POLYCHROME RELIEF PANELS IN WOOD

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DEDICATION

This research project is dedicated to my father Mr. J.D. Oyovotu Soko whose painstaking sacrifices has made me what I am today.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to experiment with polychrome relief panels in wood. A total of fifteen projects (Plates I-XV) were executed using plywood as a support. The materials used were sensitively chosen; they were varied and diverse, ranging from gum-arabic ronseal, colours (both oil and local colours), broken mirrors, glasses, chains among other things.

The objective in this project was to explore textural qualities that is characteristic of reliefs. As a sculptor, part of the objective in this study was also to explore the aesthetic qualities of relief sculpture.

Among the findings of this study was the ability to "marry" colours to sculpture which was a major feature of African tradition sculpture in the past. Furthermore the study offered the opportunity of bringing together objects of diverse form and nature to achieve exciting harmony in the process of these creations.

Finally the study has proved that the area of sculpture can be explored to almost any length.

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Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

Looking at African Art generally and sculpture specifically, it would appear that there has been a series of drastic changes in terms of function, design, execution and theme. These drastic changes have been brought about by changes in the African's religions, economic and socio-cultural set-up. The religious and secular demands for traditional sculpture appear to have been reduced to the point of being almost extinct.

Today, these traditional demands have been surplanted by foreign religious orders, namely Islam and Christianity. In the case of Islam, sculpture appears to be entirely disallowed while in the case of Christianity, all the vitality and character that had won African sculpture a pride of place internationally appear to have been destroyed.

Also, new socio-economic pressures have seen mass movements from our villages, which could be regarded as the abode of our tradition and culture, to the new urban centres. This drain, in no small way, among other things, seems to have resulted in the weakening of the village culture. Thus, for example, the village cults that formerly needed masks for their numerous masquarades are fast becoming extinct.

Beset by this lack of patronage by his new society, the traditional sculptor has tended to turn round to produce for a new kind of patrons and ubiquitous tourists whose demand is a mere souvenir.

Lucrative as the souvenir trade (generally referred to as "airport Art") may be, by and large, it tends to take the soul out of traditional African sculpture. Perhaps much more would be acheived artistically, if the African artist lends an ear to the advice of Trowell (1970) who submits "It is to a great extent through appreciative study of the past that the modern artist may hope to develop in his turn the artistic guinius of his race".

1.2 Problem of the Study.

This research aims at producing sculptures that would draw character from African traditional sculpture, as it fits into the present day religious, cultural and socio-economic set up of the African. Since the ideals of the past have been replaced by those of the present day, the functions or roles of sculptures produced in the past cannot easily fit into present day circumstances. For instance, the shrines cults and huts of the past have been replaced by churches, gallaries, airports and hotels just to mention a few and above all modern African homes.

The sculptures which would be produced in the process will be in the form of relief panels which could easily be suspended. This is due to the fact that horizontal space in the average home or working place tends to be very limited. By the time furniture and fittings have been put up there tends to be little or no space to consider the display of sculpture in the round.

At this point it would be necessary to state that the panels to be produced shall be movable due to the tendency of the average urban dweller and worker to move. This again has made it imperative in this project to take into consideration the nature of the material to be used.

Due to its light weight and nature, plywood is selected as the main medium to be used in executing all the panels for this project. This is in realization of the fact that African artists of the past and even those of the present have excelled in the area of wood sculpture.

In addition, only motifs and themes that are conspicuously recognisable as African will be employed for decoration and subject matter respectively. Also, the element of colour which was one of the outstanding values of African sculpture, especially in the execution of masks and statuettes which appear to be fading would be introduced.

1.3 Specific Aims of the Project.

The specific aims of this project are

1. To design and execute sculpted relief panels in wood.
2. To finish the relief panels thus produced using one or a combination of the following techniques:-
   a. Collage
   b. Direct painting of panels after completion.
   c. Direct painting of sculpture materials before using it to build up the panel.
3. To use traditional African life and beliefs as the subject matter for sculpting the panels.
4. To use local raw materials and/or industrial products in the finishing of the panels.

1.4 Definition of Terms Used.

For the purpose of clarity and to avoid ambiguity certain words and expressions are exclusively defined as used for the purpose of this project.

Relief: This is a synthesis of two and three dimensional art forms. There are high and low reliefs. But in this project, high reliefs which are almost detached from the background a will be excluded.

Panel: A panel is a sawn timber or plywood of flattish nature upon which forms are sculpted using reduction techniques like carving or burning and/or building up techniques like modelling, applique or assemblage.

Collage: "a picture built up wholly or partly from pieces of paper or other material stuck on the canvas or other ground". But for the purpose of this research, materials like paper and canvas are going to be excluded. As work progresses, materials deemed suitable would be used.

Local Materials: This refers to materials found within the country and occuring naturally as against materials that have been processed industrially. Operationally, these include local dyes or colours and glazes or finishes like gum-arabic.

Industrial Products: These are materials processed in an industry within Nigeria or those imported. These include woodfinish, enamel paints, wood polishes, synthetic auto-body fillers, terrazzo chips and the like.

Traditional African Life and Beliefs: Refers to practices and beliefs that are native to Africa. These include themes like Abiku, Eyo masquarade, Royalty, Warriors, Shango (god of thunder) etc.

1.5 Delimitation of Study.

It would be necessary to state that this submission is not a thesis hence there will be no reference to an hypothesis or tests thereof. Methods of data collecting, ordering and analysis must therefore not be expected in this write up.

