

**“EXPLORING FORM AND EXPRESSION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF
FIVE SCULPTURAL ARTWORKS IN EKEHUA CAMPUS, BENIN CITY”**

BY

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**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY.**

JANUARY, 2025

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF FINE
AND APPLIED ARTS, FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES,
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, EDO STATE IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD
OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A) DEGREE**

JANUARY, 2025.

DECLARATION

I declare that this work is based on personal research undertaken by me in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Faculty of Environmental Science, University of Benin under the Supervision of Prof. Freeborn Odiboh.

UMOR VIRTUE MORRISON
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DATE

CERTIFICATION

We, the undersigned do certify that this research was carried out by UMOR VIRTUE MORRISON with MAT No. ENV2002780 in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts. This work is adequate in scope and qualifies for the partial fulfillment for the Award of BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A) DEGREE of the University of Benin.

PROF. FREEBORN ODIBOH
Project Supervisor /Head of Section

DATE

DR. KENNEDY EWEKA
Head of Department

DATE

PROF. OSA D. EGONWA
External Examiner

DATE

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my late mum, Mrs. Ideria Morrison.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who has supported me throughout the completion of this project.

Firstly, I am profoundly grateful to my project supervisor, Prof. Freeborn Odiboh for his invaluable contribution to the writing of this project, The HOD of the Department and all art history lecturers of Fine and Applied Arts Department, University of Benin, for their guidance, knowledge, and mentorship. Your insights and encouragement have been invaluable in shaping this work.

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ABSTRACT

This research critically examines five contemporary sculptural artworks located on Ekehuan Campus, Benin City, focusing on their form, expression, and communicative potential. The study addresses the skepticism surrounding the ability of sculptural pieces to convey universal, non-verbal communication, independent of linguistic or idiomatic interpretations. This skepticism raises questions about the accessibility of the sculptural language to diverse audiences and its effectiveness in transcending cultural and contextual barriers.

The research aims to explore how these sculptures communicate ideas, emotions, and narratives through their forms and expressions. By analyzing the selected artworks, the study seeks to uncover the extent to which they fulfill their communicative roles and resonate with both informed and lay audiences. Using a qualitative methodology, the research involves on-site observations, photographic documentation, and critical analysis of the sculptures' aesthetic, thematic, and symbolic dimensions. Interviews with the artists and viewers provide further insights into the intent behind the artworks and their perceived impact.

The findings reveal that while sculptural artworks on Ekehuan Campus exhibit remarkable creativity and thematic depth, their ability to communicate universally varies. Factors such as cultural symbolism, abstraction levels, and viewer familiarity significantly influence interpretation. The study concludes that effective non-verbal communication in sculpture requires a careful balance between universal themes and contextual nuances. This research contributes to art history and criticism by highlighting the dynamic interplay between form, expression, and audience perception in sculptural art, advocating for a more inclusive approach to public art creation and interpretation.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The presence of the sculptural works of art within the campus necessitates a detailed investigation of the forms and structural systems that have been utilized in their collective articulations.

Contemporary sculptural works of art designed by artists are subject to numerous forms of composition, media, usage of objects, and structural arrangements, which together are immediate responses to their aesthetic values and expressions. Artistic appreciation often depends on the visual appearances of the art object, whether in its exterior or inner interpretation. In sculptures, dominant forms (whether abstract or representational) characterize their closeness to likenesses of shapes or visual compositions, spatial analysis of form, texture, rhythm, and balance, compositional elements of line quality and structure, craftsmanship, as well as their unique freedom of expression.

Art is an energy form in various material compositions and should be thought of outside commonly held convictions. Sculptural works of art should be evidently visible or identifiable in their broader environments; otherwise, they are snubbed and considered structurally illegitimate. The essence of sculptural establishment implies that art speaks the common language of non-verbal communication devoid of idiomatic languages. Sculptural works of art should be plain enough to be intelligible

to everyone; however, there is skepticism as to whether art objects do speak or not. It has been intuitively believed that art does have various distinguished languages; yet, there are academic inquiries for entering the realm of understanding art forms. Within the circle of sculpture, since both Western and Eastern worlds have diverse conceptual settings and aesthetic values, applications of philosophical aesthetics have been explored in sculptural appreciation.

At each sculptural design stage, the artist interacts with the implicit languages and inner desires to express these feelings and thoughts in outer languages meant to be interpreted by others. Perspectives preoccupy the establishment of a tone and voice through their outer construction and presentation, yet inner values seem hard to overlook, drifting again in the interpretation of art.

Regarding forms, there is experience that sculptural works of art praise consideration of shapes, textures, dimensions, balance, as well as their relationships with surroundings and viewers' participation. This essay consummates an explorative discussion of the form and expression of five contemporary sculptural works of art within the Ekehuan Campus. The selected five art objects are publicly displayed in the outer environments, mature in medium compositions, and constructed using diverse structural systems. There is an intention to visibly or physically highlight parts of the works of art to illustrate the explaining arguments through close observation of these sculptural works composed in divergent representation

Historical Context of Sculpture in Nigeria

Sculpture in Nigeria has a rich and diverse history that spans pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods. Nigeria's sculptural tradition dates back several centuries and plays a significant role in the cultural and religious life of its various ethnic groups.

