is exploitive, and should be called out. Not only because of the portrayal he gives to people who have never been to Africa, but also its almost blatant racism. Now this might come across as finger pointing, but when an art work is problematic or is poised for shock value, it is never truly an entirely thought out work. Just like in the case of Dolce and Gabbana and the Blackamoor. Pieter Hugo, a white South African, alive in a post apartheid South Africa, to ignore the socio-political ramifications is what will make him a bad subject appropriation-ist. When asked if he feels the need, as a photographer, to provide interpretation of what he sees, his response was *“As an artist it’s not my responsibility to provide a responsible rendition of how the rest of the world should perceive or not perceive Africa. Firstly, I’m not really concerned with Africa, I just happen to work here and it’s become an*

exten-



*sion of my topography and the
world that I inhabit”*

This chapter began discussion of morals amongst artist, in the way they appropriate subject matter. In ethics of appropriation, and the the depiction of subjects, photojournalists are already notorious for being confronting, intrusive and exploitative. While I understand the stories need to be told and that there's certainly a place for using photography to document culture (both the good and the bad) I find that with photojournalists it really is all about the bad side of things. Its increasingly worrying that photojournalists hardly tell stories in their entirety anymore, its almost always focusing on the bad side of things. The side that sells more shocking, provoking images to the media and to news outlets.

Photojournalist turned artistic photographer Guy Tillman is an example of this. His confronting and exploitative methods of capturing have left him a favorite of news agencies such as Reuters and have SABCTV referring to him as a provocative artist. At a time when perceptions of the continent are changing for the better and spirits are high with hope, his portraits of child soldiers create a fictionalised Africa, as if by celebrating something that does not exist it can be brought into being. His pictures deliver the shock of classic photojournalism, visiting only crisis zones such as the Democratic Republic of Congo or poverty stricken areas of South Africa he portrays a continent in chaos, through chosen and composed images. Tillim photographs Africa in that typical photojournalistic way that communicates ambivalent ideas and disturbing perceptions.

Ultimately Tillims photographs become a dubious gloat over misery and poverty of a continent in flux.



Chapter 3

(Its Complicated)

Culture Appropriation is a very tricky and touchy subject and even after reading, talking to people and reading some more, it's still very murky and grey waters to venture into. It often comes across as a double standard, because as stated in the earlier chapter, there is a predisposed mind set regarding culture appropriation. There is always the big bad appropriating caucasian and the poor defenseless minority. However, there is often appropriation within a minority or between two minorities. Also influences of western culture adapted into minority culture. These forms of culture appropriation are rarely ever discussed. Why?

It is as a result of several things. Domination of the minority in form of slavery or colonialism, have allowed mannerisms of western culture to infiltrate the cultures of minorities. Because they were forced upon them, with the introduction of education, religion and clothing. These were all instrumental.

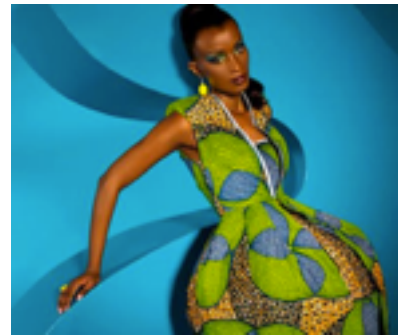
The culmination of this idea is the cloth commonly referred to as 'African Print' but is actually Dutch wax. How can fabric with Indonesian motifs, made by Europeans, and sold in Africa be considered African? The question and enigma of Vlisco is born.

Vlisco is a dutch company that produces wax print fabric. While these fabrics have come to signify African identity today, the patterns on these Dutch Wax fabrics were originally based on motifs found in Indonesian batiks, and were manufactured in Holland in the nineteenth-century. The European imitations of the Indonesian batiks did not prove lucrative when sold in South Asian markets, so Dutch manufacturers then marketed the textiles to their West African colonies, where they have since been appropriated and integrated into local culture.

British Nigerian artist, Yinka Shonibare initially used Dutch Wax in all his work as a tool to investigate the place of ethnicity and the stereotype in modernist representation. This was a response to his college tutor who challenged him to reference the 'African-ness' in his background more.

How has something that has passed through so many different cultures and found a home in Africa become such an intricate part of our identity? This issue of ownership also feeds into questions of our perception of identity and cultural awareness. Yinka Shonibare's work goes a long way towards shedding light on the effects of imperialism, colonisation and globalisation on our perception of self and definition of identity. In speaking of his own identity, Shonibare refers to himself as a post-colonial hybrid. He is open about the fact that he was driven to this African-ness not completely by choice but by the 'unspoken rule' that the work of diaspora artists must be a direct representation of their ethnicity. This has led to a

new classification of issues and concerns regarding what I will call the 'invasion of cultural privacy' giving way to the dis- of appropria- appreciation.



At the end of chapter I will with some ex- that emphasise

my points. But before I go into this, I will like to reiterate that appropriation is not always a bad thing. Appropriation has been defined as the adoption of specific elements of a culture by another, not belonging to that culture. It only turns bad when the cultural elements being appropriated are misinterpreted which then leads mockery or degradation of that culture. or when elements appropriated are of sacred significance.