This research is also not experimental in the scientific sense. No attempt will therefore be made to test results or set up control groups. This project is submitted only as a report based on the practical research.

1.6 Justification of Study.

It is felt that this approach to relief sculpture executed in plywood would in no small way add to the scope of sculpture in general.

It would also spur other artists to re-examine their traditional forms and techniques which seem almost lost today. This would in no small way help in preserving the traditional artistic skills of the past.

Furthermore, it would make a worthy artistic collection by galleries or individuals. Also, issues touched upon in this research project would stimulate art historians to study and document more closely the contribution of African sculpture to the trends of world art and culture.

Finally, it would, for example, spur African artists to use resources like local colours and finishes which are in abundant supply.

1.7 Review of Similar Works and Related Literature.

> Relief sculpture surrounds us in museums and galleries, on public monuments, on the fabric of churches and other buildings, and close-to-hand on the coins we carry about. All great civilizations assyrian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Mayan and Indian have practiced it, though each has differed in it's approach to questions of space and form, representation, composition and the use of light an shade. Rogers (1974).

Examples are the "Decent of the Ganges" which is a rock relief from Mamallapuran in India and the "Virgin and Child" by Desiderio de Settingnamo which is in the Philadephia Museum of Art. In Nigeria at the National Theatre in Lagos one also sees the relief which adorns the entrance, which was executed by Erhabor Emokpae.

Furthermore, it seems that images and decorations in relief have been created at one time or the other almost every kind of artefact which affords an opportunity for doing so - on jewellery, furniture, musical instruments, ceramic and metal vessels, boxes and caskets of all kinds, coins and medallions, cutlery, weapons, mirrors, fountains, garden ornaments and a host of other things.

Relief which is a synthesis of two and three-dimensional art-forms is one of the three fundamentally different kinds of artworks which are concerned with relating an image or decoration to a surface or ground. The other two being pictures and intaglios. Various materials also have been used in the execution of reliefs, these include concrete, glass, plastic, fibre-glass, metal, clay, stone, rock and wood.

> There are several names to the varying depth of projection, ranging from alto-relievo, or high relief-which is almost detached from the ground-through mezzo-relievo to bas relief (basso relievo) and further still relievo stiaciato (or schiacciato) which is scarcely more than scratched. Cavo-relievo is the same as intaglio, that is, relief in inverse, sunk into the surface instead of embossed upon it. (Murray & Murray 1976.)

Records have it that sculpture was also practised by the earlyman. These were done in the form of engravings. An example of this is the rock carving of the Elephant, Dromedary and Buffalo in the Gonoa valley Tibesti, Republic of Chad. This was done before the Sahara became a desert. Even during the times of the earlyman, colour as an aesthetic element was used on reliefs. Examples of these include the engravings of images of the "Graceful Ibex" which is outlined with red beneath the glistening sheet of stalagnite in the cave of Cognac and that of a

salmon or trout engraved on the roof of a small cave known as "La Grote du Poisson" Brentjes (1970).

As Rogers (1974) observed, colour has ever since been used in the execution of relief sculpture - "among the various methods of treating the forms of relief we may identify three fundamentally distinct approaches. They may be called the painterly or colouristic, plastic or scu;ptural and the linear or graphic approaches". From the above statement one may conclude as Aubert (1964) said that "Colour was an intergral part of sculpture and its setting".

Various reasons have been given for the use of colour in relief sculpture. According to Rogers this is largely because "the materials used by many sculptors today - sheet iron and fibre glass for example have no worthwhile colour characteristics of their own". Furthermore, Rogers commenting on the effect of colour on relief adds:-

> The first point to notice is that a figure which is painted in one colour will show up clearly as a shape against a ground which is painted in a contrasting colour. The colour will thus gain strength through being a boundary of a coloured area as well as a boundary of the form. The second point to bear in kind is that different areas of the figures themselves may be distinguished by their colours.

Moreover, it seems that colour has an emotional impact on the viewer, it tends to arouse specific feelings in each individual.

An example of a relief with colour is that of the "Head of a young woman" by Andrea Della Robbia which is a glazed terracotta made in 1470, and is presently in the Museo Nationale, Florence, Florence Mansell Collection.

Brentjes (1969) noted that African sculpture as examplified by Egyptian art include numerous stone reliefs. The most outstanding ones, could be found on the bank of the Nile in the two cave temples of Abul Simbel. They were discovered by a Swiss traveller J.L. Burckhardt in 1812. Most of these reliefs were polychrome.

Perhaps one of the best examples of painted reliefs in Africa could be cited in Ethiopia. Here, brilliant colours have been used on architectural churches which adorned the monolithic churches.

In sub-Saharan Africa, around Northern Nigeria there are a lot of coloured reliefs in the architecture of the area. Examples include the moral on the wall of the General Post Office in Zaria and also on the walls of the palaces of the Emirs of Kano and Zaria.

