

Mentor's Introduction

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Mentor's Introduction

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Most of my research efforts have focused on experimental approaches to aesthetic behavior, particularly on psychological properties of aesthetic response. During the past several years, work with international graduate students or students from particular ethnic orientations has led to my recognition of the importance of social and cultural dimensions of aesthetic behavior. In working with graduate students from countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Trinidad, Chile, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia it has become apparent that the majority of these students are more interested in acquiring the means of adapting their indigenous aesthetics to a changing world rather than in acquiring only skills and artistic techniques associated with the major movements in Western Art. Also, certain findings in ethnic aesthetics have suggested that groups differ not in structure of aesthetic response, but in their attention to particular social dimensions associated with a group, such as Blacks' attention to obvious Black subject matter, a commonly held tenant of a Black Aesthetic. These findings, along with foreign students' desires to adapt their own aesthetic rather than to adopt another, have increasingly pointed to the importance of social and cultural dimensions of aesthetic behavior. This has led to an interest in the aesthetic bases of art in order to accommodate students' interests in building upon their own indigenous aesthetic as opposed to acquiring one from another society.

It seems extremely important that graduate art education studies recognize the nature of an aesthetic indigenous to a society as a base from which to accommodate social and technological change. The study of art and the values of a social or cultural group serve as a framework against which to provide cultural continuity and identity in the face of changes and controls instituted in the guise of economic or political efficiency.

There is a need to examine the aesthetic base of all social and cultural

groups as a means of coping with identity problems in the face of the forces of change. I believe that this is what Patricia Stuhr is doing in her study of contemporary Wisconsin Indians and their art. An initial step in any social or cultural group is the need for the description of who the peoples are and what they create and the value context within which they live. Such thorough studies as Stuhr's on Wisconsin Indians' art then provide a basis for examining the dynamics of potentially conflicting value systems of the traditional and the contemporary. Studies such as these will provide insights into the dynamics of change and thus a sounder basis for making curriculum and instructional decisions than we currently possess.