

A Study and Analysis of Different Approaches and Finishing in Sculpture

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Abstract

Any time an artist decides to create, he implores ideas guided by an inherent critique nature in him. In the process of creating art, the intellect is put to work and at the end of this creative » process art is created and fine-tuned. It is this process of fine tuning the surface quality to make it have a suitable finish that is called finishing. This paper addresses the issue of finishing agents for cast sculptures made in fiber glass, Terra cotta, plaster of Paris and other cement families and approaches towards realizing them. This paper will consider some issues using protective covering or patina to finish sculptures, exploring aging as a surface quality for sculpture; consider also enhanced decorative embellishment of these cast sculptures and give a protective covering against weathering and damage; analyze some finishes for sculpture and open vistas for future studies in finishing. Essentially findings, observations and discoveries of this paper are also documented for further interactions aesthetically.

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Background to the Study

Sculpture, like other arts, is a record of human experiences which brings to light the culture of a people, reflecting their wealth, religion, deities or totemic images in solid materials such as clay, cement, metals, wood, Stones, many other solid materials and in their various approaches. Many years ago, people made sculptures of what they felt could be their tradition and culture in terms of the kind of pots, stools, tool implements and so on. From the earliest times to our present day, sculpture has recorded a lot of these and is still recording them.

According to Fleming (1980-18), if one desires to know the spirit and inner life of a people, one must look at its art, literature, dances and music, where the spirit of the whole people is reflected. This further explains some influences of these records of human experiences which sculpture connotes. Being able to identify the Bini royal sculptures and the Ife sculpture heads, are possible because of the cultural semblance of these sculptures as linked to various historical locations. If sculptors therefore use historical examples and techniques to sharpen their vision and deepen their understanding of problems, they use tradition creatively.

Sculpture may range from minute tabletop pieces otherwise known as figurines, to gigantic monuments and static ones like the works of Auguste Rodin (1840 - 1917) or mobiles as in the work of Alexander Calder (1898), and the rest. These sculptural pieces had been produced by different sculptors and with different known materials such as metals, fiberglass, wood, marble stones, granites, plaster of Paris and so on. People everywhere have therefore found need for sculpture also. Whether in work, in play or in prayer.

Ekanem (2000:12-13) asserts that Art is a product of the capabilities of the artist on the one hand and the environment on the other. He further describes the environment here as "all embracing, including the light we see, tire sounds we hear, the things we touch and smell. It includes our feelings, our emotions and our thought processes". Though the artist will bring his know-how to play, he must also put his environment into consideration as he produces the artwork. The light we see affects any piece of sculpture depending on the finishing and how this sculpture is situated which explains why a particular sculpture can be seen to be of different pigmentation at different times depending on the interplay of light and colours in the environment. Krauss (1977:3), echoes Lessing who asserts that sculpture is an art concerned with the deployment of bodies in space. And, he continues, saying that this defining special character must be separated off from the essence of those art forms, like poetry, whose medium is time. If the depiction of actions in time is natural to poetry, Lessing argues, it is not natural to sculpture or painting, for the character of the usual arts as they are static. Because of this condition the relationship formed between the separate parts of visual object are simultaneously given to its viewer; they are there to be perceived and taken in all at once. This is heavily enhanced by the surface finishing or rendition of the particular art piece in question.

The artist and the environment must hereby merge for a beautiful work of art, especially for sculpture, to be in place the materials could be in themselves attractive, melodious, repulsive or grotesque depending. On the way and manner, the artist uses them. Some materials appear so beautiful so inviting in terms of finishing. But the application of such materials could either let the sculpture remains attractive, appealing to the beholders or repelling and offensive. Sculpture also records the joy to commemorate achievements and the deeds of nations and individuals like "The Peace Column' by Ben Ekanem (1989), which according to him, exhorts the people to a new beginning in peace. Sculpture could also be found in honorary award plaques and trophies made in materials such as fiberglass, wood, bronze. Brass etc.