- **Pre-Colonial Sculpture:** Nigeria is home to some of Africa's most famous ancient sculptures, including the Nok terracotta sculptures (500 BCE–200 CE), which are among the earliest known forms of art in West Africa. These sculptures, often representing human figures, display an intricate understanding of form and expression. The Ife bronzes (12th–15th centuries) and the Benin bronzes (13th–19th centuries) are other notable examples of early Nigerian sculpture. These artworks are renowned for their realism, sophistication, and spiritual significance, often representing royal figures, deities, or ancestral spirits.
- **Colonial and Postcolonial Influences:** The arrival of European colonizers in the 19th century brought new dynamics to Nigerian art, including the suppression of traditional practices and the introduction of Western artistic techniques and education. However, indigenous sculptural traditions persisted and, in some cases, adapted to colonial influences. During the postcolonial era, Nigerian artists began to merge traditional and contemporary influences, giving rise to a new wave of sculptural expression.

- Modern and Contemporary Nigerian Sculpture: Nigerian artists in the modern era, like Ben Enwonwu and Bruce Onobrakpeya, played pivotal roles in shaping contemporary Nigerian sculpture. Enwonwu, for instance, combined traditional African themes with European modernist techniques, creating works that reflect Nigeria's complex cultural identity. By the late 20th century, Nigerian sculptors began experimenting with new materials, forms, and political themes, reflecting the broader trends in global contemporary art. Contemporary Nigerian sculptors often explore themes related to identity, politics, and globalization, with artists such as El Anatsui and Nnidi Dike gaining international recognition for their innovative use of materials and socially conscious work.

Problem Statement

Sculptural art, as a form of non-verbal communication, is often celebrated for its ability to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers. However, skepticism persists regarding whether sculptural pieces effectively speak a common language that is universally understood without reliance on idiomatic expressions or contextual knowledge. This challenge is particularly evident in public spaces like Ekehuan Campus, Benin City, where diverse audiences interact with sculptural artworks.

The ambiguity in interpretation raises critical questions about the effectiveness of these artworks in conveying meaning and engaging viewers. While some observers may grasp the intended narratives or emotions, others may struggle to connect due to

varying levels of cultural familiarity, artistic knowledge, or personal perspective. This disconnect undermines the communicative purpose of such artworks and calls into question their accessibility and inclusivity.

This research aims to address these concerns by critically analyzing five selected sculptural pieces on Ekehuan Campus. It seeks to evaluate their form, expression, and ability to communicate universally, exploring the factors that either enhance or hinder their role as vehicles of non-verbal communication. By examining the interplay between artistic intent and audience perception, this study contributes to understanding the communicative dynamics of public art within a diverse cultural and educational setting.

Research Question

To what extent do the sculptural artworks on Ekehuan Campus, Benin City, communicate universal meanings through form and expression, independent of linguistic or idiomatic influences, and how are these messages interpreted by diverse audiences?

Aim

The aim of this study is to critically analyze five selected sculptural artworks on Ekehuan Campus, Benin City, to evaluate their capacity to effectively communicate ideas and emotions through non-verbal means, devoid of linguistic or idiomatic barriers

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the formal and expressive qualities of the selected sculptures and their role in conveying meaning.
2. To explore the extent to which these artworks achieve universal communication that transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries.
3. To investigate the factors that enhance or hinder the sculptures' ability to convey non-verbal messages to diverse audiences.
4. To assess the relationship between artistic intent and audience interpretation of the selected sculptures.
5. To contribute to the discourse on public art as a medium of non-verbal communication by offering insights into how sculptural forms can bridge the gap between artistic expression and audience understanding.

Scope of the Study

This study critically analyzes five sculptural artworks located on Ekehuan Campus, Benin City, to investigate their ability to communicate non-verbally and transcend linguistic or idiomatic barriers. The research is guided by the skepticism surrounding whether these sculptures effectively convey a universal language understood by diverse audiences.

The scope includes the following aspects:

1. Five contemporary sculptural artworks on Ekehuan Campus are selected based on their prominence, thematic significance, and potential for non-verbal communication.
2. Examination of the physical attributes of the sculptures, such as form, texture, scale, material, and composition, to understand how these elements contribute to meaning-making.
3. Analysis of the expressive qualities and symbolic narratives of the sculptures to evaluate their capacity for non-verbal communication.
4. Exploration of how diverse viewers, including students, staff, and visitors, perceive and interpret the sculptures, considering variations in cultural and experiential backgrounds.
5. Investigation of the artists' intentions behind the creation of the sculptures and how effectively these intentions align with audience interpretations.
6. Consideration of the cultural and environmental context of Ekehuan Campus, assessing how it influences the creation and interpretation of the artworks.
7. The study employs qualitative methods, including visual analysis, interviews with artists and viewers, and photographic documentation, ensuring an in-depth understanding of the sculptures' communicative potential.

The study is geographically limited to Ekehuan Campus, allowing for a focused examination of its public sculptures while contributing to the broader discourse on the universality of non-verbal communication in art

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of form and expression, in sculpture has captured interest in the world of art critique and academic conversation. Sculpture goes beyond appeal as a three dimensional art form; it delves into profound reflections of cultural heritage individual stories, social concerns and abstract ideas.

The study of sculptural communication through visual dialogue is deeply rooted in the intersection of art theory, semiotics, and audience reception. This review explores relevant literature on the roles of form, context, and interpretation in sculptural art, emphasizing their contribution to non-verbal communication.

Art theorists like Herbert Read and Clive Bell argue that the formal qualities of art, such as shape, texture, and composition, are fundamental to its communicative power. According to Bell's Significant Form theory, it is the arrangement of visual elements that elicits an emotional response, independent of cultural or linguistic context. Gombrich (2000) further emphasizes the importance of form as a universal visual language capable of conveying ideas across cultural boundaries. However, critics highlight that form alone may not always suffice; the level of abstraction or symbolism in sculpture often challenges interpretative

1. Concept of Form and Expression in Sculpture

Form and expression are central to the understanding of any sculptural work. The “form” of a sculpture refers to its physical shape, structure, and materiality, while

“expression” encompasses the emotional, conceptual, or cultural ideas conveyed through the work. According to Rudolf Arnheim (1974), form in art is not just an external feature but is intrinsically tied to the expression it conveys. Arnheim argues that the elements of form—such as line, mass, and texture—are vehicles for emotional expression and are shaped by the artist’s creative intent.