Till this day there are still side effects of colonialism, regarding identity and its arguably a greater issue within the African Diaspora. I have met and known a number of Black Americans and Black British that are clueless as to what part of Africa has their roots and in an attempt to re-connect with their roots, they seek out cultural artefacts, of any kind, to put on display as a way to pledge allegiance to and create links with their African roots. If, for the sake of argument, we were to challenge these people, could this not be seen as an ethnic minority appropriating another minority? Or an even more complicated question, what happens when ethnics appropriate others' appropriations of ethnicity? for example when a black British boy, in need of ethnic connection buys a pair of Adidas trainers made from Kente printed cloth by a factory in China? Surely they are aware that Kente is traditionally a strong and sacred symbol of royalty in Ghana and parts of Togo, reserved for kings and worn only in times of importance, and if they don't know know, shouldn't they be subject to the same appropriation charges as the rest of the western world?





On the flip side of appropriation, while searching for imagery on random google image search I found the image below. Its a picture of two Asian women, one of whom is wearing a hijab with the American flag print. The image was linked to a Facebook page with a caption that reads: 'to our American members: what would you do if you saw this?'. Needless to say, the responses are appalling, extremely hateful and sad to read. All because she's, for the sake of argument, wearing an American flag as a hijab. Like many other people in the Diaspora, America is probably the only home she knows and she may well have been expressing her patriotism and allegiance to America

through her traditional dress. But to the people who responded to this post, America can and will never be a part of her culture.

Based on the principle above, surely these women should be ostracised too for their 'terrible' actions. How dare they wear the precious American flag on any part of their body? Wait, they 'look American', so they must be American and that makes it okay, right?!



or this?



This is why culture appropriation is such a hot topic, there is often such a double standard, it sometimes seems like you're damned if you do and damned if you

don't. Because someone will almost always be offended. The best one can do is to research and arm oneself with as much information as possible. Also if there is more education, by crediting original sources of things, then mistakes like appropriation of an appropriation cease to occur. To sum it up there is a thin line between correct and incorrect appropriation, the only way to stay on the right side is proper education.

Conclusion

(Cultural Transcendence)

We live in a postmodernist world as stated earlier, once information is put out there it becomes difficult to control and monitor its use, and the question of 'who owns what' begins. Postmodernism has influenced fashion all around us, from eclecticism, to parody, pastiche, and deconstruction. Fashion designers, constantly in the search for the next big thing, use cultural influences to create. Unfortunately to keep up with public demand for fast fashion, these influences do not go through a proper vetting process often ending up with a completely diffused cultural soup, where it's impossible to tell what is what. Leaving them to draw influences from a concoction of watered down cultures. When designers use this system of 'borrowing' to appropriate, traditional influences with symbolic significance from other cultures often end up as collateral damage. This is simply the incorrect way to appropriate culture and though this process cannot be undone, it can however be stopped.

Education on cultural specifics by members of that culture or scholars with expertise on the culture is one of the ways to avoid and reduce negative appropriation in fashion. If ample material is made available for designers to educate themselves, then the trend forecasters, moldboard makers and others who perpetuate fast fashion can be stopped. Understanding that there is a difference between being inspired by a sacred pattern used for ceremonial attire and exactly replicating that pattern for a clothing line are traits of a good designer, paying homage to a culture by citing it as a source of inspiration and being nuanced and tactful in adopting a particular clothing style or pattern. Ultimately it's a case of being well-informed and respectful about the culture in question. Inspiration should be honoured and celebrated. There is no better way to do this than to undertake thorough research and to be educated about the social mores and historical background of the culture serving as a source of inspiration.

