

SNYTHESIS OF FORMS: THE ADAPTATION OF BENIN
SYMBOLIC OBJECTS INTO NON-FIGURATIVE SCULPTURES

BY

EMMANUEL WESLEY OKACHI

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N.C.E.(Riv.,C.O.E.) B.A. HONS (A.B.U.)

**A RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT SUBMITTED TO POST GRADUATE
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1999

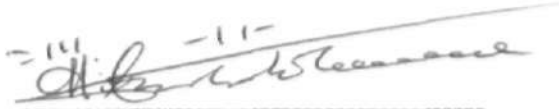
CERTIFICATION

This project report titled "Synthesis of Forms: The Adaptation of Benin Symbolic Objects into Non-Figurative Sculptures" by Emmanuel Wesley Okachi meets the regulations governing the award of the degree of Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) Sculpture of Ahmadu Bello University and is approved for its literary presentation and contribution to knowledge.



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Chairman, Supervisory Committee

Date: 17th August 2000



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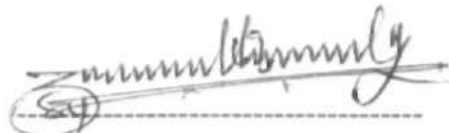
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DECLARATION

I, Emmanuel Wesley Okachi hereby declare that this project report titled “Synthesis of Forms: The Adaptation of Benin Symbolic Objects into Non-Figurative Sculptures” was undertaken by me.

That I have duly acknowledged sources of all materials consulted.


Emmanuel Wesley Okachi

Date: 26th Nov, 2000

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We have just began

Emmanuel Wesley Okachi

1999

ABSTRACT

"Synthesis of Forms: The Adaptation of Benin Symbolic Objects into Non-Figurative Sculptures" is a practical studio project that involved the conceptualization, design and execution of sculpture in three dimensions.

Motifs were employed as deliberate factor for aesthetics. The documentation of all concepts, techniques, finishes, photographic production of all executed pieces, and literary materials found valuable to this project are all included in this project report.

The methods employed for the purpose of this study were developed through the descriptive approach and studio experiments. Twelve sculptures were executed. Specific sculpture materials at the disposal of the researcher were used. These include, cement, clay, plaster of Paris, polyester and fibre glass-resin.

This project culminates in the exhibition of selected sculptures for gardens, living homes, roundabouts and strategic areas in the environment.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of symbolic objects has been an important element in African sculpture. Their usage over the years has been decorative and mostly to adorn sculptures.

Aig-Imoukhuede (1991), asserts that "although there was no written language communication within a community and between communities was carried out by the use of symbols understood by all or which can be interpreted by those versed in such messages within the community". The presence of prerogum tree (ogirsi in Ibo) indicates that the site is sacred or a shrine. Palm fronds across the road is a warning that movement is restricted. The bull roarer signals a curfew. However, there are more elaborate systems. Some restrictive in use to members of cults and some so complex, an interpreter is necessary to deliver the message.

According to Aig-Imoukhuede (ibid), in Aroko in Yoruba land symbols which represent ideas, historical facts, events, proverbs, and aphorisms are used to transmit messages. The use of objects which have similar literal meanings or whose use can be associated with certain statements or beliefs, is another important feature. For instance, two cowries facing each other suggests friendliness and openness of two parties to each other, when one face is placed against the back of the other, it is regarded as a natural relationship. Two cowries backing each other means opposition while a single cowry is an unfortunate answer to a request or message. Another belief is the kolanut which is popular among the Hausas as a stimulant. The Yoruba and Edo serve broken (split) kolanut with alligator pepper which is also a symbol of plenty and good auspices.

The people of Benin have the same symbolic attachment to some objects just like any other group in Africa. Ogene (1984) states that "Benin sculptures functionally are humanistic and symbolic in nature". Formalistically, they are art

works with high aesthetic values. Bronzes and ivories are symbols of authority in Benin. Apart from the documentation of historic events they were used for political administration.

Apart from Christianity and Islam, many Nigerians are practitioners of traditional forms of religion rooted in their cultures. Culture, being that complex whole which include knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society. In developing nations, culture is the mobilization of a national consciousness which will reveal a new identity through symbiosis of the old and the modern.

The proposed research is therefore based on the assumption that much attention has not been given to symbolic objects and their representation in sculpture in the round in contemporary times. Going by this therefore, the purpose of this study is to attempt to achieve sculpture in the round with the use of Benin symbolic objects.

This equally will be translated into visual vocabulary which provides very vital reference material for designers, painters, sculptors, art historians and ethnographers.

This will be executed in three-dimensional form using fibre glass resin and polyester.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Contemporary sculptures are adorned with symbolic objects without serious thought being put into synchronizing their connotations and significance. This diminishes the import of such objects as they have greater value that most often goes beyond the merely decorative.

The incessant destruction of public sculptures in some parts of the country has energized this research. This wantonness can be attributed to an absence of proper curatorial and restorative apparatus in the nations cultural institutions.

While the problem of this study revolves around the possibilities of adapting Benin symbolic object into non-figurative contemporary sculptures the issues raised above are examined and put into perspective for the emergence of a more cogent modern sculptural statement. By imbibing objects from a specific cultural premise and adapting them properly into present day situations it is expected that the question of ambiguous decoration of sculpture forms will be discouraged thereby bringing meaning and relevance to our artistic statements.

1.3 **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of this study are to:-

- i. Create possibilities in the adaptation of symbolic objects into non-figuration sculptures.
- ii. To adapt Benin traditional symbolic object into contemporary sculpture practise.
- iii. Create highly expressive aesthetic sculptural works that have relevance for modern man.
- iv. Produce documented literature and works of sculpture as a contribution to existing knowledge and practise.

1.4 **SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY**

The significance of this study include to;

Formulate a conceptual frame-work upon which an expressive art can be cultivated;

The researcher hopes that the creative capabilities of artists and students shall be awakened towards a better understanding of traditional forms and designs for the purpose of teaching, learning and practice;

Stimulate research into other art traditions and their hidden qualities;

Provide modules for synthesizing Benin symbolic objects with modern sculptural techniques and materials and finally to

Initiate studies in Benin art culture through the use of symbolic objects.

1.5. SCOPE AND DELIMITATIONS

The study will revolve around such symbolic objects as the Benin perceives them to serve as authentic statements. Thereby unearthing their innate connotations and relevance.

The research shall confine itself to the use of fibre glass and polyester to make a statement.

The research has no religious inclinations, rather a general study of these symbolic object forms.

1.5 DEFINITION OF TERMS

OLOKUN - This is a water diety worshiped by the people of Benin.

Non-Figurative Sculpture – Sculpture that is devoid of human or animal representation in the round.

1.6 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

This studio report bears the introductory chapter as chapter one. This carries the introduction into the area of study and goes through the problem and objectives. It is immediately followed by the significance of the study, the scope and delimitations. The definition of terms comes before the organization of the study in the chapter.

Chapter two reviews literature and relevant works. It further deals with the origin of Benin, symbolic objects and their significance.

Chapter three contains the design procedure of the project known as the methodology, it includes data collection and catalogue of works.

The final and concluding chapter is the fourth. This produces the summary, findings and recommendations of the entire project, and finally makes conclusion and lists references and interviewed persons.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW AND RELEVANT WORKS

The prehistoric man with memories of his impressions began to carve and draw on stone, wood, bone and whatever materials were available, slowly developing “art”. These works are today symbolic and have culminated in the figures, symbols, motifs and cave paintings found in Europe, Non-European countries; and Africa which include, Nok, Igbo Ukwu, Ife and Benin Cultural findings.

Though Nigerian contemporary art is now well appreciated worldwide by art collectors and art critics, the wall decorations, motifs and symbols of different traditions are very much artistically vital. It is however regrettable that due to the impact of the missionaries with their doctrines many beautifully decorated shrines were demolished. This therefore introduced forms, symbols, motifs and patterns which were alien to the traditions and beliefs of the society.

Segun (1991) asserts that “A person needs cultural identity as a point of reference from which he can operate. The vitality of identity has been emphasized over and over again by a number of people who have left their abode in the diaspora to come to Africa in search of their roots. These roots lie in the past and the past is history”.

Each country in the world has its symbols, motifs, patterns and forms characteristic of her art; the historical places and monuments like Buckingham palace in London, the Eiffel tower and the pyramids at Giza on the outskirts of Cairo. The sphinx and Luxor where the past is preserved in sculptures set in a temple in Egypt are characterized by unique symbols, patterns and motifs of these countries.