In the context of contemporary sculpture, form is often manipulated to break away from traditional representations. Modern sculptors engage with abstract shapes, unconventional materials, and new techniques to reflect contemporary experiences and critiques. Rosalind Krauss, in her influential work *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (1977), highlights how 20th-century sculptors began to question the boundaries of sculpture, leading to innovations that allow for more complex expressions. The shift from traditional, representational forms to more abstract and experimental forms has expanded the expressive possibilities of sculpture.

This understanding of form and expression will be critical in analyzing the selected contemporary sculptures on Ekehuan Campus. The manipulation of materials, use of space, and the interplay between form and symbolism will be explored to understand the artists’ intentions and the messages behind their works.

The context in which a sculpture is created and displayed significantly impacts its interpretation. Geertz (1973) in his theory of Thick Description emphasizes that art cannot be fully understood without considering the cultural, historical, and social environment in which it exists. For instance, public sculptures often carry layered

meanings influenced by the site, community identity, and artistic intention. In her study on site-specific art, Kwon (2004) highlights how the physical and social contexts of an artwork shape its reception, often creating divergent interpretations among viewers from different backgrounds.

Audience Interpretation

Audience reception plays a critical role in sculptural communication. Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding model (1980) offers a framework for understanding how audiences interact with artworks. Sculptures, as encoded messages, are decoded differently depending on viewers' cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, and knowledge of art. This aligns with Dewey's (1934) assertion in *Art as Experience* that meaning in art emerges through the interaction between the artwork and the observer.

However, researchers like Barrett (2011) caution against assuming universal accessibility in art. Barrett argues that the degree of abstraction, cultural specificity, and symbolic content in sculptures can alienate audiences unfamiliar with the artist's intent or the cultural codes embedded in the work.

Non-verbal Communication And Semiotics

The semiotic approach to art, championed by Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco, provides a framework for analyzing sculptures as systems of signs. Barthes' idea of the Death of the Author suggests that meaning is not solely determined by the artist's intent but is constructed by the viewer. Eco (1976) further explores the concept

of Open Work, emphasizing that artworks allow multiple interpretations, thus fostering a dynamic visual dialogue between the piece and its audience.

Gaps in the literatures

While existing literature extensively explores form, context, and audience interaction, there remains a gap in understanding how these elements intersect to create a cohesive visual dialogue in sculptural art. Additionally, studies on public sculptures in educational contexts, such as university campuses, are limited, leaving room for further exploration of how such works communicate to diverse audiences within academic and cultural settings.

The literature reveals a complex interplay between form, context, and interpretation in sculptural communication. While form provides the visual foundation, context and audience perception significantly influence the interpretive process. This study builds on these theoretical frameworks to analyze how sculptural artworks on Ekehuan Campus engage in visual dialogue, evaluating their success in transcending linguistic and cultural barriers.

Sculpture and Nigerian Contemporary Art:

Nigeria's art history is rooted in a deep tradition of sculpture, most notably in the Benin Kingdom. The Benin Bronzes and other sculptural artifacts from the region have long been celebrated for their craftsmanship and historical significance. However, Nigerian contemporary art has evolved beyond traditional forms, incorporating modernist and postmodernist influences. This evolution is evident in the works of

artists such as Bruce Onobrakpeya and El Anatsui, who have pushed the boundaries of materials and form in Nigerian sculpture.

According to Olu Oguibe (1999), contemporary Nigerian art is characterized by a fusion of indigenous forms with modernist techniques. This fusion often reflects the postcolonial identity struggles, modernization, and the global art market's influence. Nigerian artists have also begun using new materials, such as found objects and industrial materials, to express contemporary realities. The sculptural works in Ekehuan Campus, Benin City, are part of this broader trajectory of modern Nigerian art, where traditional influences meet contemporary expression.

Chika Okeke-Agulu (2015) in *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria* discusses how contemporary Nigerian artists, including sculptors, respond to their socio-political contexts through art. He highlights how the country's tumultuous history, from colonization to independence, has shaped the narratives expressed in Nigerian contemporary art. This contextual understanding will be useful in analyzing the thematic underpinnings of the selected sculptures, exploring how they relate to national identity, history, and contemporary societal issues.

Critical Analysis of Sculptural Artworks in Ekehuan Campus

There has been limited academic documentation specifically addressing the sculptural works in Ekehuan Campus, Benin City. However, a few scholarly works have analyzed the role of public sculptures in Nigerian universities. Public sculptures

serve as not only decorative pieces but as important cultural and educational tools. They engage the campus community by creating spaces for reflection and discourse. According to Nwoko (2012), university campuses in Nigeria, particularly those with strong art faculties like the University of Benin, have become important sites for contemporary artistic experimentation. These sculptures often embody themes of education, tradition, and modernization.

The selection of five contemporary sculptures on Ekehuan Campus will offer a focused case study to explore how the artworks reflect modern Nigerian sculptural practices. Drawing from Okeke-Agulu's (2015) and Oguiibe's (1999) discussions on the Nigerian art scene, this study will consider how the artists have used form and material to express cultural, social, or personal narratives. Analyzing the materials used—whether traditional like wood and bronze, or modern like metal scraps and industrial materials—will also help in understanding how Nigerian sculptors engage with their cultural heritage while innovating for the future.