To fashion sculpture, Man has to learn to use certain materials, and machines and techniques. He will also learn to develop further, tools and processes and finally give all these various sculptures he develops, good finishing (protective coverings), intrinsic or extrinsic, before these sculptures are ready for the beholders: the buyers and critics alike. These works could then be said to be more attractive, appreciated or said to be finished works of art. Therefore, this study intends generating different types of sculptural finishing using some existing finishing agents and also exploring the use of acrylic covering, among other protective coverings or coating agents, show placement methods in terms of sculptural relief works mounted on wooden panels or other synthetic panels as will be explored by the researcher.

Issues

The concept of style is indispensable for the study of art, and yet it can be a source of confusion because the word has so many different meanings. Sometimes style refers to the work of a particular historical period. It may refer to the art of a nation or several nations, or to the art of a region within a country. How can this sculpture be preserved effectively to withstand the *effects* of the weather and cause the said sculptures to at least last for a very long period of time if not by giving the surfaces good and adequate protective covering. The issue of weathering is typical of outdoor sculptures which is equally why this research is carried out. The growth and development of a single artist's way of working is often called ' the evolution of his style". In addition, style can be a certain technical approach of the creation of art. Feldman (1972.169).

The art of a certain nation or period could be represented by a corresponding use of certain finishing materials to give a likely outlook of such art that existed at the period. The researcher therefore observes that some artists use certain Finishing materials because others did so. Of what use is the watermark effect being introduced to a finished sculpture carved in red mahogany wood? The researcher further observed that taking a look at a sculpture made in fiberglass and given a wooden or bronze look may not have informed the beholders of the true materials used but may have played a camouflaging role to the project. So many of the sculptural pieces in our academic environments and even outside of the same were either hurriedly or inappropriately finished, that is why a sampling of some of these works will show whether. The problem is with the material or

with the inappropriateness of the material. Many sculptors may have worked with different kinds of cast materials as mentioned earlier; applying the technique they may have learnt or developed in order to achieve surface finishes as their only way to actualize their desired art.

Finishing for cast sculptures and constructed sculptures differ probably because of the mode of preparations peculiar to both groups. Same applies to works in terracotta, plaster of Paris, fiberglass and cement. Therefore, the researcher desires that artworks should be properly finished, so that when one beholds them, one would be able to say the work is beautiful. Hence Holgate (1972:21) states that "The idea of aesthetic experience is that we know something is beautiful because when we see it (some would include "when we think of it") we experience a special sensation.

Scope

The objective of this paper considers the use of protective covering or patina to finish sculptures and explore aging as a surface quality for sculptures, it will also enhance the decorative embellishment of these cast sculptures and give a protective covering against weathering and damages. This paper will be a guide to artists (sculptors) to be acquainted themselves with various finishing methods. Furthermore, a demonstration of the use of polyester resin as patina or finish for sculptural pieces, introducing intrinsic colour application and use when preparing functional sculptures such as children's play objects, indoors and outdoors.

Considerations

Some scholars of art have in one way or the other been able to articulate what can be called a prelude to maximizing the high artistic potentials in Art, putting together what it might take to make art in Nigeria become of more economic value other than foreign countries retaining our art for "safe keeping". Aniakor (2000:154) states, what remains is to evolve appropriate and effective implementation strategies for harnessing these artistic potentials and resources as export commodities given their quantity, quality, variety, aesthetic richness and depth as well as production technique and the fact that they are still the living cultures of Nigeria. Emphasis is being pushed to quantity, quality, variety and aesthetic depth as well as production of such works, production methods for continuity and giving each of the products of sculpture appropriate and aesthetic outlook. Using the right material for production of a piece of sculpture, will in no doubt promote the importance of patinas or finishing agents. This cannot here be over-emphasized but has been appropriately presented in this research as a bed rock for realizing a good finishing on any sculpture. Bookbinder and Lyon (1999) gave a brief explanation of patina as being the term used for the surface colour and quality of bronze and other materials. Without waiting for time, use, and atmospheric conditions to give a lovely surface to sculpture, artists use acids, heat, and other devices to achieve immediate effects of mellowness, age and subtle colour. All of this is for a better presentation and appreciation of such sculptural pieces. That in effect is the main pivot of this research, which has definitely taken a look at finishing and some finishing materials that definitely enhance surface

qualities of our sculptures and has equally shown various other ways of presenting these works.