Also, in Southern Nigeria, a lot has been done in the area of sculpture and colour generally. Masks, statuettes

and reliefs were produced by different tribes like the Ibo, Ibibio, Ekoi, Bini and Yoruba. Colour has played a very major role in the execution of masks which is perhaps the most outstanding form of sculpture in the area. Extraneous materials like tooth, horns, hair, shells, vegetable fibres, hand mirrors, glass beads, berries, pieces of metal and stripes of cloth were used in addition to colour according to Monti, (1969). "To intensity in a truly dramatic manner the expression and deep feeling of magic and awe which is usually intrinsic in the object". Some of the examples include the wooden helmet-shaped Epa mask (Fig. I) which is presently in the National Museum in Kaduna. It is worn by youths who perform acrobatic feats of strenght and skill during the annual Epa festival. The Ikenga figure (Fig. II) for the cult of the hand, (this depicts the sense of man's power to cope with practical difficulties) which probably comes from Onitsha division of Anambra State in Nigeria. Another is the Ibo figure (Fig. III) whose origin is South Eastern Nigeria. All of which are presently in the National Museum in Kaduna, Nigeria. Looking at each of these pieces closely one finds how the individual artists have used colour and other materials in enhancing their aesthetic outlook. It may seem appropriate at this point to say that the element



Fig. 1 Epa Headmask.
National Museum, Kaduna, Nigeria.



Fig. 2 Ikenga Figure.
National Museum, Kaduna, Nigeria.



Fig. 3 Ibo Figure.
National Museum, Kaduna, Nigeria.

colour contributes in no small way in projecting form in sculpture generally.

African artists of the past used colour extensively in the execution of relief and so do some contemporary artists. An outstanding artist noted for this is Bruce Onabrakpeya.

He uses lino sheets for his reliefs and his type of relief falls into the intaglio or engraving range, these being reliefs that are sunk into the surface instead of embossed upon it. This could also be termed the substractive approach. Again, he does not limit himself to the subtractive approach alone; he also uses the additive approach which entails the building up of the relief. This he does mainly by using a strong adhesive material which has the trade name "Araldite", he even uses strings occassionally.

One outstanding advantage of this artist's approach is that it allows him the opportunity to mass-produce a single relief. This he does by placing soft metal foil over the original relief and pressing it into the entire grooves. After getting the entire impressions the foil sheet is removed and turned upside down, having done that the adhesive in poured into the entire grooves and left to set or harden.

After getting the relief, colour is then applied. This is done by applying a dark colour first on the entire surface. This would enable the colour to get into all the grooves and is wiped off before it dries up. This then leaves the sunken parts dark and projecting parts highlighted. From this point the artist then applies colours as found necessary which in turn enables the artist to produce the same relief in various colours. One of his outstanding works is the "Threshold of Resurrection" which is presently in the Art Gallery of the National Theatre in Lagos, Nigeria.

In this research, the student would explore and use a completely different media. The main medium for the panels will be wood and plywood. For colour application, both local and synthetic colours and finishes would be used. This is quite unlike the colours used by the artist mentioned previously who used synthetic colours mainly. Furthermore this study would not be limited to the use of colour alone, materials like glass, metal, shells for example would also be used. Panels to be produced will be original since they cannot be mass-produced or duplicated.

The researcher is of the opinion that African relief sculpture with colour is an area that has not been fully exploited. As such, while exploring this area, the researcher would also bear in mind that works to be produced are functional in a modern setting. As such, at the end of this report, suggestions would be made on how the panels could be functionally used in a modern setting.

1.8 Methodology.

The media used in the studio research was treated in two broad groups. These are materials for the panels and those for the finishing of the panels.

Finishing Materials: These fall into three groups - the first were the colours to be used. These include paint (water and oil) pastels, coloured inks, coloured powders or dust and coloured polishes. The others were local colours, which were those that could be obtained from local sources e.t. charcoal, white clay etc.

The second group include extraneous materials like cowries, shells, metal, fabric, mirrors etc which would be applied through the assemblage or collage approach. The last group included polishes and finishes, both synthetic and local, which would be used for glazing or polishing the finished works and also for protective purposes. These are generally colourless.

Techniques: Since this project dealt with sculpture and colour, various techniques in sculpture and painting were used.

Sculpting Techniques: Here the two major techniqies in sculpture were applied these were the reduction and additive techniques. The techniques entailed burning and

carving while the additive techniques involved modelling, assemblage and lamination in the case of plywood, in order to increase the projected surface of the sheet when and where necessary. As the project advanced other means and materials were used, these shall be discussed later on.

Painting Techniques: This is basically the two-dimensional representation of any given form in colour. In this project colour is applied through the following approaches:-

i. Collage: Materials like cowries, shells, glass etc were stock to the surface of the relief panel, at the same time care was taken in the choice of such materials so as to use only those that blended harmoniously with the furface of the panel.

ii. Colouring of sculpture material before it was used to build up panel.

iii. Direct painting of the panels after the building up process has been completed i.e. using flat and toned colours. Flat colours here referred to those that are applied without being mixed with other colours, e.g. black when mixed with white becomes grey, which is a tone of black.

Chapter 2.

2.0 CATALOGUE OF WORKS

As mentioned earlier, this chapter contains the project report which deals directly with the presentation of the works. The approach adopted is to show a photograph followed by a general discription of the motif and the process of production. Essentially, the artistic ideas (motifs) are drawn from Nigerian (African) life and culture.

In all, fifteen assorted projects were executed (Plates I - XV). A general description of the motif and process of production is presented below.

2.1 Plate I Melody Maker

The figure (Plate I) in this panel is that of a man playing the local string guitar. The figure which is elongated is cladded in traditional Hausa attire.

After making the sketch on the plywood surface, both the addition and substractive approaches in sculpture were applied. A cutting knife, a chesel and mallet were used in carving out lines and other depressed areas. In the case of the holes, they were manually drilled.