The Role of Sculpture In Public Spaces

The importance of sculpture in public spaces has been extensively discussed in art literature. Public sculpture, as argued by Miles (1997), plays a crucial role in shaping the experience of space, creating dialogue, and interacting with its surroundings. Sculptures in public spaces, such as universities, often carry specific themes or messages intended for the community. They can become iconic landmarks, symbolic representations of collective values, or critical commentaries on society.

In Nigeria, public sculptures are used to reflect national pride, cultural heritage, and modern achievements. Sculptures on university campuses like Ekehuan Campus contribute to an environment of learning, engagement, and inspiration. As argued by Ikwuemesi (2013), public sculptures in educational spaces can be instrumental in fostering critical thinking and reflection among students. By interacting with these artworks daily, students and staff engage with both the artistic and cultural dimensions of their environment.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a multi-disciplinary research methodology to critically analyze the sculptural artworks on Ekehuan Campus, Benin City, focusing on their capacity for non-verbal communication. The research design is structured to address the skepticism surrounding whether sculptures can communicate a common language devoid of linguistic or idiomatic influences. It combines visual analysis, audience perception, and artist interviews to provide a holistic understanding of how form, context, and interpretation interact to convey meaning.

The study is descriptive and exploratory, as it seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of how sculptural artworks communicate non-verbally. The research will explore the visual dialogue between the sculptures and their audience, without assuming prior generalizations. It will also explore the gap between the artist's intention and audience interpretation.

A purposive sampling method will be used to select five sculptures from Ekehuan Campus. These sculptures will be chosen based on criteria such as prominence, thematic relevance, and their potential to engage with a broad audience. The selection will ensure diversity in terms of artistic style, materials, and the subjects represented in the sculptures.

The study will involve a convenience sampling approach to gather responses from a wide range of campus viewers, including students, staff, and visitors. Participants will be approached at different times of the day to ensure a variety of perspectives.

The primary sculptures will be analyzed in detail for their form, materials, composition, and symbolic content. Photographs will be taken to document each artwork from various angles, providing a visual record for analysis.

An informal survey will be conducted where participants are asked to provide their interpretations of each sculpture. The questions will explore how they understand the sculptures' meaning, emotions they evoke, and their general impressions. The survey will focus on both verbal and non-verbal aspects of the artwork's communicative function.

Direct observations will be made on-site to document how individuals interact with the sculptures. Observations will focus on the physical engagement, such as lingering or conversation about the sculptures, as well as non-verbal cues like facial expressions or body language that suggest emotional or intellectual responses.

The visual analysis of each sculpture will focus on its ability to convey meaning through its formal elements. This will be interpreted in relation to the sculptures' context and the responses from the audience. The aim is to identify patterns of visual communication that transcend cultural or linguistic differences.

Participants will be provided with information regarding the purpose of the study and their right to anonymity. Consent will be obtained before engaging them in the survey or interview process.

Ethical care will be taken to ensure that the sculptures are not damaged or altered during the data collection process. The artwork's integrity and the campus environment will be respected throughout the study.

The study will be limited to the five sculptures on Ekehuan Campus, and findings may not be generalizable to all public sculptures or different cultural settings. Audience perceptions may vary based on individual background and familiarity with the art, and cultural biases may influence interpretations. However, these limitations will be acknowledged and framed within the specific context of the research.

An understanding of how form, context, and audience perception influence the communicative capacity of sculptures.

- Insights into the ability of sculptural art to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers and communicate universal messages.
- A comparison of artists' intentions and public interpretations to highlight the effectiveness of non-verbal communication in sculpture.

This research design will provide a comprehensive framework for exploring the visual dialogue in sculptural artworks and their capacity to communicate meanings beyond linguistic or idiomatic constraints.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF FIVE SCULPTURAL ARTWORKS ON EKEHUA CAMPUS

4.1: Artwork 1: AFRICA'S DILEMMA

Artist: Omoigui Osagie. G.

Year of Creation: 2003

Visual description

The sculpture Africa's Dilemma presents a seated female figure in a reflective pose, surrounded by large, traditional clay pots. The central female figure, with pronounced curves and traditional African attire and hairstyle, embodies the essence of African identity. The pots, one of which lies broken, possibly symbolize the abundance of natural resources or cultural heritage, and the act of sitting evokes contemplation or distress.

This sculpture encapsulates a narrative that reflects the struggles faced by Africa—possibly its struggle between modernity and tradition or the burden of colonial history and its aftermath. The woman's expression, posture, and the surrounding broken elements evoke a profound sense of reflection, uncertainty, or loss, potentially referencing the continent's current socio-political struggles and conflicts.

Form and composition

The sculptural form is highly stylized, with a strong emphasis on the curvature of the figure, which can be linked to traditional African aesthetics that highlight

femininity and fertility. The figure's hairstyle and attire also reference traditional African motifs, grounding the sculpture in a specific cultural heritage.

The large pots that surround the woman further draw attention to the role of women as custodians of both culture and life. However, the broken state of one of the pots juxtaposed with the woman's calm yet sorrowful demeanor hints at the "dilemma" the title suggests—possibly alluding to the fragile state of Africa's resources, cultural erosion, or even political turmoil.

Symbolism and expression

The figure in Africa's Dilemma is emblematic of the mother figure often seen in African art, symbolizing nurture, fertility, and life. Yet, the broken pottery represents loss or destruction, perhaps signifying Africa's struggle with the exploitation of its natural and human resources, colonial oppression, or its search for identity in a post-colonial context.