The issue of use and mastery of materials in terms of finishes and finishing agents has become so vital so as not to ill finish the surface quality of any sculptural piece. In her article, Marter (1998), could not over emphasize this but simply points out the sculptor and mastery of his materials. She writes of Alexander Calder_ as she says, Calder developed such proficiency in joining and suspending elements he no longer needed to make the careful calculations and measurements that were required in the early years... Calder was always the master of his materials and methods" An immense knowledge of the characteristics of the finishing materials one uses could be an added advantage and a kind of confidence booster to the individual sculptor in this light.

Fleming (1980: 1), refers to the book of the Bible, Ecclesiastes chapter one verse nine and states, the things that hath been, it is that which shall be and that which is done, is that which shall be done; and there is nothing new under the sun". The search for the origin or rather the root of when a thing began or how a Clung began makes way for continuation. The way the early Egyptian artists finished their works, or the way the early cave artists finished their works has also given rise for the quest to know more about their finishing and improve on it. Theirs may have been home out of different philosophical backgrounds in terms of uses and appreciation which in one way or the other was attributed to their lifestyle. Fleming yet maintains that the past is constantly alive and ever present. In other to achieve a fuller understanding of the arts, therefore, we must view them within this expanded contemporary time frame, see items as decorative, functional and aesthetic objects perhaps.

Sculpture Analysis

Many artists have done works of sculptures and finished them in several ways. For the purpose of this research, five Nigerian studio and/or academic artists in the likes of Ben Ekanem, Bona Akah, and Abayomi Barber have been studied. Six of these artists' works have been selected for a review and have been analyzed as they appear to determine how effective these works have been Over the years in terms of appeal and acceptance. All these working towards the choice of protective coverings or finishing of cost sculptures.

Blameless

(Bona Akah 2004; Wood, 56cm x 28cm)

Bona Akah is a sculptor with a whole lot of years of experience attributed to him. He has received so many awards for excellence from the time he was in the institute of management and Technology. (IMT) Enugu until his practice in Osun State where he worked briefly at the State's Council for Arts and Culture Oshogbo as head of sculpture section (1992-93). His sculptures grace the gardens of many public and private spaces in Enugu and other states of Nigeria. His work "Blameless" (see figure I) typifies an innocent appearance of one with hands up produced in abstract realism. The treatment of the wood gives one the impression that this sculpture could be made of metals for the mat black that the sculptor used for the finishing.

A first glance at the work could also inform the beholder that this piece of wood may be of ebony wood. Furthermore Holloway (1950:90) declares that there are various ways of ebonizing, or obtaining a dense black stain, on woodwork_ Considering the appearance of "blameless", one will regard the effectiveness of the finishing applied to this work as having become welcoming in terms of smoothness and beauty. Hence one can say there is beauty in innocence. Instead of mat black finish for an ebony look, this research has der* eloped other wars of ebonizing woods.



Figure 1.

Artist: Bona Akah
Title: Blameless
Medium: Carved Wood
Year: 2004
Size: 56cm x 28cm

World of Embrace

(Bona Akah 200.Fiberglass. 38cm x 48cm)

This is another sculpture in the lineup of Bona Akah. The composition has a total of five figures arranged in a melodrama kind of appearance in its horizontal frame.

It depicts the map of the world and placed prominently on the map is map of Africa which has some irregular shaped halls stuck in the map to represent the people (see figure II). The vibrant flow of contours in this sculpture appeals to the intellect and one begins to wonder if the journey of this world is as smooth as Bona has sculpted, as shown by the nuclear family of the man. Wife and two kids.

