7.
SCULPTURE AND ADAPTATION; EFFECTIVE FORMS IN *ALLO*

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Introduction

With the growing religious intolerance, coupled with general change in the socio-economic order in the modern society, acts of misconception, hostility and neglect on sculpture and craft abound; and so are calls for the protection of noble civilizations (Heathcote, 1976; Whitehand, 2009). Generally however, the generation of intriguing physical forms for aesthetic enhancement of the environment has been the primary responsibility of sculptural art in human development; and this should not change under any disguise. In order to cope with this responsibility, different methods or techniques of generating forms, using different materials, have been developed in sculpture. Beautiful forms are, for instance, generated through modeling, casting, carving, construction, and installation of familiar and unfamiliar objects or materials. This way, sculpture bridges civilizations (Stokstad, 2008; Whitehand, 2009).

One technique of sculpture in which contrasting view-points are correlated in a form is adaptation. Adaptation can simply be described as a kind of installation in which forms of craft and found-objects are adapted or presented and regarded as sculptures (McEvilley, 1999; Buhari, 2015). In it, substantial qualities of the original object or craft remain noticeable and assimilated in an unusual disposition. Craft and objects that are usually associated with a singular functionality would start to be considered in ranges of possibility. According to Sullivan (2010), sculptors have thus, continued to adapt objects into sculpture, not only to generate new forms but also to blend conceptions. Believing that the merger of craft and art, like in the traditional African society, would save the status-quo, therefore, the artist attempted to adapt wooden slate, *allo* (a relatively flat wooden board on which Arabic-Quranic verses are written, in practice by traditional Muslims), into sculpture. World Bank Education Programme (2015), notes that, indigenous knowledge system enhances general development.

In the research, effective sculpture forms inherent in *allo* were explored for increased appreciation of the subject. It was expected that its outcome would help in bridging the gap or diffusing controversy in the perception of traditional craft and modern sculpture, especially in regions where great value is attached to *allo* and sculpture is misconstrued.

Work Procedure

Practice-based research method, involving observation, sketching, and studio-manipulations, was the type of research adopted in this work. According to Candy (2006), practice-based research is most suitable for a research in which inference is drawn from created physical form, as is the case in this work. In the preliminary work, before the production of the sculptures in the studio, research-subject, *allo*, was examined via observation of forms. The examination was done first at the natural school setting (*Makarantan Allo*) where the characteristic qualities, especially the placement styles of the board, were studied in relation to forms, and secondly in isolation where a piece or form was left to physical distressing and weathering effects.

A*llo* was then burnt, cut, soaked in water, and chipped. All these actions produced diverse effect on the physical form of the board. The result of this exercise was sketched out and incorporated in the planning and execution of the main practical works. The techniques of work adopted in the studio were carving, burning and modeling.

All woodwork in this research was realized through carving and burning processes. Cuts and lines were made on wood to form a design and when a desired design was reached, the surface was burnt in fire especially the incised and lower parts. After burning, the plane or top areas were sand-papered clean, leaving the soot or effect of the fire at the low areas. Before carving started, however, elements and forms observed from *allo* were composed onto other pieces of wood. Here, sketches were first made on paper and pieces of wood that could suit the design sought and the sketch was transferred onto the wood and carved out. In some cases, pieces of wood were critically observed and *allo* forms and characteristics found on them were defined. Tools used for the woodwork included power saw, grinder, drill, router, handsaw, hammer, knife, chisel, gouge, fire and water.

Some other works in this research were realized through modeling. Works were modeled through three methods of direct material modeling, indirect-cast material modeling and direct-cast material modeling. In direct material method, observed forms of *allo* were modeled with the final medium (concrete mixed at a ratio of three cement to one sharp sand) direct onto an armature to achieve the desire design. Similarly, the desired design was modeled direct with clay and the leather-hard green was scooped, bone-dried and fired in a kiln into terra cotta. In indirect cast, the desired design was modeled with clay and cast into another material (concrete mixed at same ratio as direct method), discarding the clay model. Waste mould technique of casting was adopted in all such works. For the direct cast method, the design was basically modeled with clay and stone chips bound with cement and water at a ratio of four to one to half respectively. It was applied direct on the clay to reach the complete desired size and details. The clay core was removed after three days.