The broken pot may represent Africa's riches and cultural heritage that have been shattered by external forces (colonialism, slavery) or internal conflicts (corruption, civil wars). The woman, meanwhile, seems to bear the weight of these tragedies, reflecting Africa's predicament and the dilemma of how to reclaim and restore what has been lost.

Contextual interpretation

Created in 2003, Omoigui Osagie's sculpture resonates with the themes of socio-political struggles and cultural erosion that many African nations face in the

post-colonial era. The artwork invites viewers to reflect on Africa's past—its rich cultural heritage, the exploitation and destruction of its resources, and the internal and external dilemmas it continues to face.

In a broader context, Africa's Dilemma may represent the challenges of modernization and globalization as African nations strive to maintain their traditions and identity while adapting to contemporary societal and economic pressures. The maternal figure symbolizes the nurturing role that Africa plays to its people, while the broken pot might represent a fragmented society in need of healing and rebuilding.

Formal analysis

The sculpture's form follows traditional African stylization with exaggerated features that emphasize the importance of fertility, beauty, and life-giving. The texture of the work, possibly created from clay or a similar medium, adds an earthy, organic feel that connects the sculpture to the land and nature, grounding it within the African environment.

The use of symmetrical forms (the placement of the pots) juxtaposed with the irregularity (the broken pot) adds to the sense of imbalance and uncertainty. The open space surrounding the sculpture, as seen in the photograph, contrasts with the closed, reflective posture of the figure, further amplifying a sense of isolation or entrapment—both physically and metaphorically.

In summary, Omoigui Osagie's Africa's Dilemma effectively uses traditional African symbolism, formal elements, and metaphorical expression to comment on the

continent's socio-political and cultural struggles. The representation of a nurturing maternal figure surrounded by broken elements evokes a deep sense of loss, confusion, and uncertainty about the future, symbolizing Africa's quest to reconcile its past with its present reality.

As part of the project 'EXPLORING FORM AND EXPRESSION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF 5 CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURAL ARTWORKS IN EKEHUAN CAMPUS, BENIN CITY', this piece exemplifies the integration of cultural heritage with modern socio-political commentary, and its powerful narrative contributes significantly to contemporary African sculpture.

AFRICAN DILEMA



Plate 1: African Dilemma
Photograph: By Andy Arthur
Date: 20th November, 2024



4.2 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF “THE ZEALOUS PROFESSOR By Obayuwana Collins (2013)”

As part of the project on contemporary sculptural artworks in Ekehuan Campus, Obayuwana Collins’ work “The Zealous Professor” stands out in terms of its form, symbolism, and expressive qualities. This sculpture, created in 2013, embodies several layers of meaning that align well with the topic of exploring form and expression, making it a fitting subject for critical analysis.

Form and Structure

The sculpture, composed of distorted human anatomy, immediately draws attention due to its exaggerated form. The figure is seated, with a large, open book serving as the chest and upper body, its edges flaring out almost like wings. The fusion of the human form with this large, angular book suggests a deliberate distortion intended to emphasize both intellectual engagement and immersion in knowledge.

Dynamic composition: The legs and arms of the figure appear slightly oversized and irregular, and the angularity of the book juxtaposes with the otherwise organic human form. The seated posture reflects a moment of contemplation or study, with the figure seemingly frozen in a state of zealous intellectual pursuit.

Material and surface treatment: The surface of the sculpture appears weathered, with textures that mimic the roughness of aged bronze or oxidized metal. This choice of material, likely intentional, could symbolize the passage of time and the enduring

nature of knowledge, yet also the inevitable erosion of human life in contrast to the lasting legacy of intellectual pursuit.

Expression and symbolism: Collins' choice to fuse the figure with a book is a profound commentary on education, intellectualism, and the figure of the professor as a timeless symbol of academic rigor.

- **The Book as a Central Motif:** The oversized book replacing the chest represents knowledge becoming an integral part of the person's identity. By making the book a central part of the anatomy, Collins illustrates that for this professor, education is not just a career but a defining feature of their existence. The book is both metaphorically and literally the heart of the figure.
- **Head Tilted Backwards:** The head of the figure is thrown back, almost as if in exhaustion or exasperation. This posture could suggest the overwhelming nature of intellectual endeavors, where the pursuit of knowledge can sometimes be an all-consuming process. It might also express the weight or burden of such pursuits, as if the figure is struggling to maintain balance under the Pressure of the book they bear.
- **Zealousness in the Expression:** The figure's posture and exaggerated form convey zeal—an intense enthusiasm for knowledge. The professor's large, rooted feet suggest stability and groundedness, but the tilted head and open book suggest an openness to learning and teaching, albeit at a personal cost, as seen in the somewhat strained physicality.

Context within Ekehuan Campus and Contemporary Art

Placed in an academic setting, the sculpture resonates deeply with its environment. Ekehuan Campus, being part of an institution of learning, makes the presence of this sculpture particularly relevant. It serves as a reminder of the value of academic inquiry, but also as a subtle critique of the sometimes overwhelming weight of knowledge and intellectualism in a professor's life.

- **Representation of the Academic Struggle:** The title "The Zealous Professor" hints at an intense commitment to academic life. It is common for educators to be portrayed as overworked and overburdened, and this piece might be viewed as a commentary on the demands placed on professors, especially in contemporary Nigerian society where higher education faces significant challenges, from inadequate funding to overwhelming student populations.
- **Contrast in Size and Space:** The disproportionate size of the book and the slight exaggeration in the limbs give the sculpture an almost surreal, larger-than-life quality. This amplifies the idea that the professor's identity is overtaken by their intellectual pursuits, which physically and emotionally strain them.