According to Duerden (1974), “many kings, ancestors and chiefs in Africa kept a collection of objects which symbolized their personality and its attendant

soul. He further stated that after a Basonge Chief had been chosen he was given, a leopard skin; which is a symbol of cunning nature, a lion skin, symbol of strength, and Otter skin, symbol of intelligence, a fox skin; symbol of an agile mind, a hatchet, a bow and arrow; symbol of justice, double bowl with a handle; symbol of the life force". He further opined that a king or chief was credited with second sight which would enable him to perceive matters which embraced the whole community, and consequently this collection of symbols had very special power. At the same time these symbols expressed his particular personality.

This is in conformity with Robbins (1976) who states that "African art is in fact symbolic rather than a representational art". The art of Africa he stresses can best be understood if it is regarded as a language – in sculptural form – which in the absence of written languages in the traditional societies, played much the same roles as did written literature, history or documents. Just as the white wig symbolizes the authority of the "British Judiciary" the cross "Christianity" the moon and the star "Islam" he states that African art, if we learn to perceive it is an insistent creative force, the power to evoke emotion, disciplined stylistic traditions, a remarkable degree of artistic techniques and skills, and a most subtle use of patterns, motifs and abstractions to convey symbolic meaning.

Jenks (1993) in quoting Durkheim tells us that all religions are divided into two realms, sacred and the profane; sacred symbols are condensed, pure, solidaristic and comforting whereas profane symbols are fragmenting, diffuse, dangerous and defiling and, above all threatening to the sacred. The most primitive of religions also operate through objects (totemism). Which involves the projecting outwards of the group spirit onto an object. These natural objects, or totem, then takes on sacred qualities, becoming the source of identity and recognition of the particular group who selected it, it becomes their 'emblem' which they worship and revere.

Robbins (1976) laid credence to this statement when he opined that “one of the most important function of symbolic sculpture was to instruct, evoking wisdom and authority of the ancestors, its symbols speak of a way of life or of the way one should live. For each purpose, a suitable form was created, stylization of conventional female beauty as fertility symbols, bold powerful shapes such as horns of animals to symbolize strength and virility; frightening visages to inspire awe and fear in order to enforce social customs”.

While Duerden (1974) asserts that “in any given culture the artists, even the most restless needs to select from forms which have specific symbolic value in his culture. He develops unities for symbolizing of experience and this he shares with the experience of his culture at large”.

Leuzingers view (1976), in analyzing “Herman Buaman” states that “certain decorative features, such as twisted band and the figure of eight loop, were associated with the sacral kingship. In addition the author identifies in art the tendency to express sensuous feelings, emotions, allegories, adages, mythologies, socio-cultural values and proverbs of artists to their given societies” which is in conformity to the study.

Izevbigic (1998) states that “images which have motifs, patterns and decorations in addition to the ordinary physical appearance, reflections or aesthetics, might still have a deeper connotation and any, with some deeper meaning other than what it represents ordinarily is symbolic. These symbols and their meanings he asserted differ from place to place and in some respect are similar to some cultures”

Gutip (1998) also maintains that “the most specific function of monumental sculptures were celebrating either memorials or as cognizance and symbols for propagating history or certain institutions as well as aesthetic sensations. They are therefore allegorical and iconic he added”.

According to Soyinka (1998) “symbols are part of our lives, they constitute an emotional quotient but they go further - symbols carry messages that departs from mere abstractions and can be used or abused to impinge positively or deleteriously upon society”.

Akolo (1998) in quoting Aniakor states that, “the eagle itself is a rare bird whose white feather is regarded as a symbol of status and prestige and is worn as a plume surmounting the red cap of an Igbo titled leader”.

According to Aig Imoukhuede (1991), “the use of symbols for communicating messages are found in the usage of other ethnic groups. For example the use of ginned cotton surrounding live embers carried in a large basket in Borno meant power to conquer. These ideologies also have the same relevance in the art of Benin and its culture”.

In recognition of the vitality of symbolic objects, NA’ALLAH (1998) states that “old objects of visual arts that are of significance like sculpture in various media in stone, metal, bone, ivory, designs and crafts should be preserved and documented for the purpose of identifying our identity”.

The researcher in response to this call, carried out the study on the “Synthesis of Forms: The Adaptation of Benin Symbolic Objects into Non-Figurative Sculptures”.

2.2 Origin of the Benin

Ogene (1984), Ighodaro (1986) and AKENZUA (1979), all agree that the Benin legends and traditions assert that they were the first organized people to emerge in southern Nigeria. The legends concerning their origin are clothed in mythical stories. One popular legend states that the original founder of Benin was the youngest son of Osanobua, the supreme God. According to another legend, the founders of Benin emigrated from the East possibly Egypt. After wandering

through Central Africa with their kinsmen the Yoruba settled in Ile Ife for many years.

Yet another legend has it that the Bini's came from a common ancestor which were the Ogisos, the Ogiso period is archaic and essentially mythological, this is in conformity with the tracing of the history of the Benin monarchy which dates back to Ogiso era at about the 10th century. According to Uwaifo (1998), no matter their origin the Benin today can be found in Edo State with their very well organized monarchial system, which has remained intact after the internignium period (the period of twenty five years when Benin had no Oba because of the British invation in 1897). According to Gillion (1979) "the Bini inhabit an area which includes the city of Benin and belongs to the Kwa group" while Akenzua (1979) asserts that the Bini was called or known as Igodomigodo several centuries ago".

2.3 SYMBOLIC OBJECTS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

Most of the art objects contain certain motifs which are characteristic of everyday life. Ogene (1984) asserts that, "religiously, the Edo share the philosophy of two plains of existence, the Agbon (earth) and 'erinwin (spirit world)". The earlier consisting of the tangible physical world of humans and animals surrounded by plant life and the later comprising of gods and the spirit world deities and other supernatural powers. The earthly physical realm depends on the HEAVENLY ONE for continuity of existence while the spiritual realm are demi-gods and the messengers of the supreme gods. Some of the high gods include Sango, Olokun and Osun deities. Most of these gods have their symbols and signs.

On the highest realm is Osanobua the most high God who is worshipped. Also in Bini is Olokun according to Izevbigie (1998) the sernior son of Osanobua. Olokun is mostly worshinnied by women as a symbol of fertility associated with

the god. Olokun symbolisms are applied on most Benin art objects. The Benins no doubt possess a lot of symbolic objects but for the purpose of this research, some were used especially those that are non-figurative.

1. EDE : (CROWN)

This is the crown used by the Oba which symbolizes his supreme authority political power or monarchy in Benin.

2. ABUWA (WEALTHY HAND)

This represents the five fingers of the hand and as the name implies is a symbol of wealth and success.

3. ADA AND EBEN (Ceremonial Sword)

These symbolizes investiture or spectre of power and authority of the kind and some chiefs.

4. IVIE – (Beads)

There are different types of beads. There are some called the coral beads which are used to identify both political and sociological (status) symbols. This also symbolizes wealth and abundance.

5. IKPIGHO (Cowrie Shells)

This represents both religious and economic symbols in Benin. Before the advent of the white men (Europeans) it was used as a means of exchange in Benin. In Benin traditionally it is still looked upon as money used in ritual sacrifices to the witches and spirits. It equally symbolizes sacredness when used on buildings as a form of wall decoration on the shrines.

6. OMEN: (Palm Fronds)

This equally can represent religious symbol used to also identify an area (land) in dispute and areas where religious activities take place. could also be used to symbolizes deities or spirits.

7. EBE – EWERE (LEAF OF GOODWILL)

This is used during Igue festival in Benin for incantations and purification. Ewere leaf could also symbolize good luck, progress, development and good will.

8. UWENRIOTAN – (Glyphaea Leteriflora)

This symbolizes sacredness, something that is holy and deities. It is adorned in religious shrines in Benin.

9. ORHUE – (Kaolin – White Clay)

Orhue known as native chalk is a symbol of purity, success and happiness in Benin. This is identified when a Benin decorates him or her self with ORHUE to celebrate birth (new born) or good Omen.

10. EJOEBI (CHARCOAL)

Symbolizes grief and unhappiness.

11. ODODO – (Red Flannel)

This symbolizes power, war, fire and religious power. Ododo could also represent bad and good omen and is used by priests and priestesses in Benin. Olokun worshippers in Benin believe that it could be used for good (progress) and bad (punishment). It is also seen as an emblem of protection against danger and is philosophical in Olokun worship. Also a symbol of victory and success.