To achieve the embroidery on the 'dashiki', the additive method/technique was applied. Chips of plywood were glued onto the area before glue was applied over the chips and left to partially dry. A traditional symbolic motif was then carved out using a cutting knife.

Finishing:- A mixture of charcoal powder and gum arabic was applied to carved out areas and over the embroidered areas. The embroidered area was left to dry partially before a metal spatula was used in scraping the colour. This left the depressed areas darkened while the projected areas in the colour of Ivory.

The dark liquid obtained or extracted from the bitterleaf plant was then applied over the entire surface of the panel except the embroidered area. Then a mixture



Plate I Melody Maker
120cm x 60cm, Wood & Colour.



Plate II Mondage
60cm x 120cm Wood & Colour.

2.3 Plate III Abiku.

This relief is based on the African myth which says that certain people are born to die prematurely, this is common in parts of Western and Eastern Nigeria. The Yoruba call it "ABIKU" while the Ibo call it "OGBANJE".

The upper part of the relief (Plate III) shows the stylised profiles of two women, the one on the right is pregnant and, wiping tears from her eyes while the other on the left has her hand holding her head expressing agony and sorrow. Both gestures shows how the Abiku makes a woman a mother at one time and motherless the next moment.

Directly below these two profiles is the Abiku represented as a child sitting cross legged and holding a calabash out of which beads pour into a hollow pit. The string of beads with the locked padlock attachment symbolises the unbreakable link between the child (Abiku) and the non-living world. Three planks measuring 6ft by 9ins by 3 ins were glued lengthwise, clamped with a vice and left to dry. This was done to create a wider surface area.

The sketch was then made on the surface after which the carving was started. The carving was done with various chisels and an adze. In the case of the opening at the lower part of the relief, it was first carved out with an



Plate III Abiku
180cm x 67½cm, Wood, Metal, Stone & Colour.

adze before live coal was poured in and left to burn. This created a burnt out effect. All areas of the panel except the hollow and the surrounding areas were smoothened with a rasp and sandpaper. The area around opening was textured by applying a layer of woodglue (ponal) after which sawdust was poured over it and allowed to dry.

Finishing:- This was started by mixing a little quantity of black enamel paint with a larger quantity of brown French polish (Walpsmur) and applying it around the figures. These were applied in such a way that the darkest parts were those around the outline of the figures while the lighter areas appeared further away from the outline. This was done to create an optical illusion of depth. The next colour to be applied was black, which was applied in the surrounding areas. It was also applied above the head of the Abiku, but in this case the paint was first poured into the depressed area above the head before the entire relief was tilted slightly upside down. This enabled the paint to flow freely after which the relief was left to dry.

At this point, extraneous materials are added. These include cowries, chips of terrazzo, coins and chips of stone. These were glued to the panel with a strong adhesive, cowries were also glued around the Abiku's head, the neck and in the hollow, it is worthy of note that the

number of cowries put in each place was seven. The chips of terrazzo were glued around the hollow and painted with a mixture of brown French polish and black enamel paint. The chips of stone were also glued in the hollow before a mixture of green and yellow enamel paints was spinkled in the hollow.

The final step was the application of three coatings of the entire relief with woodfinish (Ronseal).

2.4 Plate IV Royalty 1.

This panel titled "Royalty 1" (Plate IV) is based on the cultural tradition of the Bini who still hold their tradition in very high esteem. The Oba who is the traditional ruler of the Binis hold the highest authority. This panel is meant to show how highly the office of the Oba is regarded, using some of their traditional emblems. In the case of the Bini, it is only the Oba who wears the royal beaded crown. During most royal ceremonies two of his subjects carry the Ada (traditional swords) on both sides of him while occasionally he carries the "Eben" (royal shield) which he throws up and spins. These three royal emblems the crown, the Ada and the Eben are the major decorative motifs for this panel.

The execution of the panel was completed in two separate stages. The first was sculpting of the main panel which comprises of the background, two pairs of Ada and the bearers. The next step was the building up of the Eben and crown motifs which was glued onto the main panel.

The main panel which measured 180cm by 75cm was started by first making the sketch on the plywood before using a cutting knife to cut out the lines. The cutting knife was used in order to get well defined lines.



Plate IV Royalty 1
180cm x 75cm, Wood, Metal, Class & Colour.

A chisel and mallet were then used to create a rich textured background. This was done by first placing the Chisel vertically before subjecting it to heavy blow of the mallet. The process is later repeated by placing the chisel horizontally.

The pair of Ada motifs which appear at the lower part of the panel were rendered in broken pieces of mirror which were placed on a vertical axis and glued to the panel with woodglue (Ponal). A manual drill was used in creating a nacklace design on the neck regions of the bearers and on the Ada motifs that appear partially behind the Eben.

1st Finishing:- The textured background was first painted with black enamel paint by dripping the paint. It was done in such a way that the darkest areas are those around the edges. Brown French Polish was then used to cover the rest of the textured area. Chips of terrazzo were placed and glued around the handle of the Eben. In the case of the geometric forms of the subjects, black enamel paint was applied over the affected surface but before drying a rag that had been dipped into regular French polish (not brown French polish this time) before using it in wiping off the paint in some areas. Some of these areas were further scraped with a chisel to create more highlights. After this area had dried up a mixture

of brown French polish and ordinary french polish was applied over it. A mixture of brown French polish and a tint of black enamel paint was also applied over the mirrors, this was done to reduce the intensity of its reflections. Without allowing this to dry a wet rag was used to wipe slightly.