Interpretation through the lens of expression

From an expressive standpoint, Collins has achieved a work that communicates more than just the physical likeness of a professor. Through exaggeration, symbolism, and posture, the piece speaks of the internal conflicts faced by individuals in the

academic sphere. It portrays the tension between zeal and burnout, the pursuit of knowledge and its burdens.

In comparison to other contemporary sculptures on the Ekehuan Campus, “The Zealous Professor” uniquely blends its subject matter with its form in such a way that they are inseparable. Where other sculptures might depict form in a more realistic or abstract manner, Collins’ work is symbolic, merging the human figure with objects that define the professor’s identity.

In conclusion, the Zealous Professor is an intricate blend of form and expression that captures the complex life of an academic figure. Its physical structure, exaggerated features, and symbolic motifs combine to create a layered narrative that resonates with the pressures of intellectual life. Positioned within Ekehuan Campus, the sculpture feels both celebratory and cautionary—celebrating the pursuit of knowledge but also cautioning against the toll it can take on the individual. Collins’ work is not only a remarkable piece of contemporary art but also a fitting representation of the struggles and triumphs associated with academia.

In the context of my project on the critical analysis of sculptural artworks in Ekehuan Campus, The Zealous Professor offers a rich opportunity to discuss the intersection of form, expression, and the environment in which it is placed.

Artwork 2: The Zealous Professor



Plate 3: The Zealous Professor

Artist: Obayuwana Collins

Year of Creation: 2013

Photograph: By Okonofua Andrew-Young

Date: 20th November, 2024



4.3 Artwork 3: CRITIQUE OF “STONE AGE” BY PIUS EHITA EGIALAMHEN (2018)

The sculpture titled “Stone Age”, created by Pius Ehita Egialamhen in 2018, is a contemporary exploration of form, texture, and symbolic expression that evokes reflections on human history and evolution. Located within Ekehuan Campus, Benin City, this piece offers an evocative interpretation of prehistoric man, engaging both the subject matter and material in ways that merge the ancient with the modern.

Form and composition

The sculpture represents a muscular male figure standing upright, slightly leaning on a vertical stone slab, which adds stability and emphasizes the connection to the Stone Age. His figure is well defined, with a robust body structure, giving an impression of physical strength and endurance. This composition reflects the primeval human’s relationship with physical labor and survival, resonating with the historical significance of early humans.

The overall stance of the figure, with legs firmly planted and one arm resting on the stone, conveys a sense of confidence, readiness, and connection to the earth. His posture suggests he is at ease, yet alert, symbolizing the dawn of human consciousness and its battle for survival against natural elements.

Material and texture

The material used for the sculpture, which resembles granite or stone-like substances, is crucial to the work's symbolic essence. The rough, uneven texture of the surface mimics the unrefined tools and techniques of the Stone Age, grounding the artwork in the historical period it represents. The stone-like texture contributes to the tactile quality of the piece, inviting viewers to imagine the harsh, unforgiving life of early man.

By using a material that recalls stone, the artist establishes a direct link to prehistoric culture, when humans relied on stone for tools, weapons, and shelter. The texture also highlights the contrast between the primitive and the modern, prompting the viewer to consider how much has changed—and how much has stayed the same—since the early days of human civilization.

Expression and concept

Egialamhen's Stone Age invites a broader reflection on the evolutionary journey of humankind. The exaggerated muscles and stern facial expression on the figure evoke a sense of stoicism and resilience, qualities necessary for survival during the prehistoric era. The figure's expression lacks distinct emotional engagement with the viewer, reinforcing the idea of a man focused on his own survival, immersed in his world of physical labor and primal challenges.

The concept of the Stone Age has a dual resonance here. On the surface, it portrays the literal period in history, but symbolically, it may also reflect on the idea of

human rawness—our primal instincts, our early struggles, and perhaps even a commentary on how some aspects of human nature remain unchanged despite the passage of time.

Cultural significance

In the context of Benin City, a region with a rich cultural heritage rooted in craftsmanship, art, and history, Stone Age creates an interesting dialogue between local history and global prehistoric narrative. It reminds us that humanity's origins, no matter how far removed, connect us all across time and space. The piece stands as a tribute to endurance, evolution, and the timeless struggle of humans to shape the environment to their needs.

Moreover, the sculpture could be interpreted as a subtle commentary on modern life—while technology and society have evolved, the fundamental need for survival, strength, and adaptability remains constant. There's also a reflection on how much of the ancient world still influences modern thinking and culture.

Artistic expression within contemporary sculpture

Within the framework of contemporary sculpture on Ekehuan Campus, Egialamhen's work stands as a testament to the marriage of concept and form. His choice to explore the ancient era through the lens of modern artistry shows a mastery in bridging historical subjects with contemporary sensibilities. The figure's realistic proportions, combined with a rough, stylized surface, make it a blend of naturalism and abstraction.

This sculpture, along with others on campus, reflects a broader movement within contemporary African art to engage with historical themes in new, inventive ways. The artist's approach to form and expression is characteristic of the growing trend in contemporary sculpture where the past and present meet in dialogue.

Pius Ehita Egialamhen's *Stone Age* is a visually striking and conceptually rich piece that draws from history while engaging contemporary audiences. The sculpture's detailed form, coupled with its rugged texture and symbolic depth, offers a reflective look into the origins of humanity and our continued connection to our past. The piece contributes meaningfully to the conversation on how we, as humans, define progress, evolution, and our place in history.

Within the context of Ekehuan Campus, this work serves as a significant piece of contemporary sculptural art, contributing both to the aesthetic environment and to a critical discourse on form and human experience.