12. EBAEHUE: (Parrots Red Feather)

The parrot has red feathers, which stand for the mythical powers of the ododo cloth and is considered to be the wisest and the most intelligent bird. This is usually worn by traditional religious priest or priestesses in Benin and it represents danger or used to identify

a traditional medicine man or priest. It also represents olokun's purity, wisdom and creative power.

13. ERORO AND EGOGO - (Small and Big Gongs)

There are different kinds of gongs in Benin. Egogo (Big gong) and Eroro (small gong) both represent religious connotations. The big gong are seen in shrines and religious alters used by priests to summon the attention of the spirits and deities of the gods before the commencement of their prayers or rituals. The small gong or bell is used in the same way. In addition it represents pregnancy. This is worn around the neck of pregnant women in Benin. The inkling of the bell represents prayers and the warding off of bad spirits from the women.

14. OGUN – (iron)

This represents Ogun diety normally, whether its on a shrine or found anywhere. It's used to word off thieves thereby symbolizing protection.

15. EM OLOKUN (Olokun Drum)

Usually seen as the drum that is used for religious music in the olokun shrine or temple.

16. UGBE DRUMS (Urhonigbe)

This symbolizes a drum that was introduced by the Eda people in the 16th century.

17. EM EDO (Drum)

Used during religious performances in Benin for communal worshipping of deities. This symbolizes the Benin drum.

18. OKO (IVORY OR HORNS)

The significance of this is that, it served as a historical document that were used in identifying past Obas, whose names were inscribed on them to commemorate their ascendancy to the throne and their loyalty to Olokun. Worth knowing is the factor that, all bear varying numbers of decorative motifs and are divided into two planes with a knob at the top. The upper planes are decorated while the lower are smooth and rounded.

19. UKEGU (DRUM)

This is the smallest of the drums. It is used by the Ehen-Ebo for initiation rituals.

20. AGBA (Tall Drum)

Perhaps the most unique of all Bini drums measuring about five feet in height. This is used during Ogun religious rituals, the diety for which it is mainly used. They are always found in the temple of this diety.

21. UKUSE (Maracas)

This is a musical instrument used in ritual dances or songs in Benin. It is made of a calabash and strings of coral shells, systematically tied around the calabash to produce sound effect when clamped against each other.

22. AKH OLOKUN (Olokun Pot)

This symbolizes olokun diety which is found in the personal shrines of individuals who worship olokun when used during initiation rites, it symbolizes Olokun. It could also represent the image of olokun. Olokun pots can be identified by their intricate decoration of the human and animal figures, and cowrie shells.

Three main items are noticeable: Snake, Cowrie shells, and

foodstuffs. The decorative motifs represent a frieze of worshippers, religious activities, wealth and power of olokun. The pot may also signify olokun's kingdom at sea. The images on the pots are a symbolic language understood to all devoted worshippers. The language speaks of life more abundant in wisdom, money, materials, and most of all, it speaks of world of infinite creative and procreative power.

23. EZUZU (FANS)

The Ezuzu is of two varieties. However, the type used at urhowgbe temple is symbolic in that it symbolizes calmness and peace of olokun.

24. EKPOKI – (Container of Olokun Religious Relics)

The ekpoki is of two types. The symbolic one, depicts the sacredness of Olokun altars or shrines because it is placed on the altar or shrine as a warning to non-initiates, not to defile the altar by touching the sacred things therein.

25. EWU – (Shirt or White Robe of Olokun)

This olokun dress symbolizes morality, peace and harmony.

26. IGAN OGHON – (Eagles Feather)

The vulturine fish eagle has white feathers reminiscent of olokun's purity and is thought to be the king of deities. It used to recognize or identify a first class chief in Benin.

Review of Relevant Works

The artists and sculptures featured in this review do not by any means exhaust all the nuances and features of symbolic objects, and do not belong to the same artistic continuum. They are bound by the same flexibility and dynamism of

tradition, which allows the Yoruba talking drum in its verbal repertoire to speak Nigerian languages.

CHINA (17TH CENTURY BC)

Mao Kung Ting (plate I) is an eloquent example of symbolic objects that were used in sacrifices to the gods of heaven and earth, the mountain and rivers, it was equally used by kings to honour the ancestors of dukes, princes and ministers who had made a great contribution to their nation or sovereign, to establish a model of reminder for later generations.

This tripod bronze on display at the national palace museum in Taipei was imperally commissioned. On the tripod interior is an inscription 497 characters in length, divided into 32 lines and two halves, extending from the mouth of the vessel to the bottom interior. The inscription is the imperial mandate for casting of the vessel, written in stately and powerful tone.

EGYPT (C.3100 B.C.)

The prestigious and highly valued object in Egypt is the palette of Narmer in (plate II). The slab or palette as it is called, was originally used as a tablet on which eye make-up was prepared. It is an elaborate, formalized version of a utilitarian object common in predynastic period. Its importance is great, not only as a utilitarian object equally as a historical document that recorded the unification of the two Egypt and the period of the dynastic period.

GHANA (1700-1800 BC)

Symbolic object found its greatest expression and prominence perhaps in Ghana. The double blade of a ceremonial sword as depicted in (plate III) from Akwanmu, Ghana forms an important part of a chief's regalia, and is symbolic of his authority at an installation or enthronement ceremony.

The double sword which has double blade terminates at the same handle at the top with a spiral shaped object which is either a tail of snake as it is scally

depicting its body that is stopped abruptly or is a horn of a powerful animal with surface design. The blades comprise a lizard and a bird motif which looks like a peacock. This sword is pyramidal in shape.

IGBO UKWU (9TH CENTURY)

The Igbo Ukwu bronzes in (plates IV and V) are perhaps a wine bowl or drinking cup, and a bowl which might have been ceremonial objects or armaments for a priest-king, and were cast in lost wax process.

EHOLOR M.A. (1998)

Another good example of non-figurative sculpture using the symbolic object is the Oko (plate VI). The piece resembles the ivory tusk which is splendidly rendered and embellished with surface designs which range from edged lines inter-lapping each other probably depicting scales of a fish and punched dots like that of a leopard motif and beads which ran across the sculpture in spiral movement from the bottom to the top.

GREG A. (1993)

Greg Agbonkonkon's work titled heritage (plate VII), is influenced by his inward looking attitude, drawing strongly on his Benin tradition and suffused with cultural symbolism. In the words of the artist "heritage is a spill over of our cultural and historical past. The egg shape depicts the delicate esteem in which the Edo people hold their traditional heritage. The hole represents the bridge between the ancestral past and the present ensuring cultural continuity and the crown affirms the supremacy of our Royal father over his subjects".

JIMMY YATES (1990)

Prussin (1976) suggests that the "Northern Knot" motif is derived from the Hausa dagi (feline paw) motif. That the interlacing motif of two combined ovals known in Hausa as dagi developed from an Islamic archetype, the "magic square" whatever its origin, the Northern Knot, was traditionally used as a symbol of

royalty among some traditional northern leaders. Today, it is being adopted as a symbol of unity among the northern states.

The northern knot (plate VIII) concrete cast cement sculpture of about 6m high situated in the Ahmadu Bello way in Kaduna combines geometric shapes of V and Z characteristics. These geometric shapes are symmetrically arranged in such a way that they intersect each other at the middle, yet standing in an upright position to hold the northern knot symbol. The geometrical columnar structures, each has a circular hole at the lower part and at the top.

BEN OSAWE (UNKNOWN)

Ben Osawe's forms are controlled and take full advantage of grains, texture and symbols, the throst and spiral of the ada ceremonial sword in motion is suggested in this sculpture piece, titled LIBIDO (plate IX) in which the projecting female parts rear up bold and brazen. The use of ada is symbolic to the Benin tradition.



Plate I:

Title: Mao Kung Ting

Medium: Bronze

Size: Unknown

Year: 17th Century B.C

Country: China

Artist: Unknown



Plate II:

Title: Palette of Narmer

Medium: Slate Slab

Size: 25"

Year: Hierakonpolis. C.3100 B.C.

