**MAU Module Name: Heritage Management**

**Introduction to Ethiopian Art and Visual Culture**

**Chapter One**

1. **Fundamental of Arts: Conceptual Perceptual Meaning of Arts**

**1.1 Art**

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| Universally, Art commonly used to describe something of beauty, or a skill, which produces an aesthetic result; there is no clear line in principle between a unique piece of handmade sculpture, and a mass-produced but visually attractive item. Therefore, Art is a highly diverse range of human activities engaged in creating visual, auditory, or performed artifacts-artworks that express the author’s imaginative or technical skills, and are intended to be appreciated for their beauty and emotional power.  The oldest documented forms of art are visual arts, which include images or objects in fields like painting, sculpture, printmaking, photography and other visual media. Architecture is often included as one of the visual arts; however, like a decorative arts, it involves the creation of objects where the practical considerations of use are essential, in a way that they usually are not in another visual art, like a painting.  Art may be characterized in terms of mimesis (its representation of reality), expression, communication of emotion, or other qualities. However, the definition of what constitutes art is disputed and has changed over time, general descriptions center on the idea of imaginative or technical skill stemming from human agency and creation. When it comes to visually identifying a work of art, there is no single set of values or aesthetic characters.  A fundamental purpose common to most art forms is the underlying intention to appeal to, and connect with, human emotion. However, the term is incredibly broad and is Broken up into numerous sub-categories that lead to utilitarian, decorative, therapeutic, communicative and intellectual ends. In its broadest form, art may be considered an exploration of the human condition, or a product of the human experience.   * 1. **Art: Multiplicity of Forms, Types and Genres**   Before trying to define art, the first thing to be aware of, is its huge scope. Art is a global activity that encompasses a hostofdisciplines, as evidenced by the range of words and phrases, which have been invented to describe its various forms. Examples of such phraseology include: "Fine Arts", "Liberal Arts", "Visual Arts", "Decorative Arts", "Applied Arts", "Design", "Crafts", "Performing Arts", and so on. Drilling down, many specific categories are classified according to the materials used, such as: drawing, painting, sculpture (Inc. ceramic sculpture), "glass art", "metal art", "illuminated gospel manuscripts", "aerosol art", "fine art photography", "animation", and so on. Sub-categories include painting in oils, watercolors, acrylics; sculpture in bronze, stone, wood, porcelain; to name but a tiny few. Other sub-branches include different genre categories, like narrative, portrait, genre-works, landscape, still life. In addition, entirely new forms of art have emerged during the 20th century, such as assemblage, conceptualism, collage, earthworks, installation, graffiti, and video, as well as the broad conceptualist movement, which challenges the essential value of an objective "work of art".   * 1. **Definition of Art is Limited by Era and Culture**   Another thing to be aware of is the fact that art reflects and belongs to the period and culture from which it spawned. Cultural differences act as natural borders and religion is a major cultural variable that alters the shape of the artistic envelope. In addition, Political events are the most obvious era-factors that influence on art: for example, art styles like Expressionism, Dada movement, and Surrealism were products of political uncertainty and upheavals.  Generally, the world of art is a highly complex entity, not only in terms of its multiplicity of forms and types, but also in terms of its historical and cultural roots. Therefore, a simple definition, or even a broad consensus as to what can be labeled art, is likely to prove highly elusive.   * 1. **History of the Definition of Art**      1. **Classical Meaning of Art**   The original classical definition - derived from the Latin word "arts" (meaning "skill" or "craft") - is a useful starting point. This broad approach leads to art being defined as "the product of a body of knowledge, most often using a set of skills." Thus, Renaissance painters and sculptors were viewed merely as highly skilled artisans (interior decorators). No wonder Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo went to such efforts to elevate the status of artists (and by implication art itself) onto a more intellectual plane.   * + 1. **Post-Renaissance Meaning of Art**   The emergence of the great European academies of art reflected the gradual upgrading of the subject. New and enlightened branches of philosophy also contributed to this change of image. By the mid-18th century, the mere demonstration of technical skills was insufficient to qualify, as art-it now needed an "aesthetic" component-it had to be seen as something "beautiful." At the same time, the concept of "utilitarianism" (functionality or usefulness) was used to distinguish the more noble "fine arts" (art for art's sake), like painting and sculpture, from the lesser forms of "applied art", such as crafts and commercial design work, and the ornamental "decorative arts", like textile design and interior design.  