The finishing of the background was achieved by mixing copper dust in ordinary French Polish which was applied over the entire surface of the Ada that appears partially behind the Eben. Black enamel paint was then used in creating some designs on it. Another mixture of copper (this time with more copper dust) was furthermore used in highlighting the edges of the black and creating more designs on the black areas. Black was also used in painting the holes. While all this was being done the area meant for the Eben was left projecting and uncoated.

The next stage was the cutting of the shape of the Eben from another sheet of plywood and the building up of the crown on it. After cutting out the outline of the Eben a manual drill was used in making holes around the edge of the Eben. The Eben was then turned upside down and a rasp was used in bevelling its edge. This was done to create a suspended illusion. The Eben which has an opening on either side of it, was cut in such a way that

the outline of the royal crown was included. Another sheet of plywood was cut into the shape of a bust and placed directly below the crown area. The lower part of this was also filled with a rasp so as to flow directly onto the surface of the Eben. Jute material was then dipped into woodglue and used in covering the entire bust area, this was then left to dry.

The beaded crown was created with small dry fine sticks which had been cut also into the shape of beads. While doing this the area for the face area was left untouched.

2nd Finishing:- Black enamel paint was applied over the entire surface of the Eben and crown. When this was dry a mixture of copper dust and regular french polish was used in creating dosigns and highlights. The area for the Oba's face was left black. The next step was the fixing of the two metal rings around the neck area. These were first painted in black before being highlighted with copperdust.

The final stage was the permanent placing of the Eben on the main panel with woodglue. Weights were then placed on the Eben to ensure a firm contact and grip. The weights were removed after twenty-four hours afterwhich three coats of woodfinish were applied over the entire panel surface.

2.5 Plate V Royalty 2.

The theme of this panel (Plate V) is the same as that for "Royalty 1" except for slight differences in terms of design and finish. This panel was slightly enlongated and the design of the lower part was rendered mainly in different sizes of holes instead of the geometric form or shapes as in "Royalty 1". The finishing was done in gold and dark bronze. It is also worthy to note that unlike the additive method which was dominant in "Royalty 1", the substractive method employed in "Royalty 1"



Plate V Royalty 2
150cm x 60cm, Wood, Metal, Glass & Colour.

2.6 Plate VI Eyo.

The theme of this panel "Eyo" (Plate VI) is based on a traditional masquerade which appears on very important occasions in Lagos, when parading in public the masquerades usually move in groups. They are often adorned in white flowing gowns which cover the entire body from head to toe, while a white bowler hat with a black stripe around it is worn on the head. The "Eyos" were however represented in a totally stylised forms.

Both the additive and substractive techniques were applied in this panel. Three layers of plywood were used, the first being the main panel which comprises of the background and the forms of two of the Eyos. Each of the Eyo forms was differentiated from one another by use of texture. The lowermost was left untextured while the one nearer it was textured with fine grains of sand. The background was chipped with a chisel to create texture.

To achieve the textured surface the next layer of plywood, woodglue was poured over the entire surface. Finger drawing was then applied to the wet glue to create permanent flowing lines when dried. This was glue to the panel when dried.



Plate VI Eyo
180cm x 70cm, Wood & Colour.

The next and final textured surface of the second shape was achieved by covering the surface with a jute fabric that had been dipped into woodglue and left to dry. Weights were then placed on them and left to stick to each other.

Finishing:- The entire surface of the panel was covered with black enamel paint except the unchipped upper part of the background. A mixture of green and yellow enamel paints was dripped onto the upper part of the chipped out background. This was done so as to further project the mounted forms shapes. Spots of black paint were then applied to the upper part of the background that was not chipped. A tint of black enamel paint mixed with a small amount of brown French polish was used in coating this area. The edge of the chipped out area was highlighted some areas of the topmost form. The final step was the coating of the entire panel with woodfinish (Ronseal). Three layers were applied.

2.7 Plate VII Kano Dyepits.

The theme of this panel (Plate VII) is drawn from the traditional method of dying fabric which is a common occupation in towns like Kano and Zaria in Northern Nigeria. The dyes are prepared locally and put into large pots that are burried in the ground. These are referred to as dyepits. Fabrics are soaked in these dyepits for colouring and spread out in the sun to dry.

The composition on this panel depicts a carved sun on the extreme right hand corner, its rays indicated by flowing curvilinear lines. On the right hand side of the figure's head decorative lines are used to depict the stylized version of the traditional architecture of Northern Nigeria. Two crescent shaped symbols are placed at the top to indicate the Islamic Religious practices of the area. Below an impression of leatherwork is created to emphasize the dominant occupation of the area.

The figure of the dyer is stylised and elongated. The body is carved out while the jumper that adorns it is left to project from the sunken body of the figure. The neckline of the jumper is indicated by a series of tiny holes. The right arm is shown pulling out a fabric from the dyepit indicated by the circular rim/ridge at the lower end of the panel. This area was chipped out. The



Plate VII Kano Dyepits.
180cm x 75cm, Wood & Colour.

shape of the cloth was achieved by cutting out a separate sheet of plywood and gluing it to the main panel with woodglue (Ponal). The surrounding area of the dyepit was textured with autofiller (trade name U-Pol).

Finishing:- Black enamel paint was applied to all the carved out areas using a brush after which the entire panel was doated with brown french polish. White enamel paint was applied on the dyer's jumper before a mixture of brown Frnch polish and a tint of black enamel paint was used in creating a visual illusion of depth around the area.