Country: Egypt

Artist: Unknown

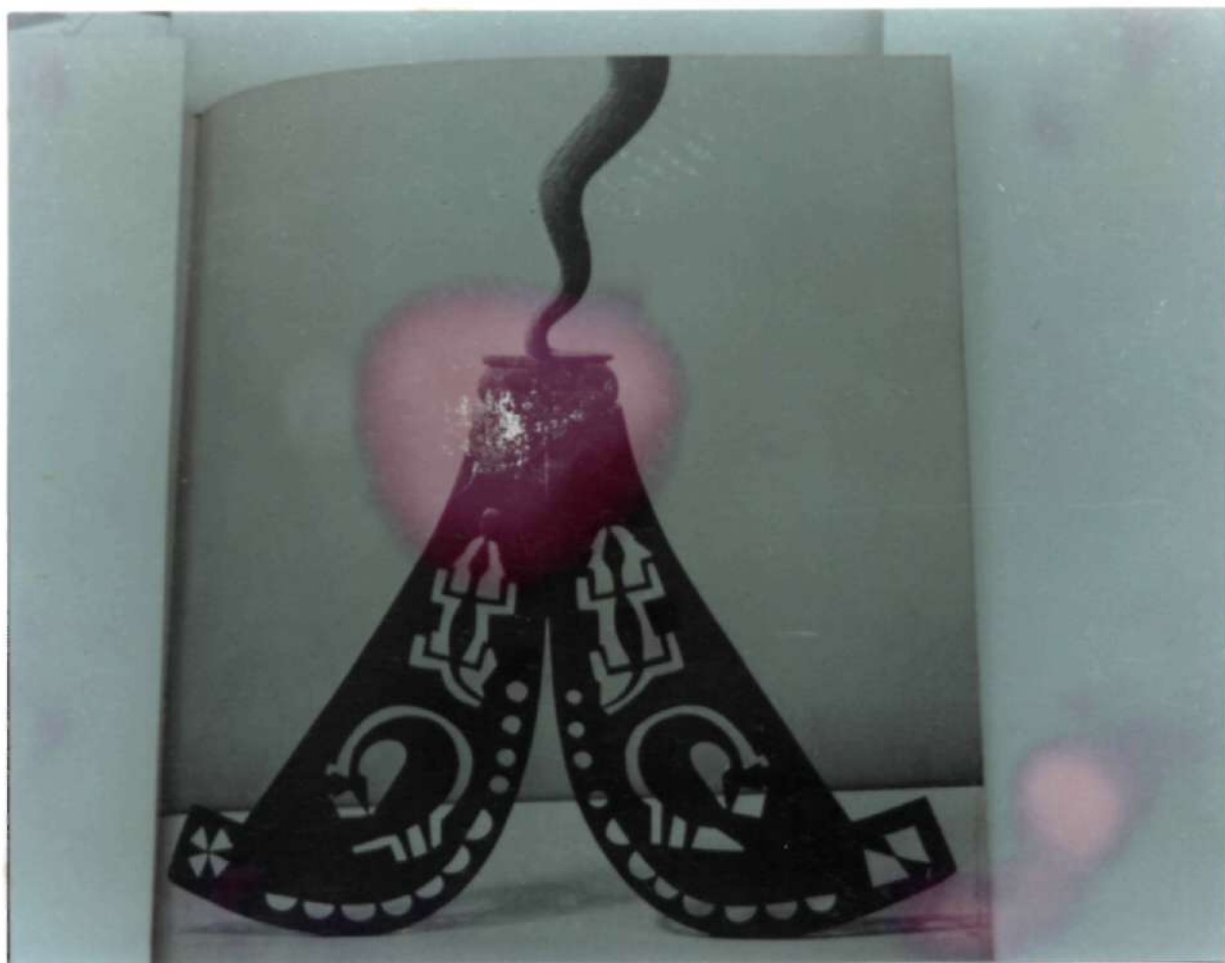


Plate III:

Title: Ceremonial Sword

Medium: Unknown

Size: 18 ½" (width of blade)

Year: About 1700-1800 BC

Country: Ghana

Artist: Unknown



Plate IV:

Title: Wine Bowl

Medium: Bronze

Size: Unknown

Year: 9th Century

Country: Nigeria (Igbo Ukwu)

Artist: Unknown



Plate V:

Title: Bowl

Medium: Bronze

Size: Unknown

Year: 9th Century

Country: Nigeria (Igbo Ukwu)

Artist: Unknown



Plate VI:

Title: Oko

Medium: Bronze

Size: 30 CM

Year: 1998

Country: Nigerian (Benin)

Artist: Prince Eholor M.A.



Plate VII:

Title: Heritage

Medium: Concrete

Size: 10 feet

Year: 1993

Country: Nigerian (Benin)

Artist: Greg Agbonkonkon



Plate VIII

Title: Northern Knot

Medium: Concrete

Size: 12 feet

Year: 1990

Country: Nigeria (Kaduna)

Artist: Jimmy Yates Construction Company

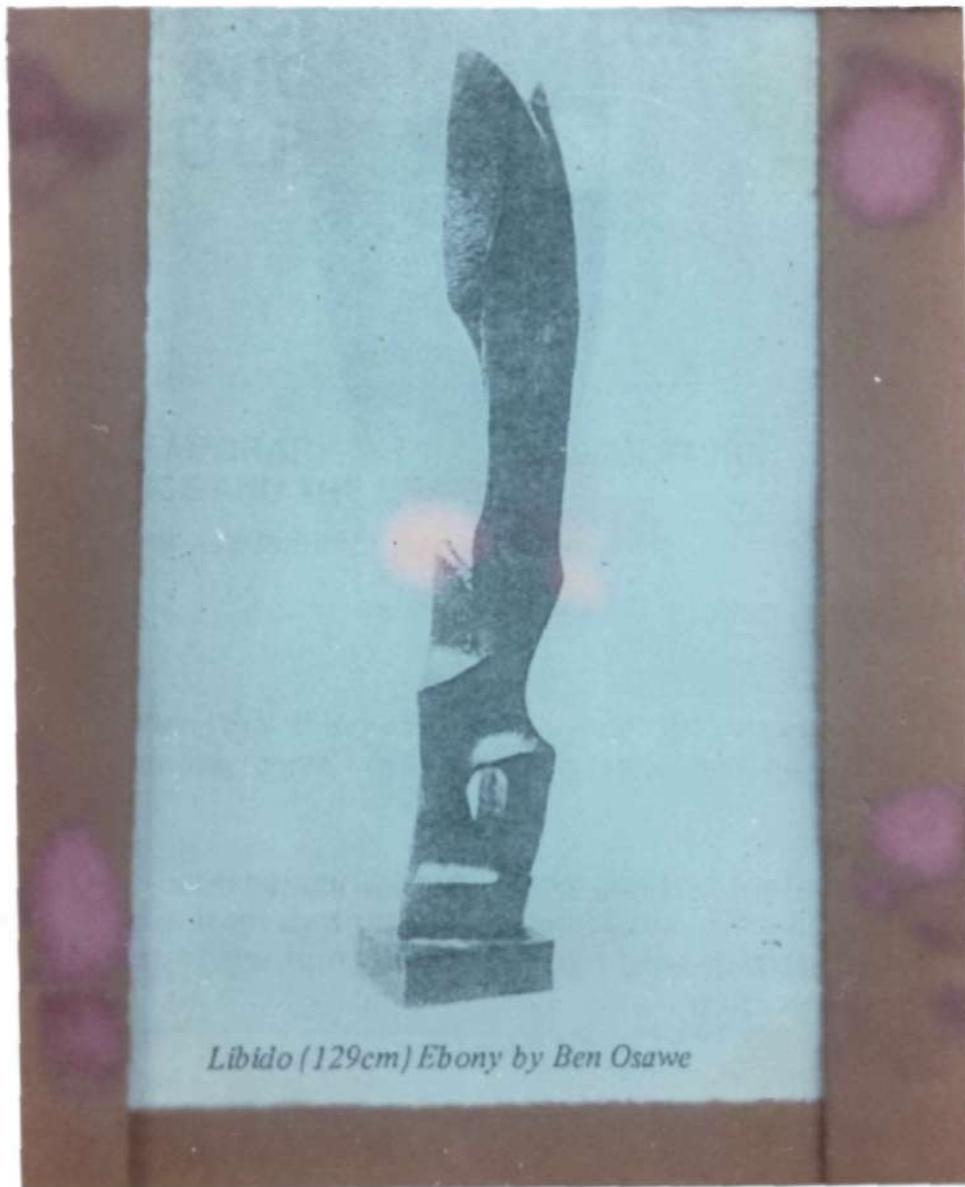


Plate IX:

Title: Libido

Medium: Wood (Ebony)

Size: 129 cm

Year: Unknown

Country: Nigerian

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This research work was inspired by the destruction of the sculpture piece titled “the mangrove gaint”, which was situated in the civic center now renamed Sharks Football Club Stadium in Moscow road Port Harcourt.

