

Abstract

*Investigating Aché as an
Aesthetic Criterion*



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El Minimalismo no tiene aché - Minimalism doesn't have *ashé* - so declared Angel Suarez-Rosado in March of 1994. What struck me about his statement is that I clearly understood his use of the term *aché* as an aesthetic criterion while discussing a school of painting that is rooted in a Euro-American modernist tradition.

The thought that we could use *aché* as an aesthetic criterion to discuss a work of art not grounded in African and in particular the Yoruba diaspora culture gave me pause. A rudimentary, albeit not definitive, translation of the concept of *aché* is "life force."

While doing research in aesthetics it is not uncommon to encounter foreign words in the literature to describe complex ideas that would be lost in translation. According to Robert Farris Thompson in *The Flash of the Spirit*, "Áshe is untranslatable." My mission therefore became finding a way of introducing the concept of *aché* into the literature and criticism of works of art.

In order to test my hypothesis, I designed the *Investigating the Aesthetics of Ashé* project and introduced it to my studio and art history students at Spelman College and later to my students at Davidson College and Colgate University while serving as a distinguished visiting professor. This investigation is conducted using a hybrid experimental research method grounded in phenomenology and organized into four "time zones."

Investigating Aché as an Aesthetic Criterion is a slide-lecture that outlines the project as a workshop module for a course or, as a stand-alone seminar for educators, artists, scholars, critics and art historians interested in art and aesthetics.