The dyed cloth was covered with patches of red, blue and black Kandahah after which light blue enamel was used in highlighting the triangular designs on the cloth. Patches of light blue and red enamel paints were also applied on top of the black coated area of the dye pit. The textured area around the dye pit was also covered with black enamel paint which was scraped off with a metal spatula before drying. This created highlights around the textured area.

The final step was the application of woodfinish (Ronseal) over the entire panel. Three coats were applied.

2.8 Plate VIII Embroidery.

This panel (Plate VIII) is based on various embroidery patterns which are usually found on indigenous Yoruba and Hausa clothing called Agbada and Babanriga respectively. These flowing garments usually have embroidered designs around the neck regions, at the back and the front area. They are usually produced by traditionanl fashion designers, using either the modern sewing machine or hand needles with different colours of threads and yawns.

After cutting out the lines and areas with a cutting knife and chisel, certain areas were texturod by using woodglue (Ponal) and chips of plywood.

Finishing:- A mixture of yellow and green Galura (Hausa dye) with water was applied over different projecting areas of the panel. Another mixture of charcoal powder and water was also applied over the entire surface and left to dry.

After a wet was rag used to wash out certain areas, thereby leaving an undertone of the previous colours that had been applied. Gum-Arabic solution was then applied over the entire surface to produce a protective gloss finish which further enhanced the colours, three layers were applied.



Plate VIII Embroidery
120cm x 60cm, Wood & Colour.

2.9 Plate IX Pots.

This panel (Plate IX) is based on different shapes of pots that are produced in Nigeria. These pots serve different functions such as decorative, ritualistic and domestic chores. In this case the entire pot motifs were carved into the surface of the plywood. The carving was done by using a cutting knife, a chisel and a mallet.

Finishing:- After carving had been completed a mixture of charcoal powder and gum-arabic was applied to all depressed areas. The next colour that was applied was a mixture of watery charcoal and plenty of gum-arabic. This was applied to the partially superimposed pots to create an illusion of depth. The black mixture was also used in creating some designs on all of the pots. On the pot that appears in the middle of the panel, a mixture of white clay (Kaoline) and gum-arabic was used in putting white spots on it. Black spots were also applied over the white spots.

Having completed the colouring, the panel was left to dry before gum arabic was used in coating the entire surface of the panel. This was repeated thrice.



Plate IX Pots
120cm x 60cm, Wood & Colour.

2.10 Plate X African Model.

This panel (Plate X) has its theme based on traditional architecture and fashion. A traditional Hausa house was used as design for the gown worn over an elongated model. The inspiration for the figure is derived from the conditions of the environment of Northern Nigeria. Here the vegetation is quite low and as such anything seen against it appears to be relatively tall, hence the elongation of the figure. Hausa traditional motifs such as the "Northern Star" and calabash motif designs were also introduced. The figure occupies the central area of the panel picture plane with the hands at the hips.

In constructing the image, parts of the panel were cut and chipped off. The gown was textured by using autofiller (U.POL). Different sizes of alluminium metal were used in adorning different areas of the panel. Woodglue was used to stick the alluminium onto the panel. Class was also used in certain areas in addition to alluminium foil which was pressed into certain carved out areas and stuck to the panel with woodglue.

Finishing:- Local green dye (Galura) was mixed in water and applied over the entire surface of the panel. This was followed by another black coating. This was wiped out



Plate X African Model
187½cm x 60cm, Wood, Metal, Glass & Colour.

with a wet rag to highlight the undercoat of green. Sandpaper was further used in desired areas to remove all colour leaving the actual colour of the plywood which also acts as a highlight.

After the panel was dry, wood-finish coating was applied over it thrice.

2.11 Plate XI The Warrior.

This panel "The Warrior" (Plate XI) is based on the Zulu of Sourth Africa who are noted for their warriors. These warriors fought with locally made weapons which were mainly spears and sheilds. These sheilds are usually oval shaped held by a pole that runs through the entire length of the shield.

In this panel the shield is carved out at the centre of the panel. Both sides of it are adorned with different designs which are meant to create harmony with variety. On the right side of the shield a combination of sig-zag and short vertical lines are introduced. On the left side, long vertical lines are indicated in addition to semi-circular and tiny circular shapes, these shapes were chipped out. On the left side of the shield are three drum motifs each placed one one another and two spears placed behind the sheild.

On the left upper side of the sheild a profile of a warrior sporting facial marking was introduced. Several decorative holes appear on the handle of the sheild and on the lower part of the righthand side of the panel.