Plate 5:Side View of Stone Age
Artist: Pius Ehita Egialamhen
Year of Creation: 2018
Photograph: By Okonofua Andrew-Young
Date: 20th November, 2024



4.7 Artwork 4: THE AQUAMAN

The sculpture constructed with periwinkles and snail shells, presents a striking example of contemporary art in its fusion of natural materials and expressive form. This piece, set against a serene yet dynamic background, invites a detailed critique in terms of its formal elements, material usage, symbolic meaning, and contextual relevance to your project on contemporary sculptural works in Ekehuan Campus, Benin City.

Form and structure

The sculpture is anthropomorphic, with the figure assuming a wide stance and extending both arms outward, evoking a sense of balance and movement. The positioning of the body appears almost ritualistic, resembling a dance or offering, and draws attention to the expressive gesture of the arms. The head is adorned with a fish-like form, indicating a blend of human and animal elements. This hybridization could suggest a symbolic relationship between humans and the natural world, a recurring theme in many African sculptures that explore identity, spirituality, and the environment.

The structure of the sculpture suggests movement and fluidity, though the medium is rigid and grounded. The figure's form is both elongated and contorted, emphasizing a struggle or dance between the forces of nature and humanity. The positioning of the legs—one bent and the other extended—further suggests motion, perhaps a narrative of progression or transition. The artist's choice to tilt the figure's

head and elongate certain features creates a sense of tension, making the sculpture feel dynamic despite its stationary nature.

Material analysis

The use of periwinkles and snail shells is a distinctive and meaningful choice. These materials, sourced from natural environments, reflect the artist's intent to merge organic elements with art. Snail shells, often associated with patience, growth, and cyclical patterns of life, may symbolize a slow yet steady connection between the past and present. Periwinkles, similarly, invoke ideas of endurance and resilience, being creatures that cling to rocks and endure the forces of the sea.

By incorporating these materials, the artist ties the work to nature's processes and the environment, possibly suggesting a commentary on the delicate balance between man and nature. The texture provided by the shells adds to the tactile quality of the piece, making it not just a visual but a physical experience. It challenges the viewer to consider the interaction of human-made forms with natural textures, providing an organic aesthetic to the sculpture's form.

Symbolism and expression

This sculpture can be interpreted as a representation of duality—man and nature, movement and stillness, life and death. The fish-like headpiece may symbolize sustenance, spirituality, of transformation. Fish are often regarded as symbols of life, fertility, and continuity in various cultures, including many African traditions. The

merging of human and animal forms may reflect ancestral connections, spiritual totems, or the embodiment of myths and stories passed down through generations.

The outstretched arms could suggest an offering to the gods or a reaching out towards something greater, a moment of vulnerability, or a display of power. This duality in gesture adds layers of interpretation, making the piece emotionally evocative. The central focus on the torso, with intricate patterns formed by the shells, seems to emphasize the heart or soul, suggesting that the essence of life (whether human or animal) resides at the core of existence.

Contextual significance

Within the broader scope of contemporary sculptural practice at Ekehuan Campus, this piece contributes significantly to discussions about form and expression. Its unconventional use of materials places it at the intersection of environmental art and modern sculpture, while its symbolism grounds it firmly within African cultural heritage. The choice of snail shells and periwinkles as artistic mediums ties the sculpture to both the physical land and the philosophical idea of time, patience, and survival.

Given the emphasis in your project on critical analysis, this piece embodies the theme of exploration. It explores the relationship between humans and the environment, investigates the tension between motion and stillness, and challenges the boundaries of material use in art. Its placement within the campus allows for a deeper engagement with the landscape, both as a physical space and as a conceptual one

where students and viewers are invited to reflect on their own connection to the themes presented.

In conclusion, the sculpture you've shared stands as a potent example of contemporary form and expression. Its use of natural materials such as snail shells and periwinkles brings organic life into the realm of art, while its expressive form and symbolic content encourage multiple interpretations. It is a reflection of the artist's engagement with themes of nature, humanity, and spirituality, all central to African artistic traditions, yet framed within a modern context. This piece will no doubt enrich your critical analysis by highlighting the merging of traditional symbolism and contemporary artistic techniques.



Plate 7: Side View of the Aquaman
Artist: Unkown
Photograph: By Okonofua Andrew-Young
Date: 20th November, 2024



Plate 8: Front View of the Aquaman
Artist: Unkown
Photograph: By Okonofua Andrew-Young
Date: 20th November, 2024

4.5 Artwork 5: The White Devil

This sculptural piece, photographed by Okonofua Andrew-young, invites an exploration of form, expression, and the cultural resonance that it embodies.

The sculpture portrays a figure with exaggerated proportions and stylized anatomy, notably the elongated arms and the disproportionately large club or staff that the figure is wielding. This gives it a surreal and slightly mythical appearance, evoking the sense of a supernatural or heroic being. The figure's muscular structure is somewhat abstracted, focusing on conveying power and dominance rather than anatomical precision.

The stance of the figure is dynamic, with a bent knee and a forward-leaning posture, suggesting movement or readiness for action. The horns on the figure's head emphasize its otherworldly or demonic nature, setting it apart from a typical human figure. These elements create a strong visual narrative of aggression or defense, as though the figure is guarding or protecting something.

The sculpture's expression lies primarily in its posture and facial features. The face, with its focused, intense gaze, radiates a sense of seriousness or perhaps aggression. The overall body language—gripping the staff tightly and leaning forward—suggests readiness, strength, and an assertive stance. This combination of facial and body expressions gives the sculpture a sense of urgency, as if the figure is in the midst of a ritual or confrontation.