Thus, by the end of the 19th century, art was separated into at least two broad categories: namely, fine art and the rest-a situation that reflected the cultural snobbery and moral standards of the European establishment. Furthermore, despite some erosion of faith in the aesthetic standards of Renaissance ideology-which remained a powerful influence throughout the world of fine art-even painting and sculpture, had to conform to certain aesthetic rules in order to be considered "true art".   * + 1. **Meaning of Art During the Early 20th Century**   Then, Cubism (1907-14) came, which rocked the fine arts establishment, to its foundations. Not simply because Picasso introduced a non-naturalistic branch of painting and sculpture, but because it shattered the monotheistic Renaissance approach to how art related to the world around it. Thus, Cubism's main contribution was to act as a sort of catalyst for a host of new movements that greatly expanded the theory and practice of art, such as Suprematism, Constructivism, Dada, Neo-Plasticism, Surrealism and Conceptualism, as well as various realist styles, such as Social and Socialist Realism.  In practice, this proliferation of new styles and artistic techniques led to a new broadening of the meaning and definition of art. In its escape, from its "Renaissance straitjacket", and all the associated rules concerning "objectivity" (on perspective, useable materials, content, composition, and so on), fine art now boasted a significant element of "subjectivity". Artists suddenly found themselves with far greater freedom to create paintings and sculpture according to their own subjective values. In fact, one might say that from this point "art" started to become "indefinable". The decorative and applied arts underwent a similar transformation due to the availability of a vastly increased range of commercial products. However, the resultant increase in the number of associated design and crafts disciplines did not have any significant impact on the definition and meaning of art as a whole.   * + 1. **Meaning of Art Post-World War II**   The cataclysm of WWII led to the demise of Paris as the capital of world art, and its replacement by New York. This new American orientation encouraged art to become more of a commercial product, and loosen its connection with existing traditions of aestheticism a trend furthered by the emergence of Abstract Expressionism, Pop-Art, and the activities of the new breed of celebrity artists like Andy Warhol. The status of "art" elevated to consider all of a sudden, even the most mundane items and concepts. Under the influence of this populist approach, conceptualists introduced new art forms, like assemblage, installation, video and performance. In due course, graffiti added its own mark, as did numerous styles of reinterpretation, like Neo-Dada, Neo-Expressionism, and Neo-Pop, to name but three. Schools and colleges of art throughout the world dutifully preached the new polytheism, adding further fuel to the bonfire of Renaissance art traditions.   * + 1. **Postmodernism and the Meaning of Art**   The redefinition of art during the last three decades of the 20th century has been lent added intellectual weight by theorists of the postmodernist movement. According to the postmodern, the focus has shifted from artistic skill to the "meaning" of the work produced. In addition, "how" a work is "experienced" by spectators has become a critical component in its aesthetic value. The phenomenal success of contemporary artists like Damien Hirst, as well as Gilbert and George, is clear evidence in support of this view.   * + 1. **A Working Definition of Art**   In light of this historical development in the meaning of "art", one can perhaps make a crude attempt at a "working" definition of the subject: Art is created when an artist creates a beautiful object, or produces a stimulating experience that is considered by his audience to have artistic merit.  This is simply a "working" definition: broad enough to encompass most forms of contemporary art, but narrow enough to exclude "events" whose "artistic" content falls below accepted levels. In addition, please note that the word "artist" is included to allow for the context of the work; the word "beautiful" is included to reflect the need for some "aesthetic" value; while the phrase "that is considered by his audience to have artistic merit" is included to reflect the need for some basic acceptance of the artist's efforts.   * 1. **The Classification of Art**   Traditional and contemporary art encompasses activities as diverse as Architecture, music, opera, theatre, dance, painting, sculpture, illustration, drawing, cartoons, printmaking, ceramics, stained glass, photography, installation, video, film and cinematography. All these activities are commonly referred, to as "the Arts" and commonly classified into several overlapping categories, such as Fine, Visual, Plastic, Decorative, Applied, and Performing Arts. However, disagreement persists as to the precise composition of these categories, but here is a generally accepted classification.   * + 1. **Fine Arts**   This category includes those artworks that are created primarily for aesthetic reasons ('art for art's sake') rather than for commercial or functional use. Designed for its uplifting, life-enhancing qualities, Fine Art typically denotes the traditional, Western European 'high arts', such as:   1. **Drawing**   It is using charcoal, chalk, crayon, pastel or with pencil or pen and ink. Two major applications include: illuminated manuscripts (c.600-1200) and book illustration.   