The sculpture piece which depicted a gaint in a fierce battle with a crocodile with his bare hands was about fifteen feet in height and was rendered in *representational or naturalistic form*.

Secondly, some people in the North especially Moslems frown at figurative or representational sculptures that has to do with human or animal figures.

The first instance led to the titling of my undergraduate out-door project now in the Departmental Sculpture Garden the “Mangrove Gaint”. This was in a protest against the action taken by the then Ada George led Government in Rivers State in 1993.

While the second instance was a careful thought on how to bring about an art form that will be appreciated by these class of audience. This gave birth to the research topic titled “Synthesis of Forms: The Adaptation of Benin Symbolic Objects in Non-Figurative Sculptures”.

This was an attempt towards the utilization of objects of Benin Origin to achieve sculpture pieces devoid of human or animal figures in representational form.

This research work was based on practical studio work and descriptive method primarily concerned with the design and production of non-figurative sculptures through the use of symbolic objects. The process of producing all sculptural themes was carried out within the studio setting.

A deliberate selection of sculpture materials from existing ones was made to achieve all the concepts. These materials include fibre glass resin, and polyester paste.

The selected compositions were given a skeletal frame work called the armature, assuming the desired pose. The sculptures were produced using clay modeling and casting process. Six of the sculptures were produced in polyester paste while six were executed using fibre glass resin and the works were developed in four stages.

Processes

1. A realistic study of sculpture pieces achieved under this stage was further divided into two. The first stage of sculptures were achieved using a single symbolic object each.
2. While the second stage of works were achieved by the combination of symbolic objects, with the introduction of voids to achieve balance.
3. The object forms were distorted to achieve abstraction.
4. The last works were modeled with minimum resemblance of objects to achieve stylisation.

Data Collection

The study employed two forms of data collection, such as the primary and secondary sources.

Primary Source

Adetoro (1997) states that “the primary source is a direct description of an occurrence by an individual who actually witnessed or observed the occurrence”.

For this study therefore, the primary source of information for data collection was achieved through oral interviews and observation, photographs, drawings and sketches.

Oral Interviews/Observations

Ndagi (1980), Afolabi (1996) and Oguntona (1981) all agree to the fact that oral interview and observation are means used for collecting information in a direct contact when a researcher intends to obtain reliable information in verbal responses from respondents in order to confirm or reject hypothesis or theoretical statements or state of affairs. In confirmation to the above persons were interviewed. This brought to light the choice of symbolic objects and their innate meanings used in the study.

The first person interviewed was the Art History Head of Section Dr. Izevbigie O.A. (JP) in the Fine and Applied Arts Department, University of Benin Ekewan campus. A tape recorder was employed and discussions were recorded on tape.

Sir Victor Uwaifo's interview was oral in nature. Employing the question and answer method and verbal responses recorded on paper. This was conducted in his Art Gallery in Benin City.

The Press/Film Officer of the Benin Traditional Council, Ewekas Court in the Oba's Palace, Benin City, Mr. Donald Odemwingie was also interviewed. This was conducted in his office in the Oba's Palace and was in the form of the previous.

The head of graphic section, in the fine and applied arts department, university of Benin, Ekewan campus, Mr. John Ogene (JP) was of immense help, his project report titled "Benin Bronzes and Ivories. Interpretation of motifs and their significance", which he made available to me after my interview with him was of great help.

My participant observation was carried out by Prince Eholor M.A. a member of Igun guild of artist with his gallery situated at the number (2) Igun

Street, Benin City. The title of the sculpture piece "Oko" was the product of my practical experience.

Finally, Joseph A. of the College of Aviation, Zaria was interviewed, employing the question and answer method, while responses were recorded on paper.

Photographs

Oguntona (1981) in corroborating the view of Collier (1967), states that "photography offers considerable insight into the use of photographs as a means of triggering responses which might not be touched upon by verbal interviewing alone while helps the respondents with marginal language fluency to communicate accurately their feelings about complex circumstances".

In this regard, relevant sculptures were photographed. This has served both as a reference and a guide to the study,

Sketches/Drawings

Varieties of sketches and drawings were executed, illustrating the symbolic objects and their composition into which sculptures were developed.

Secondary Source

The researcher made use of references at Kashim Ibrahim Library, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria and those in the Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Environmental Design, as well as Library in the University of Benin (Ekewan and Ogbowo, campuses) National Museum in Ring Road Benin, and the Obas palace in Benin.

Procedure of Technique

The following procedure were used to achieve the produced sculptures, amateur was constructed, a back stand or external support was provided to bear the weight of the sculpture. This was done in a studio setting devoid of wind, as exposure of wet clay to wind causes the work to dry fast and develop cracks.

After achieving the desired form in clay, a cast was made using cement and plaster of paris to achieve moulds. After proper setting and maturity, the moulds were opened up. Engine oil was used on the surface of the mould before actual application of concrete mixture, this was to give room for easy separation of moulds.

Concrete Application

The concrete application was carried out in three stages:-

The first stage had a smooth layer, a cement ratio was mixed with fine sand (1:1) cement to fine sifted sand. This was applied onto the modeled figure in clay and allowed for about two days to set and harden; the moulds were sprinkled with water from time to time.

In the second stage, a mixture of ratio (1:2:2) was achieved (one cement to two coarse sand to two sharp sand). This was applied over the first layer reinforcements were carried out here using one-quarter inch iron rod for the sculptures. These were buried into the concrete mixture and allowed to set. Water was sprinkled over and over at intervals for hardening.

The third stage, a mixture of ratio (1:2) was made (one cement to two parts of fine sand and coarse sand) and applied over the second layer. This was allowed to set for another two days.

Charging

In the sculptures where fibre glass and polyester paste were used as permanent materials, the same system of modeling in clay and casting were employed.

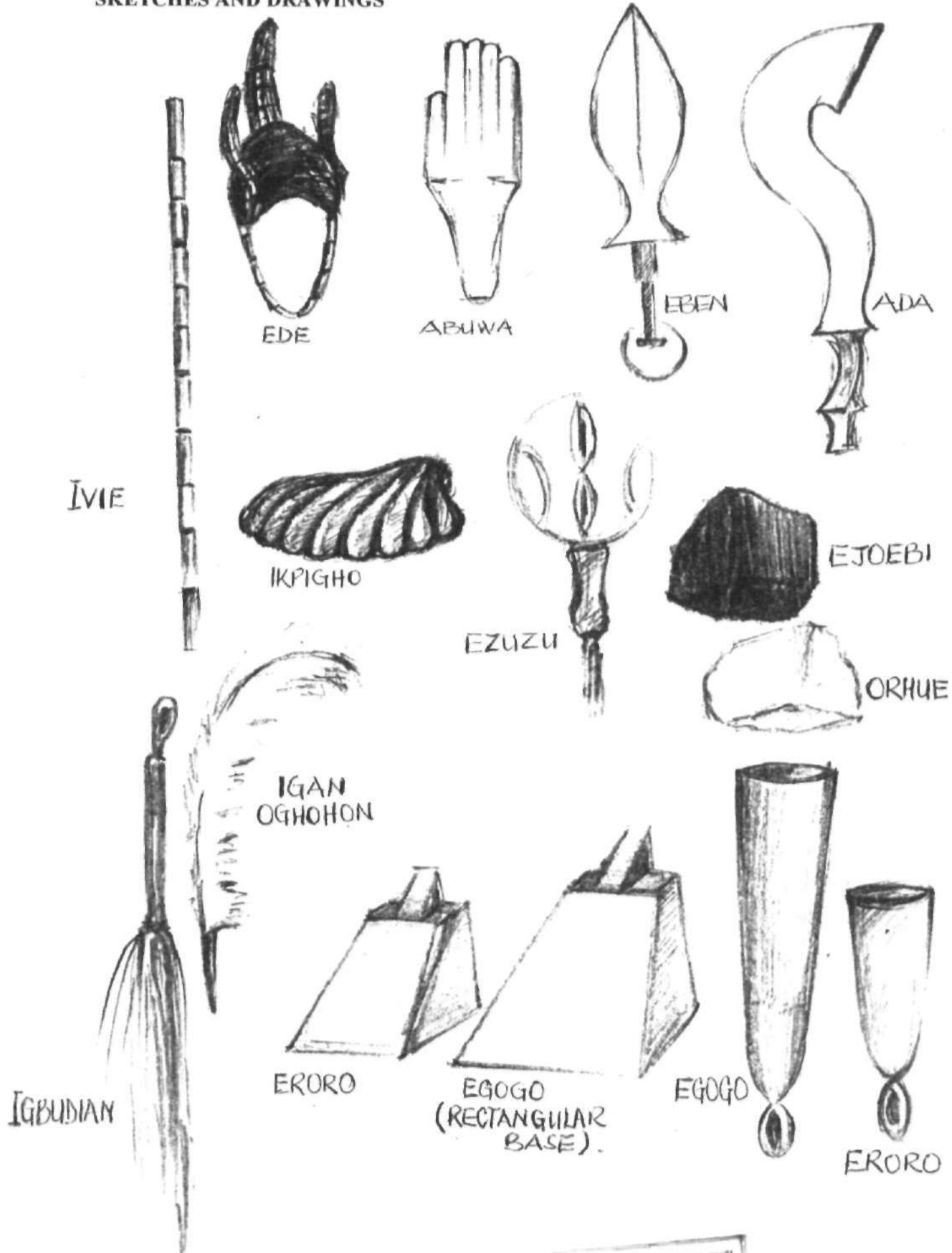
However, after the moulds were taken in the case of fibre glass, resin was mixed with catalyst and accelerator and applied to achieve outer layer. A reinforcement of the fibre mat was dipped in mixture of chemicals (catalyst, accelerator and resin) and applied over the first layer and allowed to set fully.