Finising:- The righthand side of the sheild as well as the face of warrior were covered with a mixture of charcoal powder and gun-arabic, while the left side was

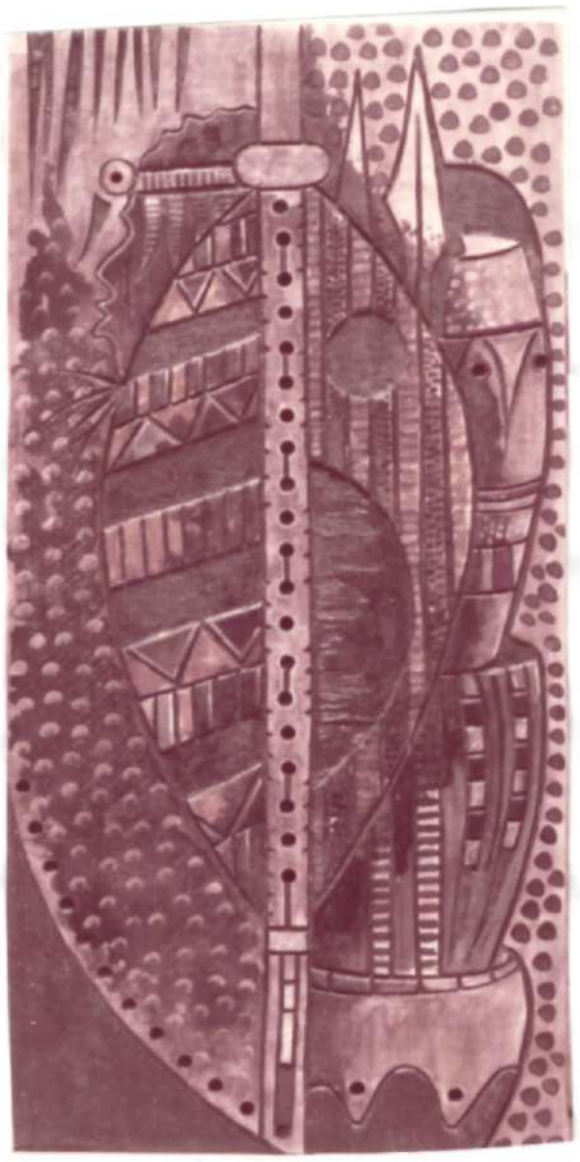


Plate XI The Warrior
120cm x 60cm Wood & Colour.

left untouched yellow galura (local dye) was mixed in water and applied over some of the projecting surfaces of the sheild. The remaining areas were covered with a mixture of charcoal powder and water. In the case of the drums red and blue galura (local dye) were applied to certain areas to improve their aesthetic value.

For the background, black spots were applied on the untouched lefthand side while the darkened right side was applied with white spots. The white colour was obtained by mixing white clay (Kaolin) with gum-arabic. It's purpose was to highlight the outline of the warriors head, including certain areas of the drums and shield. The panel was then left to dry before three coatings of gum-arabic were applied over the entire surface

2.12 Plate XII Olokun.

This panel (Plate XII) is based on the African legend of the goddess of the sea. The Yoruba refer to it as "OLOKUN" while the Urhobo refer to it as "MAMIWATA". The lines on the upper part of the panel assume floral patterns. It is meant to depict the movement of water. The round centre upper part of the panel was carved out in combination with the floral lines suggesting water drops. This again was done to emphasize the fluidity of water.

The lower centre part of the panel are provided with eyes; one has it's iris on the lower part of the eye while the other has its iris on the upper part. This again was done to emphasize the same idea of the fluid nature of water. Even if this panel were turned upside down, the eyes will still look unchanged. Below the eyes, lines were used to depict coral shells which can only be obtained from the sea.

Finishing:- Black enamel paint was applied to all depressed areas of the panel, after which brown French polish was mixed with black shoe polish (Kiwi) to obtain four different tones. This was further applied in such a way that no two shapes or areas close to each other had the same tone. They were applied to create a



Plate XII Olokun
150cm x 90cm Wood & Colour.

gradual movement from light to shade. By so doing a visual illusion of depth and movement was created especially in the areas of the waves.

The next step was the application of white enamel paint on the eyes to function both as highlight and creative designs on strategic areas of the panel. The sable brush was used as the applicator. The final stage was the application of three coats of woodfinish (Ronseal).

2.13 Plate XIII African Rhythm.

This panel (Plate XIII) is based on one of the prominent features of African cultural tradition which is dance and music. It is one of the aspects where Africans have really excelled.

The left section of this panel shows a traditional African drum that is adorned with beautiful designs with the impression of a hand rendered in geometric shape. From the left hand side of the drum, three layers of waves emanate. These become wider as they move further away from the drum towards the right hand side of the panel. They flow throughout the entire panel. These waves were introduced to depict the nature of sound as it travels. The decorative lines recognisably African in design.

Also on the right side of the drum is a partially hidden antelope headmask similar to those produced by the Bambara of Mali. This was chosen because of its elegance. On the right hand side of this another mask is also introduced to suggest the common practice of mask wearing by most African dancers. All cutting and carving were done with a cutting knife, chisel and mallet.

Finishing:- Black enamel paint was first applied to all sunken areas. The top of the drum was coated with white enamel paint before a coat of brown French polish



Plate XIII African Rhythm
180cm x 60cm, Wood & Colour.

was applied over it. The body of the drum was coated with various tones of black enamel paints and brown French polish that had been mixed together. The same applied to the antelope mask but here white was used in highlighting and decorating different areas of it. The mask on the right side of the antelope headmask had blue and white enamel paints applied over it, before a mixture of black enamel and brown French polish was used in coating it. This was partially scraped off before drying. The entire background was coated with brown French polish on which black spots were applied with a brush.

With regards to the wary lines the outermost ones were coated with light blue and red enamel paints on which lines were introduced. The middle one was coated with spots of brown French polish. The entire panel was then left to dry before three coats of woodfinish (Ronseal) were applied over it.