Though the sculpture's material is not explicitly stated, it appears to be created from a durable medium like concrete or metal, given its outdoor placement and weathered appearance. The surface treatment is relatively rough, with visible textural details such as incisions and patterns on the figure's clothing and limbs. This adds a tactile quality to the sculpture, allowing light and shadow to play on its surface and emphasizing its three-dimensionality.

The sculpture draws on traditional African symbolism, especially with its portrayal of horns, which in many African cultures signify power, spiritual authority, or otherworldly connection. The large staff or club the figure holds could be symbolic of authority, warrior-like strength, or a ritualistic object. There may also be references to deities, spirits, or ancestral figures common in various African mythologies.

The horns might also allude to local deities or ancestral figures who are often depicted with such supernatural traits. In many African traditions, physical exaggeration in art is used to highlight the spiritual or mythical significance of a figure.

Context within the campus

This sculpture, placed within Ekehuan Campus, becomes a significant marker of the environment, perhaps reflecting the cultural or philosophical ideologies valued within this academic setting. Its commanding presence may signify the strength and endurance required in academia or could symbolize a guardian-like figure watching over the campus.

The background—a simple, weathered building—creates a sharp contrast with the figure, further emphasizing the sculpture’s bold form. This backdrop may also highlight the ongoing conversation between tradition and modernity within Benin City, where historical references in art coexist with contemporary life.

In the context of my project, “EXPLORING FORM AND EXPRESSION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF 5 SCULPTURAL ARTWORKS IN EKEHUAN CAMPUS,” this sculpture represents a synthesis of form and cultural narrative. It straddles the line between realistic depiction and stylized abstraction, which can be seen as a common trait in many contemporary African sculptures that seek to balance tradition with modernity. The form speaks to power, spiritual significance, and a dynamic sense of energy.

In terms of expression, this sculpture is successful in conveying a sense of vigilance, protection, and perhaps spiritual presence. Its exaggerated, almost grotesque elements are used effectively to evoke emotional responses from the viewer, making it a strong example of how contemporary sculptors in Benin City harness traditional motifs to express complex, modern-day themes.

The use of space, form, and symbolism in this piece makes it a vital part of your critical analysis, as it shows how contemporary sculpture in Ekehuan Campus continues to draw on deep-rooted cultural references while adapting them to new artistic expressions.

This sculpture is an exemplary piece within your project, showcasing how form and expression come together to reflect both individual artistic interpretation and broader cultural narratives. The figure's posture, exaggerated proportions, and symbolic elements all contribute to its compelling presence within the campus, creating a dialogue between past traditions and contemporary expression.



Plate 9: Front View of the White Devil

Artist: Unknown

Photograph: By Okonofua Andrew-Young

Date: 20th November, 2024



Plate 10: Side View of the White Devil
Artist: Unknown
Photograph: By Okonofua Andrew-Young
Date: 20th November, 2024

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

This project, “Exploring Form and Expression: A Critical Analysis of 5 Contemporary Sculptural Artworks in Ekehuan Campus, Benin City,” examined the diverse use of form, materials and expressive techniques by five contemporary sculptors. Each sculpture revealed unique approaches to conveying cultural, historical, and personal narratives. The analysis highlighted the varied ways in which these artists engage with modern and traditional themes, reflecting their environment, society, and personal experiences. From Obayuwana Collins’ ‘The Zealous Professor’ to Omoigui Osagie’s ‘Africa’s Dilemma’, and Pius Ehita Egialamhen’s ‘Stone Age’, the works showcased the innovative use of materials, such as periwinkles and snail shells, and demonstrated how sculptors in Benin City are pushing the boundaries of form and medium to create powerful artistic statements.

Sculptural artworks serve as a profound means of visual communication that transcends language barriers, embodying stories, emotions, cultural values, and critical societal themes. The critical analysis of contemporary sculptures in Ekehuan Campus has demonstrated that these artworks are not merely decorative but serve as vehicles for expression, fostering dialogues on issues such as identity, history, and social dynamics. Skepticism about whether sculptural artworks “talk” often arises from a limited understanding of how visual elements convey meaning. However, through

deliberate forms, gestures, and materials, sculptures articulate messages that resonate deeply with viewers, proving that art speaks eloquently to those willing to listen.

Findings

1. **Symbolism in Form and Material:** Each of the analyzed sculptures employs unique forms and materials to articulate its narrative. For instance, the use of periwinkles and snail shells in one artwork symbolizes environmental concerns and cultural heritage.
2. **Expression of Societal Themes:** Sculptures like *The Zealous Professor* and *Africa's Dilemma* address critical issues such as education, leadership, and the challenges of modern African societies.
3. **Diverse Interpretations:** The meaning of sculptural artworks is not static but open to interpretation, allowing individuals to engage with the pieces based on personal experiences and cultural backgrounds.
4. **Skepticism Rooted in Perception:** Doubts about whether sculptures “talk” stem from an underestimation of visual language’s ability to convey profound messages. This highlights the need for greater public art education.

Recommendations

To bridge the gap in understanding the communicative power of sculptural art, the following steps are recommended:

1. **Art Education and Awareness:** Educational programs and workshops should be organized to help the public appreciate the interpretative nature of sculptural artworks.
2. **Interactive Exhibitions:** Displaying sculptures in settings that encourage viewer interaction and dialogue can enhance their accessibility and perceived relevance.
3. **Incorporating Contemporary Themes:** Artists should continue to integrate relatable and pressing societal issues into their works to foster deeper connections with audiences.
4. **Documentation and Analysis:** More critical analyses and publications on sculptural artworks should be encouraged to demystify their messages and cultural significance.

By addressing the skepticism and enhancing awareness, sculptural artworks can further solidify their role as vital instruments of communication and cultural preservation.

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