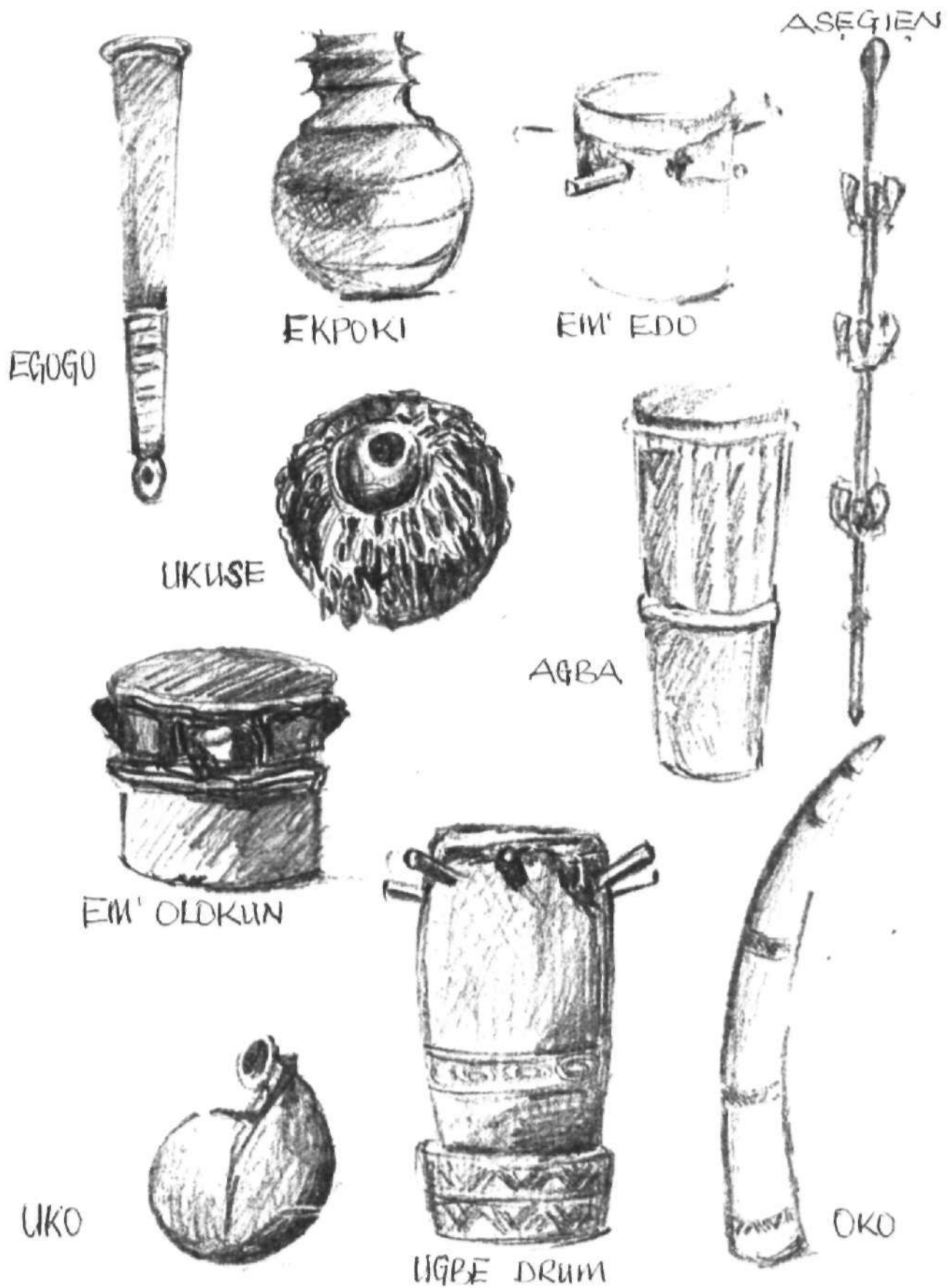
One quarter inch iron rods were used for final reinforcement. While works produced in polyester, pastes were mixed with hardener and used to achieve finished sculpture.

