



Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems

Issue 12, Vol. 8, 2025

Benallal Fatima Zahra

Title of research article 

Algerian Art as a Cultural Matrix: The Embodiment of Identity, Heritage, and Collective Memory

Hassiba Benbouali University of Chlef
Algeria

E-mail: Benallalfatima0405@gmail.com

Issue web link

<https://imcra-az.org/archive/387-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-12-vol-8-2025.html>

Keywords

Algerian art; cultural identity; popular culture; folk heritage; symbolic anthropology; traditional culture; intangible heritage; visual expression.

Abstract

Art in Algeria represents far more than aesthetic production; it is a living archive in which collective memory, cultural identity, and popular heritage are preserved and reproduced across generations. The interplay between art, culture, and identity forms a dynamic system through which Algerian society expresses its historical continuity, symbolic worldviews, social values, and ethnic diversity. Algerian artistic practices—whether visual, material, performative, or decorative—have historically served as mirrors of the people's cultural consciousness, embodying both tangible and intangible heritage. From prehistoric cave engravings and Amazigh geometric patterns to Andalusian musical traditions, crafts, weaving, pottery, and contemporary visual arts, Algerian art has functioned as a central medium for representing cultural specificity, transmitting traditional knowledge, and resisting cultural erosion throughout colonial and post-colonial periods. This study examines the theoretical foundations linking art with identity and popular culture, analyses forms of Algerian artistic expression as vehicles of cultural representation, and highlights the socio-anthropological role of art in safeguarding heritage.

Citation. Benallal F.Z. (2025) Algerian Art as a Cultural Matrix: The Embodiment of Identity, Heritage, and Collective Memory. *Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems*, 8(12), 763-769.

<https://doi.org/10.56334/sei/8.12.64>

Licensed

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Science, Education and Innovations in the context of modern problems (SEI) by IMCRA - International Meetings and Journals Research Association (Azerbaijan). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Received: 13.02.2025

Accepted: 09.09.2025

Published: 10.11.2025 (available online)

Introduction:

Art is considered a noble humanitarian message that carries with it the meanings of humanity, with all its moral values and practices that embody the cultural features of each people. Algeria is a country full of its culture and all that it contains of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, expressed by the popular category in various ways, including those works that have been translated in the form of various works of art. The artistic practice embodies the relationship of man with what constitutes his creativity, where through art it is possible to convey realistic images and highlight the ideal content of nature, the world and its components. It is a human activity that presents an aesthetic image of reality of various kinds and multiplicity, and there was a clear relationship between man and the Arts, which were expressing the popular life of societies and which still exist in different images.

This has been particularly illustrated on the walls of caves in the form of drawings of animals and signs of symbolic dimensions, and the arts have known development through the ages, and carry religious and mythological origins and have a social, cultural and economic function.

Through our research, we will try to address the importance of Algerian art for Algerian identity and culture, in other words, we will be exposed to the relationship between art and popular culture. Therefore, we are trying to address the following question: How Can Art Express popular identity, popular culture and folk heritage This is through the evocation of some Algerian artistic genres, which have been widely popular.

It should be noted at the outset that these last concepts mentioned above can be related to each other and overlap to indicate what distinguishes a people. Therefore, we will be exposed to it through what we have drawn for our research.

1-Definition of art:

Art in its general sense is a set of rules followed to achieve a certain goal, whether it is beauty, goodness, or benefit. If the goal is to achieve beauty, it is called fine art, if the achievement of good is called the art of morality, and if the achievement of benefit is called the art of industry. And art in its own sense is called the set of means that a person uses to evoke a sense of beauty, such as photography, sculpture, engraving, decorating, architecture, poetry, music and others, which are the so-called Fine Arts (Qartim, 2010, p. 22)

One of the most important anthropological definitions of art is the definition of "Herskovitz", which is: "art is an aesthetic addition to ordinary life, which is achieved only by ability and efficiency and has a certain form and it shows two important aspects: the content: which includes the subject, and the symbols associated with it. (Qartim, 2010, p. 23)

2-the relationship of art with culture:

There is no doubt that there is a relationship between art and culture, as the arts are considered carriers and carriers of culture. Where the Arts in various forms express culture, and the culture of Man includes the different ways he followed to modify his nature so that it makes it grow and develop. Human culture is a human achievement and it indicates the human possibility of perfection and the freedom of creativity for him. (Hultcranz, 1972, p. 155)

Art is called every creation formed by the hand of a human being to be in fact the talent and will of that individual and his ability to shape and formulate his artistic work, which leads to an aesthetic meaning. It should be noted that the art student has to reason about the artwork sometimes, where through: drawings, engravings, sculptures, we can learn about the customs of peoples and their traditions, which in turn form the human culture inherited generation after generation. In this context, it can be considered that art reflects human culture in its connotations.