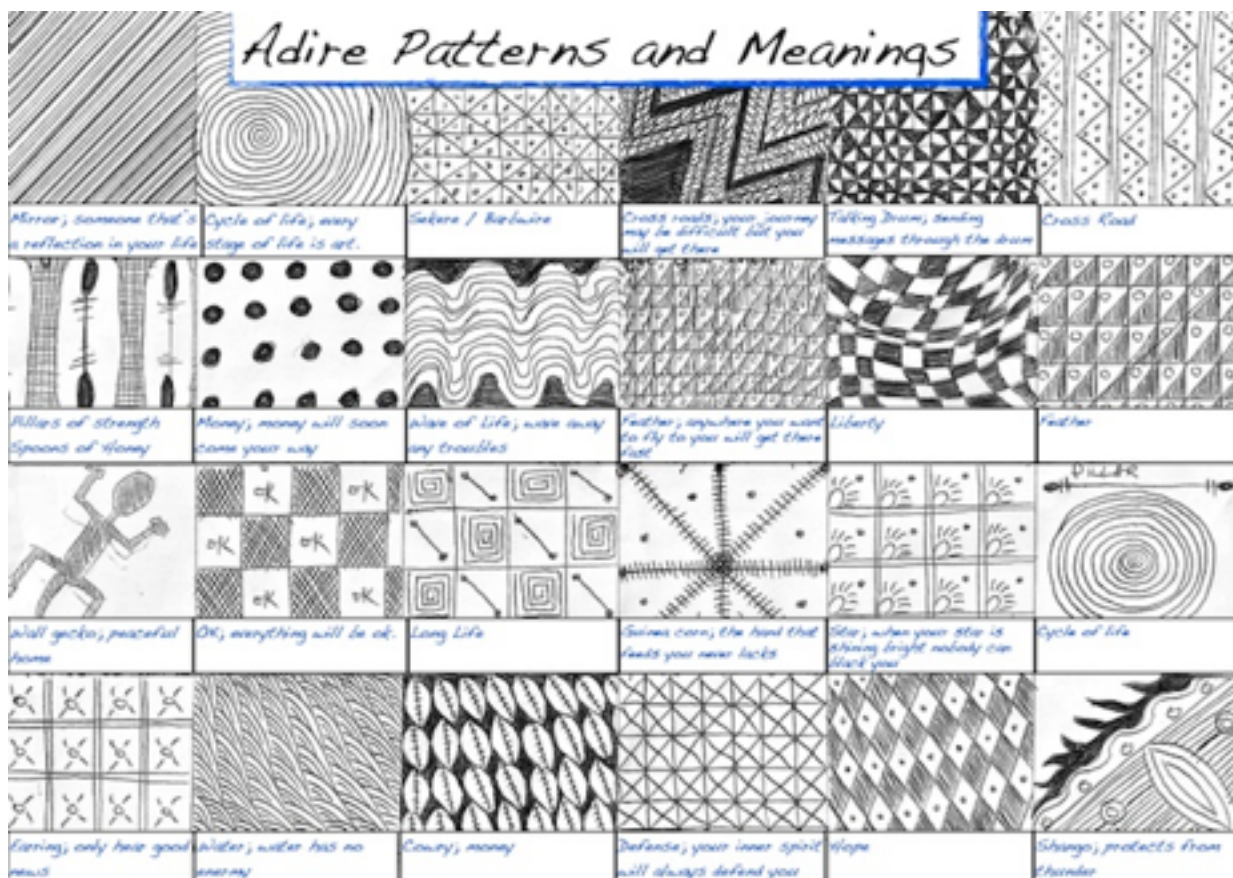
That being said, are we then to be tied to the ball and chain that is our heritage? No! We have to find a way to move forward, because without change and diversity, culture becomes ossified. Culture today is hardly an entity of its own, the phenomenon of globalisation has given rise to the concept of multiculturalism. In one way or other, a large part of the contemporary world population lives in more than one cul-

ture, be it because of the exchange of culinary techniques, or musical knowledge, or fashion ideas, and so on. When done correctly, fashion has proven to be a powerful cultural integrator, because like it or not, appropriation/ appreciation keeps a culture relevant. Because if we don't borrow and adapt aspects from cultures around the world then we risk falling into cultural stagnation. So its a way of inciting cross-cultural communication, learning more about each other, evolving and transcending.

The notion of cultures transcending seems simple at first, but it turns out to be far more complicated than going from one cultural group to another. If we observe closely, Cultures are not self-contained, distinct wholes; they have interacted and influenced one another for a long time through war, trade, and migration. People in many parts of the world live within cultures that are already cosmopolitan, characterized by cultural hybridity we may be crossing cultures even within the same cultural group.

We live in a very complex world, there is no ultimate truth or solution. There are notions. The notion of cultural transcendence, is one that we need to use to move culture to a place thats post-postmodernist. sometimes in order to go forward, we need to take steps back, we need to go back to the creation process and get down to the nitty gritty, by doing this we will begin to understand and develop a certain respect and re-appreciation for the cultural heritage. Fashion is exhausting itself and we need to get back in touch with the creation process designers and consumers alike, need to deconstruct our creative process to and perceptions to find a more modern and contemporary way that helps transcend culture.

An example is Nigerian born Visual artist and **champion for the lost art**



Bibliography

Welchman, J.C, 2001. Art after Appropriation: Essays on Art. New York Museum of Contemporary Art.

Wallis, B. ed. 1985. Art After Modernism.

Verwoert, J. 2006. Apropos Appropriation: Why stealing images today feels different. In B. Ruf & C. Wallis. Tate Triennial 2006

Crimp, D. 1980. The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism

Evans, D. ed 2009 Appropriation, Cambridge: MIT press

Crimp, D. 2009. Appropriating Appropriation (1982) In D. Evans ed. Appropriation, documents of Contemporary Art.

Susan Scafadi. 2005. Who Owns Culture: Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law Rutgers University Press.

James O Young. 2010. Culture Appropriation and the Arts. Blackwell Publishing.

Professor Bruce Ziff. 1997. Borrowed Power: Essays on Culture Appropriation. Rutgers University Press

Assche, C.V. 2000. Douglas Gordon: A new generation of readymades. Art Press.

Bourriadud, N. 2005. Postproduction 2nd ed. New York, Lukas & Sternberg