1. **Painting**   Painting is using oils, watercolor, gouache, acrylics, ink and wash, or the more old-fashioned tempera or encaustic paints.   1. **Printmaking**   Using simple methods like woodcuts or stencils, the more demanding techniques of engraving, etching and lithography, or the more modern forms like screen-printing, foil imaging prints.   1. **Sculpture**   It is preparing in bronze, stone, marble, wood, or clay. Another type of Western fine art, which originated in China, is calligraphy: the highly complex form of stylized writing.   * **The Evolution of Fine Arts**   After primitive forms of cave painting, figurine sculptures and other types of ancient art, there occurred the golden era of Greek art and other schools of Classical Antiquity. The sacking of Rome (c.400-450) and introduced the dead period of the Dark Ages (c.450-1000), brightened only by Celtic art and Ultimate La Tene Celtic designs. After which the history of art in the West is studded with a wide variety of artistic 'styles' or 'movements' such as Gothic (c.1100-1300), Renaissance (c.1300-1600), Baroque (17th century), Neo-Classicism (18th century), Romanticism (18th-19th century), Realism and Impressionism (19th century), Cubism, Expressionism, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism and Pop-Art (20th century).  For a brief review of modernism (c.1860-1965), see Modern art movements for a guide to postmodernism, (c.1965-present).   * **The Tradition**   Fine Art was the traditional type of Academic art taught at the great schools, such as the Accademia dell'Arte del Disegno in Florence, the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and the Royal Academy in London. One of the key legacies of the academies was their theory of linear perspective and their ranking of the painting genres, which classified all works into five types: history, portrait, genre-scenes, landscape and still life.   * **Patrons**   Ever since the advent of Christianity, the largest and most significant sponsor of Fine Art has been the Christian Church. Not surprisingly therefore, the largest body of painting and/or sculpture has been religious art, as has other specific forms like icons and altarpiece art.   * + 1. **Visual Arts**   Visual art includes all the Fine Arts as well as new media and contemporary forms of expression such as Assemblage, Collage, Conceptual, Installation and Performance art, as well as Photography, and film-based forms like Video Art and Animation, or any combination of art. Another type, often created on a monumental scale is the new environmental land art.   * + 1. **Plastic Arts**   The term plastic art typically denotes three-dimensional works employing materials that can be moulded, shaped or manipulated (plasticized) in some way: such as, clay, plaster, stone, metals, wood (sculpture), paper (origami) and so on. For three-dimensional artworks made from everyday materials and "found objects", including Marcel Duchamp's "ready-mades" (1913-21).   * + 1. **Decorative Arts**   This category traditionally denotes functional but ornamental art forms, such as works in glass, clay, wood, metal, or textile fabric. This includes all forms of jewelry and mosaic art, as well as ceramics, (exemplified by beautifully decorated styles of ancient pottery notably Chinese and Greek Pottery) furniture, furnishings, stained glass and tapestry art. Noted styles of decorative art include Rococo Art (1700-1800), Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (fl. 1848-55), Japonism (c.1854-1900), Art Nouveau (c.1890-1914), Art Deco (c.1925-40), Edwardian, and Retro.  Arguably, the greatest period of decorative or applied art in Europe occurred during the 17th/18th centuries at the French Royal Court. (French Decorative Arts (c.1640-1792); French Designers (c.1640-1792); and French Furniture (c.1640-1792) are important works).   * + 1. **Performance Arts**   This type refers to public performance events. Traditional varieties include theatre, opera, music, and ballet. Contemporary performance art also includes any activity in which the artist's physical presence acts as the medium.   * + 1. **Applied Arts**   This category encompasses all activities involving the application of aesthetic designs to everyday functional objects. While Fine Art provides intellectual stimulation to the viewer, applied art creates utilitarian items (a cup, a couch or sofa, a clock, a chair or table) using aesthetic principles in their design. Folk art is predominantly involved with this type of creative activity. Applied art includes architecture, computer art, photography, industrial design, graphic design, fashion design, interior design, as well as all decorative arts. One of the most important forms of 20th century applied art is architecture, notably super-tall skyscraper architecture, which dominates the urban environment in New York, Chicago, Hong Kong and many other cities around the world.  **Exercise**   1. What is Art? 2. Art was defining via different way in the different periods. Explain how was define it in the Post Renaissance period? 3. Discuss how the meaning of Art is defined during post-WWII. 4. State and explain the types of Fine Art. 5. What is visual Art? |