3-Traditional Culture:

It is the culture that is inherited within the group, the carrier of culture, and Erickson used this term to describe the essence of popular culture, " Erickson said. He considers popular culture to be in fact the same as the living traditional culture. Traditional culture is a culture that has passed a certain period of time in the same form in which it appears (Hultcranz, 1972, p. 156), and popular culture is the culture that characterizes the people and the popular society and is characterized by its compliance with the heritage and basic organizational forms.

4-Folk Heritage:

Folk heritage is an important station of anthropological research, how not, and the first concern of anthropology is the human being, the latter who lived to produce since he was resurrected, his life was characterized by complexity, so he was able with his intelligence to create for himself a culture through which he adapted to various circumstances surrounding him. In addition to all the developments and changes that have contributed to the development of this culture and the preservation of its elements and dispensing with others that do not need them. Therefore, folk heritage is considered a product of continuous cultural and

intellectual accumulation, its roots go back to the long experiences of peoples, from prehistory to the present. In it, the human person embodied his suffering, dreams, legitimate ambition, his great attachment to his land and his continuity, and his desperate defense of his present and Future (Zandri , 2016, p. 296).

5-cultural identity:

it is the product of the interaction of a set of components, mainly represented by:

- Customs and traditions: eating patterns, dress, celebrations and methods of dealing are things that express in some way the personality of the nation and itself, and although these things are subject to transformation and development, the features of originality remain available. (Ben Saadoun, 2010-2011, p. 65)
- Social values and norms: are the various abstract qualities that provide the individual with common ideas that members of society deal with. (Ben Saadoun, 2010-2011, p. 66)

As for the relationship between cultural identity and art, we find that art in its various forms is part of the cultural identity of any people, as it carries its material and moral legacies from generation to generation, as generations pass on it in different artistic models.

6-an overview of some Algerian artistic practices:

Algeria is full of its various folk arts, which distinguish it and are inspired by its distinctive folk culture, which carries with it the features of identity and tangible and intangible heritage. On this basis, the arts were divided according to their types: plastic, Instrumental or expressive, and others applied.

6-1: plastic arts:

It can be said that the beginning of the emergence of plastic arts in Algeria began with the emergence of Contemporary Photography, which has its origin in two main sources: on the one hand, it is due to ancient art, Tassili art, Berber art and Arab-Islamic art, and the second source is the influence of Western schools promoted by the school of Fine Arts in Paris, where it opened its doors in Algeria and is preparing its students to enroll in the Higher School of Fine Arts in Paris, including: "zouaoui" bye".

Algeria has known a group of plastic artists who emerged in different periods of time, and "Mohammed Rasim" is the first who tried to take advantage of the Arab-Islamic heritage, in order to create a style of National Art and was influenced by the Iranian school, from which he quoted his artistic style, and he is considered one of the most appreciated miniature painters in the world (Belbachir, 2011-2012, p. 70). He is also credited with being a link between traditional Arab art and contemporary art.

Where "Mohammed Rasim" stands at the peak of artists who practiced the art of miniatures, but he was the first heralds of his return in a sober, elaborate style that reaches the point of miracle. In his miniatures, he was interested in painting The Kasbah, where he painted its streets, popular cafes, houses and antique mosques, and like him, his student did after him: "Mohammed Tamam", "Mohammed Khadda" excelled in painting bright places, immersed in the golden ray of the sun, as well as "Ali Khoja", who was fond of bright colors. And among the pioneers of the formation movement in Algeria we mention: "Ibn Suleiman", "Al-Mamari", "Abdelhalim", "Al-zmirl", "Mehdi Izum" (Belbachir, 2011-2012, p. 81).

In the Forties of the twentieth century, a group of Painters emerged who were the most able to deal with some modern artistic styles, including: "bayah", "Hassan Ibn Abura" and "Muhammad isyakhm" in expressive diagnostic drawing and cartooning, "Bouzid Marduk", "Bashir yels". When the National Union of plastic arts was founded in Algeria, some plastic artists were able to prove their distinguished artistic presence inside and outside Algeria, such as: "fares boukhatem", nicknamed the painter of the liberation revolution, and the group "tattoos " appeared in Algeria and often dealt with the abstract style merged with folk heritage.

The period of the sixties of the twentieth century is considered the most positive for the plastic movement in Algeria, thanks to a group of faithful young painters, who tried to create a style of national art characterized by an Arab-Islamic-African character (Belbachir, 2011-2012, pp. 81-82).