2.14 Plate XIV Shengo.

"Shango" (Plate XIV) is a god which is highly regarded and worshipped by the Yoruba. It is the god of thunder and lighting. It is feared amongst the Yoruba due to the belief that when provoked, it can vent its anger in the form of terror which is accompanied by heavy thunder, lighting and destruction. It's symbol is a double-edged axe held by a mantle or staff and surmounted by a woman's head identified by three Yoruba facial markings on side of the face a fanciful hairstyle.

The upper part of the parel shows a shattered axe motif to depict Shango's wrath. It was built with fragments of asbestos sheets. From the mouth emanates a number of brcken chains to signify shango's strenght. The lower left part of the panel shows various symbolic motifs related to Shango which were rendered in glass, rope, cowries and terrazzo chips.

Generally the composition is made to be very noisy as a deliberate attempt to show the real nature of Shango. All carving and cutting in this panel were done with a cutting knife, chisel and mallet. Texture a was introduced on the handle in the upper part of the panel by using autofiller (U.POL).



Plate XIV Shango
150cm x 90cm, Wood, Metal, Glass, Stone & Colour.

Finishing:- All parts of the panel except the lower left were coated with black enamel paint, and highlighted with copper dust. This was achieved by using a dry brush dipped in copper dust and brushed over the wet surface of the paint. In the case of the lower left and area of the panel, brown French polish and black enamel paint were used in coating them. When the panel dried three layers of woodfinish (Ronseal) were applied over the entire surface.

2.15 Plate XV Masks.

This panel (Plate XV) is based on African masks, masks being on of the aspects of Art where African artists have really excelled. Masks in Africa are not just regarded as works of Art; they were sacred objects which were also used for entertainment.

In this panel two masks dominate the central position of the panel. Towards the righthand side is a rectangular area covered in metal foil. This was done by spreading woodglue on the area to be covered before putting the metal foil on it. It was then left to dry partially before the tip of the handle of a sable brush was used in pressing flowing grooves vertically on it, then left to dry and set. Furtheron to the right, glass (mirror) chips were placed vertically and glued to the panel. The width of the chipped areas at both the upper and bottom parts decrease as they converge towards the middle of the panel.

On the left side of the panel where horizontal lines had been cut out, woodglue was applied over it before metal foil was pressed into the grooves and left to dry. All cutting and carving were done as usual with a cutting knife, chisel and mallet.

Finishing:- As usual all sunken areas were coated with black enamel paint. The mask to the left was coated



Plate XV Masks
120cm x 60cm, Wood, Metal, Glass & Colour.

with brown French polish before drops of a mixture of black enamel paint and brown French polish were used in creating free-flowing designs. It was further designed with white spots which was done with a sable brush.

The mask to the left was first coated with white enamel paint and left to dry. Then a mixture of black enamel paint and brown French polish was used in coating it. This coat was scraped off before drying. This mixture was also applied over the metal foil and glass chips on the righthand side of the panel. This was also not left to dry before a dry rag was used in slightly wiping off some of the mixture. White enamel paint was then used in highlighting certain areas of the mask. Brown French polish was then applied to the lefthand side of the panel before white enamel was used in creating some designs on it. The panel was then left to dry after which three coats of woodfinish (Ronseal) were applied over it.

SUMMARY

The aim of this study was to experiment with polychrome relief panels in wood. In all, fifteen projects (Plate I-XV) were executed using plywood, both imported and local materials like gum arabic, ronseal, and assorted colours were used too. Relief sculpture is not entirely new in the African setting, it dates back to the cave dwellers. However, what is new as shown in this research is the medium used in this study.

The themes of the panels were derived from day to day experiences of the African/Nigerian environment. The size of the panels range from 60cm by 120cm to 75cm by 180cm.

Part of the findings of this study included the relief effects of projection from a surface and the negative effects of recession into a surface. Also, the qualities of the medium i.e. plywood and effects which can be produced working with it were determined during the production process. It also offered the opportunity of marrying colours to sculpture which was a major feature of African traditional sculpture in the past.

Furthermore, the study offered the oppurtunity of bringing together objects whose form or nature relate unexpectedly to create exciting compositions, by playing upon the feeling which the objects themselves may evoke in us through their inherent expressive qualities and their associations.

The use of local materials was also exploited. It offered the opportunity of applying local colour and finishes on wood. These materials include gum-arabic which was found to have a dual purpose. First it could be used as a binder and second as a protective coat or finish for wood. Local dyes and colours were also used on wood. The advantage of using these materials is that they are cheaper and easier to come by unlike imported ones that are not produced here.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

As a bye-product of the experiences encountered in the process of experimentation, the following observations and recommendations are made.

Works produced in this project appear to fit into any type of modern day interior setting, be it an Hotel, Airport, Church, Gallery etc. They can also be used functionally, since they could be produced as door panels, room dividers and bars etc. They are even convinient to move from one place to another. Considering the dimensions of the panels, they could fit into any home since it would occupy little or no space. All that is needed is a wall.

The execution of these panels can also become a topic for documentation for art historians who are ever ready to document on new art forms and styles.

Furthermore it would spur other artists to explore the medium or mediums used in this research project, this being so due to the fact that the state of Art has never and shall never be static. New approaches are bound to unveil themselves as long as an artist keeps on exploring different approaches to Art.

To an extent this research could be said to be a step toward in Bruce Onabrakpeya's approach to Linc Broze relief since some of his ideas played a very prominent role in the execution of some of the panels.

African contemporary artists should also endeavour to exploit their local resources with the view of replacing imported ones with them.

Finally works produced in this project could make a worthy contribution to any art collection be it public or private.

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