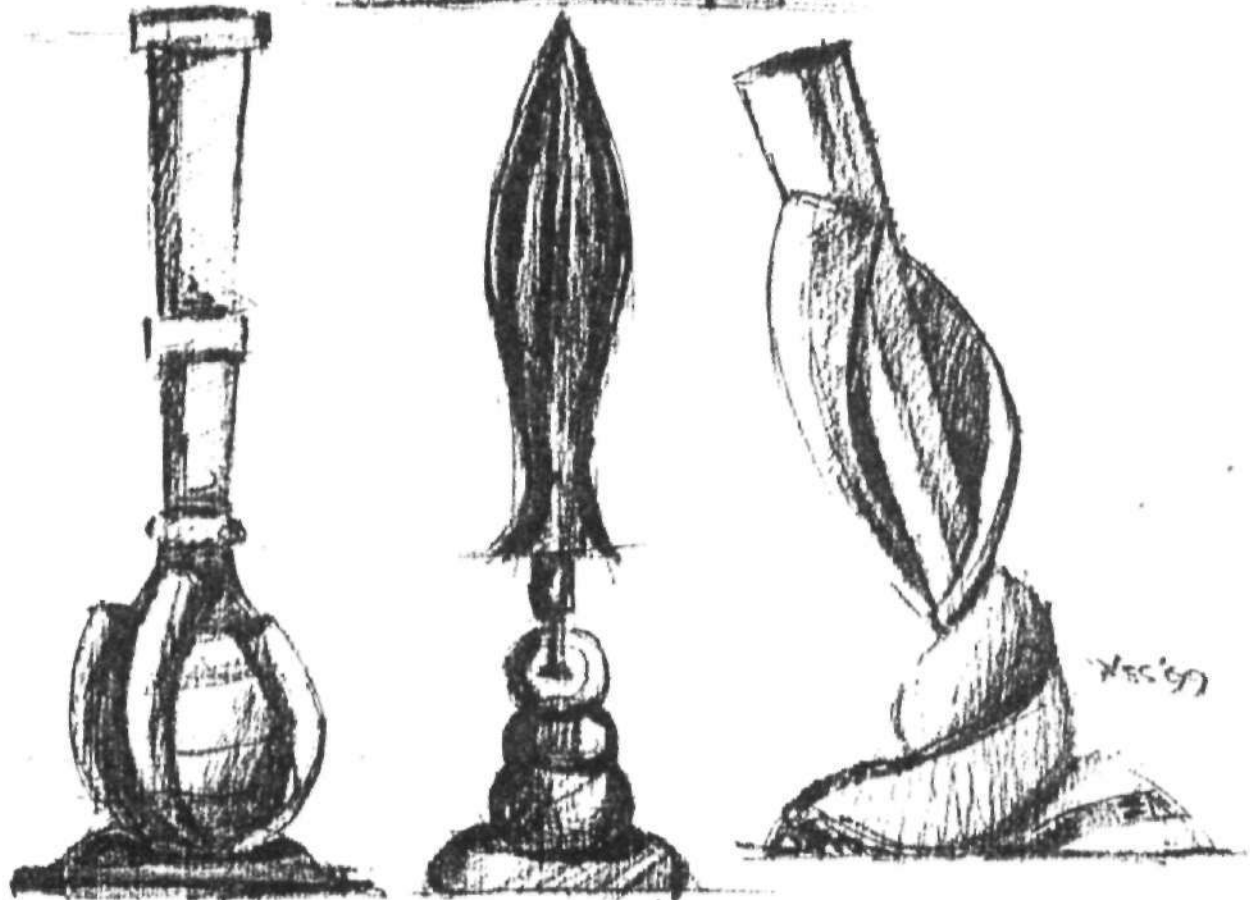
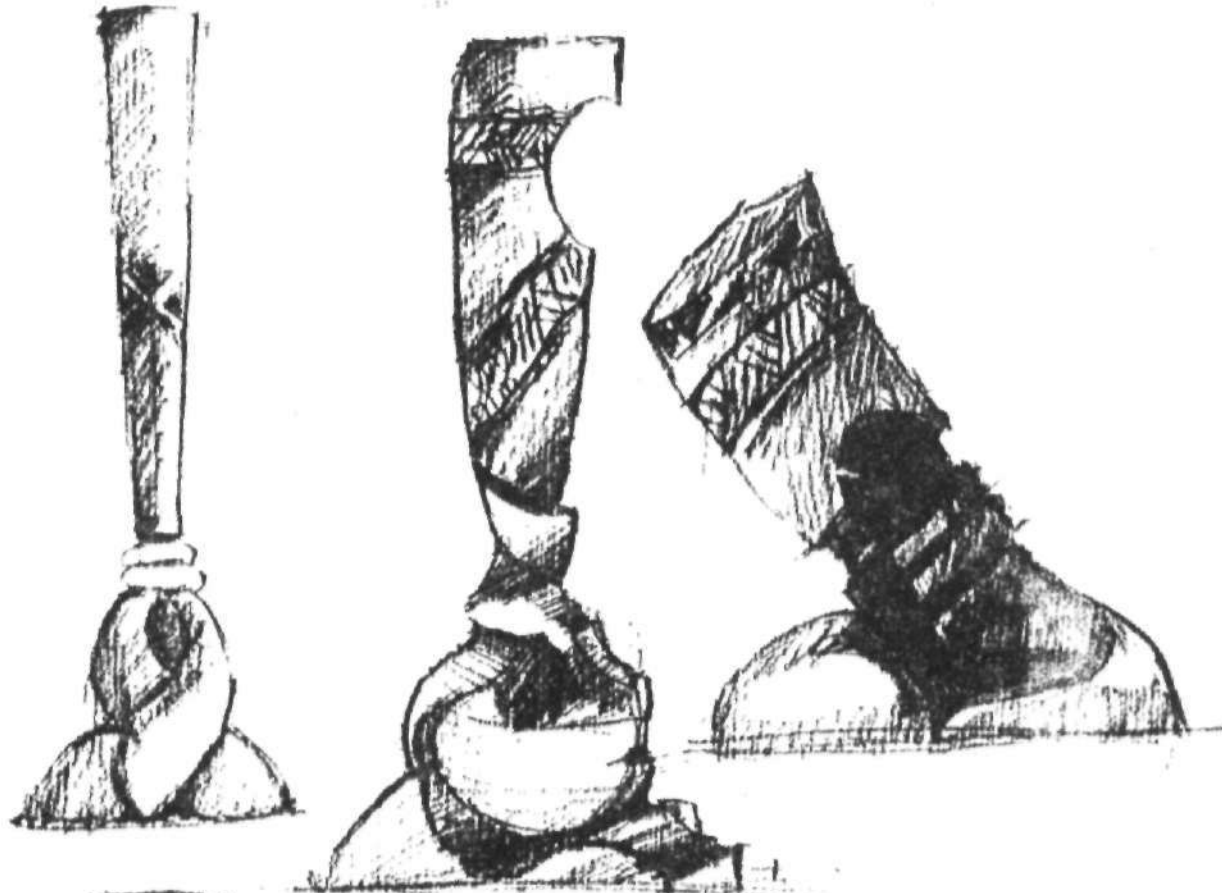
Finishing

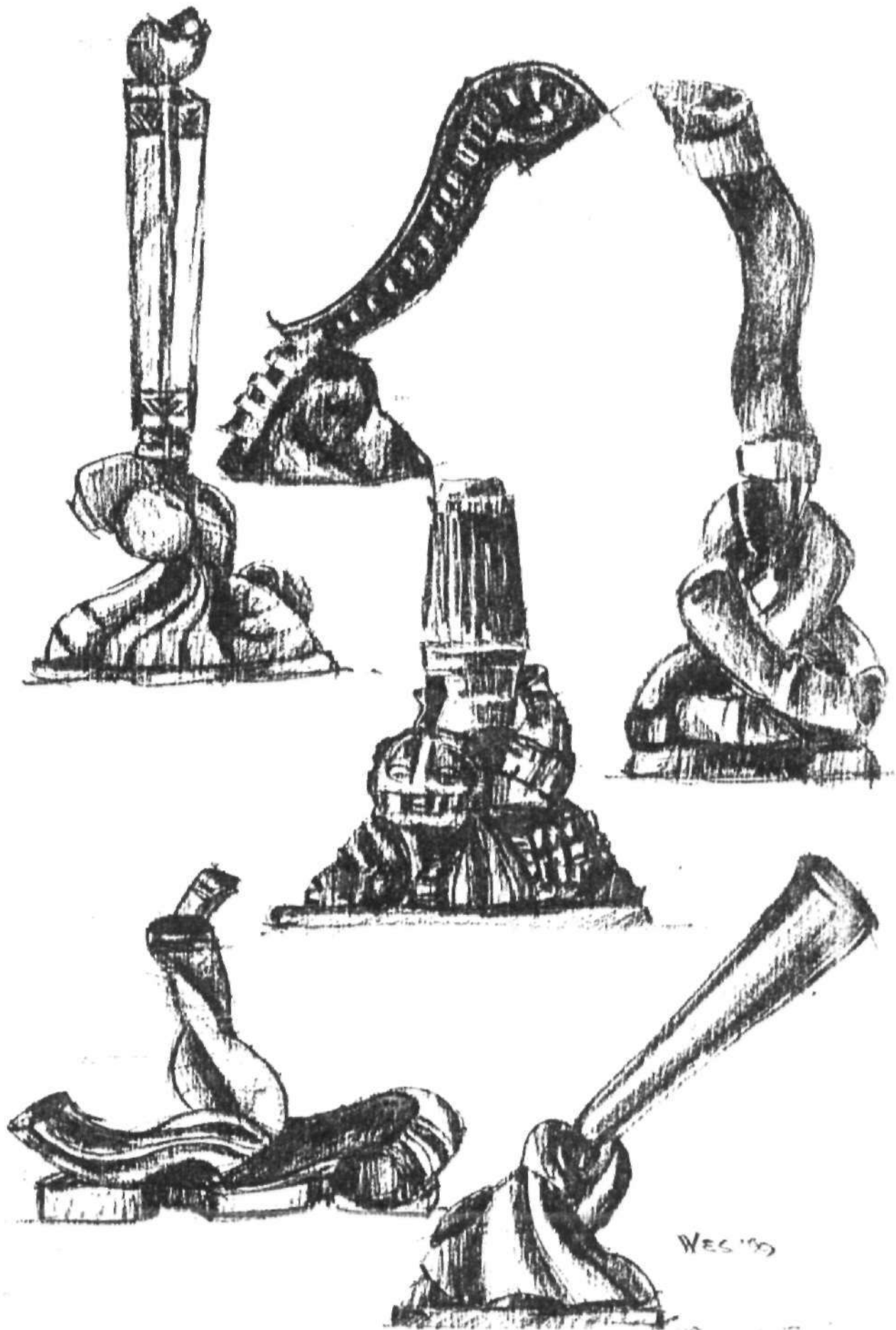
This was achieved through the use of enamel and mat black paints which were diluted with thinner and used as patination to enhance and preserve the surface of the sculptures. The sculptures were then highlighted with the use of bronze dust to achieve shades in some of the works.