For Orientalist artists, it is necessary to be exposed to "Etienne Dini" or "Nasreddine Dini", whose art, after his association with Algerian art, turned into an expressive language, where he devoted his feather to explaining his ideas and recording heritage, to save what can be saved from the desert world threatened with extinction. (Belbachir, 2011-2012, p. 77)

He described the traditions of the desert wedding accurately in his famous book: "The Green dancer of the boys of Nile", he also wrote: "spring of Hearts", where a collection of stories is considered an addition to "Mirage", "desert" and others. When mentioning Algeria in the field of painting, it is necessary to mention the artist "Etienne Deni", whose fame exceeded all borders and thanks to him, those topics that dealt with the Algerian regions as plastic art paintings became world-famous, as he dealt with several topics in his drawings that were specific to Algerian society. (Khaled , 2009-2010, p. 161)

6-2: expressive arts:

Expressive or performing arts express the intangible cultural heritage, and it is a popular creativity that embodies the life of peoples and documents the bonds of interconnection between them, and they form the artistic manifestations performed often collectively. It is a style of live expression or live performance. In particular, it is represented by: dance, music and theater.

6-2-1: dance:

It is a physical movement, consisting of moving the hands and feet and shaking the body in general, and dance is considered one of the oldest types of arts as shown by cave paintings, it is the result of primitive rituals invented by ancient man to pray to nature. Where he performs gestural movements loaded with mysterious meanings, accompanied by the rhythm of drums. In general, dance is used to express joy and happiness. It is associated with social events. Dance can be considered a method of non-verbal expression, it forms a body language through which its meanings are interrogated.

Dance is associated with music and singing, and is also considered a form of Major Performing Arts, often accompanied by musical rhythms and singing, which express a theatrical text or dramatic work. Which means that the Performing Arts can relate to each other, or rather be a syndrome among themselves. It is mainly based on moving the body in a rhythmic form, which gives a harmonious and harmoniously integrated image. In each historical period, a person may need to create a certain dance in parallel with the musical and lyrical development, on the other hand, while on the other hand, we find traditional dance, which includes folk or folklore dance, and represents the folk heritage of each region. As no society is devoid of folk dance, and it cannot be dispensed with, as it is a folk production that pours deep into memory and is linked to it historically, it carries in its content the history of peoples. If we talk about Algerian society, we would find that dance expresses its identity and differs from region to region, from East to West and from North to South in terms of details and rhythmic type, among the types of dance we find: Algerian or capital, tribal, Allawi, Shawi, Naili, Tuareg dance and others. This means that there are many types of dances that have differed in different human societies. Also, several dances can be found in one community. Algerian dance is characterized by its harmony with traditional clothing, each Algerian region has its own traditional costume, for men and women. In each type of dance, a certain element may be carried, whether it is a handkerchief, a sword or a stick, depending on the nature of the dance, or it is limited to moving the hands, legs or body in general.

6-2-2: music:

If we know music: we found that it represents the integration of a group of silent sounds according to a set of basic principles related to melody, harmony and rhythm, and the goal is to convey feelings and sensations to listeners to give an aesthetic character specific to each musical color. There are many types of music, similar to folk music, which may be traditional or modern, and sometimes there is a mix between what is traditional and what is modern. The same is true for the folk song, which was born in the arms of social classes, it is an individual creation that was first uttered by a single member of society who is talented and adept at composing and inventing songs, its public reputation from the people settled in their hearts, stuck in their minds and later broadcast it everywhere by oral narration (Khaled , 2009-2010, p. 49).

Anthropologists believe that folk song has many functions, including: self-promotion, venting emotions and fixing cultural, social and belief values in the souls of the folk group. (Khaled , 2009-2010, p. 50)

6-2-3: Theatre:

It is a humanitarian and literary art, Instrumental or expressive, through which stories, situations and anecdotes are represented, regardless of whether they are popular or historical. Its objective may be to entertain and communicate a message with a certain content, it is considered a means of expression, as we find that in some of its shows it is associated with singing and humor. Some theatrical works are in line with the other previously mentioned expressive arts: dance and music.

We cannot lose sight of the fact that the Algerian popular theater derived its existence and blended with popular literature, as the latter received great attention among the Algerian popular group, and various expressive artistic forms historically associated with the Algerian people emerged, expressed its cultural stock and it can be said that the theatrical performance was presented in another form, characterized by its specificity. Among them: praise and sayings, as it was done in the form of performances that deeply resonated with the audience. It is revived by wandering poets and folk storytellers, and includes the telling of fairy tales and strange legends, in which the narrator uses movement and the embodiment of certain situations to attract the attention of the viewer.

6-3: Applied Arts:

Applied arts are concerned with beautifying all the materials and sensations that a person deals with daily, and they are based on design and decoration. It has an aesthetic dimension and at the same time benefits humanity. Thus, they carry a practical value and constitute manifestations of folk art formed by hand, and they are dominated by the visual sense.