The fiberglass sculpture therefore given an antique kind of highlighting to really make it look strong and aged Thus is Goodheart and Willcox (1973:212) declare that antique

highlighting is applied to a stained finish to give the piece the appearance of wear such as would come about naturally through many years of regular usage. Though the sculpture "world embrace" was produced in year 2002, it wears the look of a work done about twenty years ago. Aging in this manner has been successfully achieved by the sculptor.



Figure 2.

Artist: Bona
Title: Biameless
Medium: Carved Wood
Year: 2004
Size: 56cm x 28cm

Queen Amina of Zaria

Ben Ekanem. Cement and Fiberglass: Life Size)

Ben Ekanem. One of the Nigerian's foremost artists and art educator. He is an associate professor, with the Fine and Industrial Art Department, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

"Queen Amina of Zaria" is represented in a life-sized sculpture which was situated in national theatre Iganmu, Lagos State of Nigeria, depicting the warrior Queen Amina of Zaria on a horse back ready for war with a stretched outright hand holding a sword (see figure III). The horse is seen charging for war on top of rock like platform typical of the Northern region of Nigeria.

It was formerly thought that art affected useful objects by adorning and embellishing them or by creating surfaces or skins which concealed their working points. To some extent, this view survives erroneous conceptions and applications of industrial or product design. Ekanem did the construction of the amateur or the skeletal part of this work "Queen Amina of Zaria", by himself thereby structuring the work the way was positioned

and sculpted and then gave a finish to the surface which has endured the weather over the years. One asks if the original finish of this masterpiece remains applicable to today's modern sculpture.



Figure 3.

Artist: Ben Ekanem
Title: Queen Amina of Zaria cement and fibre glass
Medium: Cement and fiberglass
Year: 2004
Size: 56cm x 28cm

(Abayomi Barber, Painted Plaster. 50cm)

This portrait *of* a Nigerian girl and titled the same, must have been achieved as a result of studies the artist has made severally, having worked a lot on portraits and life-sized realistic works. The work (see figure IV) presents a well articulated study of a female head; here beauty of the African female cannot be overemphasized. The scarf on the girl's head, a typical feature that shows a kind of well-mannered girl so to say. Prominent eyeballs, flat nose, thick lips all features of African descent.

'Nigerian Girl'' was carefully made in plaster of Paris and painted. Painted sculptures often times loose some degree of sharpness and therefore to experience beauty by the touch of hand will go along way. Savile (1983:99) therefore would say that it is indisputable that our understanding of beauty cannot be correct unless it explicates the idea in terms of some experiential response. This project therefore has paid attention to all these aesthetic commentaries to give an added value to sculptural indoor pieces done in plaster of Paris alongside the outdoor sculptures.

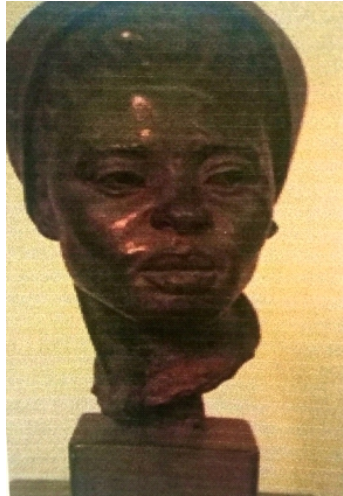


Figure 4.

Artist: Barber, Abayomi
Title: Nigerian Qiti (portrait head) painted plaster
Medium: Painted plaster
Size: 90cm

Courtesy: The Nucleus, maiden catalogue of works In Nigeria's National Gallery of Modern Art

Intricacies

The significance of finishing in sculpture as the sculptor wades through processes and techniques, according to Okpe (2005:2) allows for an evolving personal iconography in order to achieve a desired finish «licitly a work is intended for a simply open studio show or a gallery sale context. He further buttresses that the selection of materials therefore might determine what finish can be achieved as experimentation could add to the discovery of accidental finish that could in turn be compatible with the form especially in today's technological age.

A particular sculpture may be finished in a particular formula which may also trigger a different type of finishing by another sculptor who may also have worked with a similar material. The philosophy behind the finishing methods will definitely differ depending on the available finishing agents or the feeling inherent in the different sculptors as at the time.