SKETCHES AND DRAWINGS









Catalogue of Works

All sculptures executed and exhibited are all represented in this section and referred to as catalogue of works. Specific sculpture materials used in the realization of sculptures using symbolic objects, such as fibre glass and polyester paste are all documented here.

An experiment was carried out on the sculpture of Ete Olokun one (1), with powdered yellow gouache colour which was then mixed with the resin and eventually used to charge the mould, the result being its surface colour without a patina. The results achieved were quite unique and aesthetic in nature. These results reveal that symbolic objects can be used to produce sculptural pieces independently.

(1) Ovu-Ahua (Plate X)

An abstracted piece with the combination of a gong and calabash. The gong above the calabash with void to create a balance.

i) Technique

A piece of one quarter inch iron rod was used to construct the amature after which the modeling was done in clay. A cast was taken in cement concrete to achieve the mould. The finished work was achieved in plastic polyester paste.

ii) Finishing

A dilution of blue and red enamel paint with thinner was used to mask the surface of the sculpture and bronze dust was applied to achieve highlight.

Mgbogizi (Plate XI)

This is a stylized sculpture piece depicting the ivory tusks which was used like an inter-losing spirals and equally was blended with motifs.

i) Technique

Modeled in clay and the cast taken in cement. The finished work was achieved in fibre glass resin.

ii) Finishing

Internignum (Plate XII)

A stylized approach using the gong, ivory tusk and cowry shells in its execution.

Technique

A clay model done over an amature. Moulds were taken in cement cast and charged finally in polyester.

Finishing

A mixture of yellow, blue, red, white and a pinch of black was dropped and stirred in the mixture and applied over the surface.

Ele-Ada (Plate XIII)

An abstracted piece rendered with the use of a drum and sea shells.

i) Technique

A clay model was done and moulds were taken in concrete cast the final work was charged in polyester.

ii) Finishing

Mat black colour diluted with thinner was applied to achieve the surface patina.

Ele-Oha (Plate XIV)

A stylized piece derived from ivory tusk decorated with motifs to achieve the surface design.

i) Technique

A clay model was done and moulds were taken in cement concrete. The final work is in fibre glass resin.

ii) Finishing

Mat black was diluted with thinner and applied over the surface.



Plate X:

Title: Ovu-Ahua

Medium: Plastic (Polyester Paste)

Size: 49cm



Plate: XI

Title: Mgbogizi

Medium: Plastic (Fibre glass resin)

Size: 45.5cm



Plate XII

Title: Interniginum

Medium: Plastic (Polyester Paste)

Size: 79cm

4745



Plate: XII

Title: Ele-Ada

Medium: Plastic (Polyester Paste)

Size: 22cm

Year: 1998



Plate: XIV

Title: Ele-Oha

Medium: Plastic (Fibre Glass Resin)

Size: 50.5 cm

Year: 1998

Nkpara-Ye-Eze

This is a realistic sculpture piece using the Eben

i) **Technique**

Cast taken in cement and charged in fibre glass resin with reinforced fibre mat and one quarter iron rod.

ii) **Finishing**

A solution of thinner, red and blue enamel paint was made, a pinch of gold dust was applied directly on the piece and high lights were achieved.

Achi

This is an elongated piece with the use of the gong, beads and sea shells.

The surface of work was equally embellished with design patterns.

i) **Technique**

A model was achieved in clay. A cast was taken in cement. The final piece was achieved in polyester which was reinforced with fibre mat.

ii) **Finishing**

A mixture of red and blue diluted with thinner was applied to the surface and gold dust used to achieve high lights.

Nma-Ye-Dingba

This is a realistic work using the Ada (ceremonial sword) which is equally embellished with designs)

i) **Technique**

The piece was achieved through modeling with the use of clay. A cast was taken in cement and the mould was charged with the use of fibre glass resin which was reinforced with the fibre mat.

ii) **Finishing**

This was achieved with the mixture of yellow, blue, white enamel paints which formed the initial patina, mat black colour was superimposed

Ete Olokun I

A realistic piece which was achieved with the use of rattle gong, Olokun pot and ivory tusk.

i) Technique

An amature was constructed with the use of one quarter inch rod. The modeling was executed in clay. A cast was taken in cement concrete to achieve the mould. The finished work was charged with the use of fibre glass resin.

ii) Finishing

Being the only experimental piece, the surface patina was achieved by the mixture of yellow powdered gouache colour with resin before charging, which was retained and served as its patina.

Ngbaka

A realistic piece achieved with the combination of calabash, gong, beads and sea shells. Motifs were applied to enhance the surface design.

i) Technique

An amature was made and clay model executed. Moulds were taken in cement and charged with polyester.

ii) Finishing

This was achieved with the dilution of mat black with thinner.





Plate: XVI

Title: Achi



Plate: XVII

Title: Nma-Ye-Dingba

Medium: Plastic (Fibre glass resin)

Size: 57cm



Plate: XVIII

Title: Ete Olokun I



Plate: XIX

Title: Ngbaka

Medium: Plastic (Polyester Paste)

Size: 55.5cm

Ogburukwe

This is a realistic piece combining quite a range of objects like the drum, maracas, ivory tusks, beads and sea shells. This depicts festivity.

i) **Technique**

A clay model was achieved without the use of amature and moulds were taken in cement which were charged with polyester.

ii) **Finishing**

The mixture of yellow, blue, white, red and a pinch of mat black diluted with thinner was used to achieve surface coating.

Ogele

A stylized piece with the use of gong.

i) **Technique**

An mature was built, a clay model made and mould taken with cement which was finally charged with fibre glass resin.

ii) **Finishing**

This was achieved with the diluting of mat black with thinner.



Plate: XX

Title: Ogburukwe

Medium: Plastic (Polyester Paste)

Size: 50cm

Year: 1998



Plate: XXI

Title: Ogele

Medium: Plastic (Fibre glass resin)

Size: 41cm

Year: 1998

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 **Summary**

The main objective of this project was to determine suitable concepts, design and execute sculptures with the use of symbolic objects.

The preliminary collation of relevant literature and works done was carried out, the sources duly acknowledged. Twelve sculptures were designed and executed using sculpture materials at the disposal of this researcher, these include, polyester paste and fibre glass resin. These were achieved through imagination, photographs, sketches and performance observation.

Findings

It was discovered that symbolic objects can be used to communicate ideas, teach useful lessons and document a people's history. This is true not only of Benin art but also of other traditional African forms.

The salient points of adapting Benin symbolic objects to contemporary sculpture are that in the above respect they have played these roles.

It was observed during the studio experiments that cement and plaster of paris can be mixed directly to the resin to achieve a paste and patination.

4.2 **Recommendations**

Thus it is the recommendation of this researcher that:

- a) Artists should give more thought at the design stage, in the creation of sculpture with the use of symbolic objects.
- b) Although this project inclines more towards the representational (realism), stylized and abstracted forms other interested researchers in this area, can explore further in relief, geometric forms and other medium like direct metal welding in the realization of sculpture.

- c) *Teachers, practicing sculptors and students should embark more on the execution of sculptures in this area for city squares, gardens and parks. This is advisable because values, morals and historical events could be achieved and imbibed through these efforts.*
- d) *National Gallery of modern arts should collect, preserve, and display symbolic sculptures and objects of different ethnic groups and cultures in Nigeria to the public.*
- e) *Symbolic objects of Nigerian origin and their significance should be taught in our secondary schools and institutions of higher learning.*

4.3 **Conclusion**

In conclusion, these recommendations, findings and observations have been made based on the experiences encountered during the period of research and studio experiments.

The use of objects that are of symbolic importance to different traditions in the country should be encouraged in our higher institutions of learning. There is need therefore to encourage sculptors in this regard.

It was discovered at the end of this project that the use of symbolic objects as a means of expression would seem not to have no limitations in sculpture.

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Member, Igun Guild of Artist, No. 2 Igun Street, Benin City.
2. Odemwingie D. (15th May, 1998)
The Press/Film Officer Oba's Palace, Benin City.
3. Ogene J. (4th March, 1998)
The head of Section, Graphics, University of Benin, Ekewan Campus.
4. Izevbigie O.A. (6th March, 1998)
Head of Section, Art History, University of Benin, Ekewan Campus.
5. Joseph A. (7th August, 1998)
College of Civil Aviation, Zaria.
6. Uwaifo V. (12th March, 1998)
Benin City.