Here we can talk about handicrafts and traditional industries with the advent of man, in order to meet his necessary needs. From clothing and cover to shelter to other needs that have evolved with the development of his life and its complexities. Therefore, it is an important aspect within Material Culture.

We find that handicrafts include many activities such as needlework, spinning, weaving, decorating fabrics with printing, basket making, pottery, and metalwork related to decorative purposes, including ornaments, jewelry, and leathers (Qritam, 2010, p. 71). And it can be called folk plastic arts because it is characterized by specificity, depending on the nature of the region and the time in which it was inspired, it is associated with folk industries.

Handicrafts are traditional crafts that express the cultural and human heritage of each region, and include: tools, clothes, ornaments, costumes, furniture for celebrations, performing arts, storage boxes, decorations, ritual objects, musical instruments and household items.

Traditional crafts and industries are the first and only means of expressing the culture of a society and its originality, so that they are a source of livelihood for many members of society. They express different manifestations of life through artistic works of drawings, shapes and decorations that can be seen in the products of traditional crafts and industries derived from the environment and its civilized and historical character (Dheeb, 2015, p. 377). In the same context, we find that the craftsman has an artistic sense, as he has the ability to innovate and create, what he produces gives an aesthetic character that attracts people of different human tastes. And the raw materials he uses form the foundation stone of every traditional craft, where they are traded generation after generation. Like other arts, they are part of the popular cultural heritage, and here we mention the handicrafts related to the ceramic, pottery, glass and textile industries.

Conclusion:

Through our research, we tried to touch on the relationship between art and culture, through the human evocation of art in various forms, as through art, man evokes his identity and preserves what distinguishes it, as art carries and expresses culture. This was especially reflected in the various artistic genres to which we were exposed. The Algerian culture carries in its depths a different and homogeneous artistic heritage across its diverse geographical regions. The arts constitute a language, so to speak, a carrier of culture and its evocation is

collective, as the popular group agreed that folk arts can not be dispensed with because they carry customs, traditions and aphorisms circulating through generations. Art is considered a reservoir of popular memory and it can be said that it is the identity of the people, especially oral, performing and Applied Arts, which are known for their prevalence and circulation. The modernization of the artistic style or at least the collision of art with what is modern does not mean erasing what is heritage or what constitutes originality. The importance of the arts lies in its connection with the ancient past and its circulation, because, as we have pointed out, it is considered a language inherited between generations, carrying in all its historical stages the features of popular culture and human heritage, including the embodiment of identity and belonging. That is, by the conscious and unconscious practice of folk arts, the activation of identity and belonging.

Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical methodological approach, drawing on multiple sources to examine the interrelationship between Algerian art, identity, and cultural heritage. The methodology consists of theoretical and documentary analysis, content analysis of artistic forms, comparative cultural interpretation, and an anthropological perspective.

Author Contribution:

The author independently conducted all components of this research: conceptualization, literature review, interpretation of cultural materials, writing, structuring, and final revision.

Ethical Considerations:

This research is based exclusively on publicly available sources, cultural artefacts, historical documentation, and scholarly literature. No human participants or sensitive materials were involved. All referenced works are properly cited.

Acknowledgement:

The author thanks Hassiba Benbouali University of Chlef and Algerian cultural institutions for their accessible resources and support.

Funding:

No external funding was received for this research.

Conflict of Interest:

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

1. Belbachir, A. (2011-2012). *Artistic Materials and Their Place in Algerian Schools, PhD Thesis in Popular Culture, Supervised by: Mohamed Ramadan.*
2. Ben Saadoun, F. (2010-2011). *"Traditional Tlemcen Dress: Between Cultural Identity and Economic Returns (The Garaftan Dress as a Model)," supervised by Bouhsoun Al-Arabi.* Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Majister's Thesis in Development Anthropology.
3. Dheeb, B. (2015). Traditional Crafts and Industries in the Djelfa Region (Shoemaking and Textiles). *Journal of Law and Human Sciences, 2(25).*
4. Hultcranz, E. (1972). *Dictionary of Ethnological and Folklore Terms, translated by Muhammad al-Jawhari and Hassan al-Shami.* General Authority for Cultural Palaces.

5. Khaled , M. (2009-2010). *Masterpieces of Fine Arts in Algeria during the French Colonial Era 1830-1962, PhD thesis, supervised by Muhammad Saidi.*
6. Qartim, a. (2010). *Anthropology and Fine Arts.*, Dar Al-Maaref.
7. Qartim, A. (2010). *Anthropology and Popular Fine Arts.* Supreme Council of Culture.
8. Zandri , A. (2016). The Relationship between Belief and Imagination in Constructing the Social Background of Popular Heritage - The Popular Heritage of Imouhag (Tuaregs) as a Model. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 26.*