Barrio (1968-19) emphasizes that the quick drying acrylics, polymers, and polyesters are therefore much more in harmony with the quick expression and intuitive spontaneity which is so characteristic of and fundamental to modern art. Obviously sculptural pieces so finished with quick setting materials and given adequate mounting and presentation also will be inviting and pushing further the drive to get closer to such works "[the surface colour and texture of sculpture can be more or less radically altered by the use of wax polish, pigmentation, enamel and other types of surface treatment" Greene (1952:82).

Sculptures produced in Portland cement can equally be finished well by certain kind of finishing materials that can be used on plaster of Paris to enhance the surface colour and quality though not absolutely. Greene's finish method is one of the basic attractions which have motivated the researcher into delving into this research.

Feldman (1972:51) asserts that the visual arts, like the other arts, can function as languages of praise and celebration, anger and protest, satire and ridicule. In other words, art can influence the attitudes of people in groups, affecting the way they think or feel and ultimately, the way they act'. The character of the sculptural piece in terms of the surface finishing or presentation can provoke the earlier mentioned feeling in an individual. This actually emphasizes the need for attention to be paid due to the finishing agents and presentation of any artwork especially a piece of sculpture. Feldman further brings to bare the fact that certain kind of artists; work in an effort to discover meaning in the world through the materials, processes and stylistic language of an. particularly in the modern era.

The artistic enterprise is identified with search, investigation and enquiry. Search and investigations were furthermore combined with studio experiments to give this research credence in the course of this work. "Art as such contains nothing that is due to intellect. Its essence is that of an activity by which we become conscious of our own emotions. Collingwood (1955:292). Consciousness that brings to bare our emotions which we are not yet conscious of at the level of physical experience This is where art plays a major role in what it knows best to do, solving a problem in purely physical experience. Some surface finishes in sculpture could generate emotional feelings of lovely stories or a glance of it may generate a repulsive feeling down the beholder.

Collingwood therefore opines that this might further be, not only a problem. Such as art exists to solve, but the only problem which it can solve. It might seem in other words, that psychical emotions are the only emotions which art can express. For all other emotions are generated at levels of experience subsequent to the emergence of consciousness. When a plaque for an award is to be made, considerations are not given to materials such as Portland cement for a portable award gift as at those knowing different kinds of materials and their usages. This will enable the sculptor to address the issue of his subject matter and make a presentation plaque for an award, in Much case the sculptor may have to consider fiber glass and probably glass Perspex to be finished in some gold leaf lining. '1 tic extent to which the individual sculptor gets involved with knowing his finishing materials which can be applied intrinsically or extrinsically, will determine how the finished product will appeal to the recipients and the beholders alike.

Andrews (1966:76) declares clearly that it is usually necessary to curb the beginner's imagination, for generally his ambitious ideas are a little too complicated for his technical abilities. In order words, the beginner in sculpture often has great difficulty in relating his idea to the material to be used. For this reason, this project will be assisting those that find themselves in the like of the beginners of sculpture, to select adequate finishing materials

that will be suitable to the particular sculpture material used especially when it concerns cast sculptures made in cement, clay, fiberglass and plaster of Paris.

According to Ikpe (1996:35). "Aesthetics is an expressive behavior from both the sender and the receiver during a communication process. As an expressive behavior, it involves the human senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste" he further concludes, adopting the definition of aesthetics from Etuk and Akpan (1990 29) from Zettle (1973) slating aesthetics to mean a study of certain sense perceptions and how these perceptions can be most effectively clarified, intensified and interpreted through a medium... for a specific recipient.

Conclusion

The use of different finishing materials enhances the surface quality of such ornaments. An activity that involves the sense, especially in the appreciation of physical beauty must include the sight, feeling and of course the space such an object that is appreciated, occupies. Therefore, the choice of material for a sculpture of this nature must be highly preferred, bearing in mind the particular weather condition, in which the sculpture is exhibited.

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