The immediate environment provided sources of inspiration for the choice of the subjects or themes in the execution of the works. The dressing style and the general out-look of the Hausa, which can easily be related to the forms of *allo*, influenced the figures expressed in the works. Social issues like prayer, charity, unity, and search for knowledge as expressed on *allo*, as well as contemporary politics and conflicts among the people, formed most of the subjects considered in this research. Arabic letters and numbers as written on the board were adapted to enhance aesthetic qualities of works produced. Most titles for the works are in Hausa, the language of the people. The actual execution and realization of works followed two approaches: direct and indirect explorations.

Direct Exploration: In the beginning of the studio work, observed characteristic features of *allo* were adapted directly in their natural forms into sculpture, using different materials as media via the techniques given above. Most of the works in this category are relief and in wood.

Indirect Exploration: In this second category, forms, possibilities and characteristic features of *allo* as observed in the first approach were related or associated to other natural objects. Attempts were made to adapt the forms in representing figures at different postures. Here, figures were reduced to basic shapes and represented in simple (few) *allo*-forms. Attention was also given to adaptation of *allo*-forms to create sculpture composition. Natural *allo*-forms were further transformed in stylized and rhythmic application to handle artistic subjects and themes in a group composition. In some cases, *allo*-forms were combined with forms and structures of other crafts in

a single composition. Sometimes, a rhythm was achieved by repeated placement of a particular form, depending on the nature of the problem the work was geared to solve.

Finishing: Woodwork was finished by smoothing its surface with sand-paper and spraying it with varnish. Before spraying however, the work was deepened into a solution of insecticide to prevent insect attack. Work on fresh wood was allowed a period of about eight months to season before the finishing. It seems there is no finishing really in woodwork; new ideas kept coming and most of the finished works were retouched, adjusted and finished again and again; some were finished up to four times.
For works in concrete, finishing was done by polishing the surface with emotion paint; some in white and some in mixed colours. Polishing with mixed colours was done in a wash manner with kerosene in order not to completely hide the natural character of the medium. In both wood and concrete works, polishing was not made to shine; colours were rather diffused to be recessive and friendly to the environment.

Results of Preliminary Studies
The results of the preliminary works which gave rise to the development of the main sculpture pieces in this research are documented in forms of sketch. After careful observation and physical tests of *allo*, (figure 1), the following discoveries were made: *allo* is made of a plane board with three projections (one at the top and two at the lower end); there is a protrusion at the centre which makes the plane body roundish; *allo* can warp, crack, decay or burn if "miss-handled"; sculpture processes that can take place directly on *allo* are carving, installation and construction; and different placement styles of *allo* create different impressions to the artistic sensation.

Bouwmann (2006) gives a detailed description of allo:

> A wooden piece on which both sides are written on in a handwriting. Other texts that have been washed away are also still visible. The front is nicely cut and polished and shows a slight rounding. The back is likewise polished but the grains of the wood are clearly visible. The text shows the beginning verse I till 3 from the first 'sura' of the Quran.

Figure 1: A Cross Section of Weathered Allo Forms, Wood, 2002, Researcher's Collection.

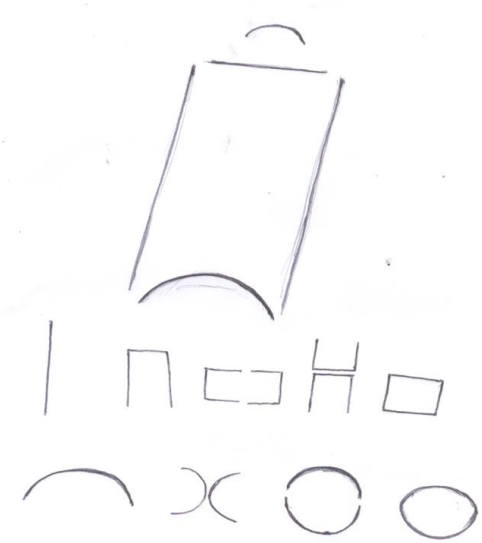

Figure 2: Forms and Lines in Allo, Ink on Paper, 2002.

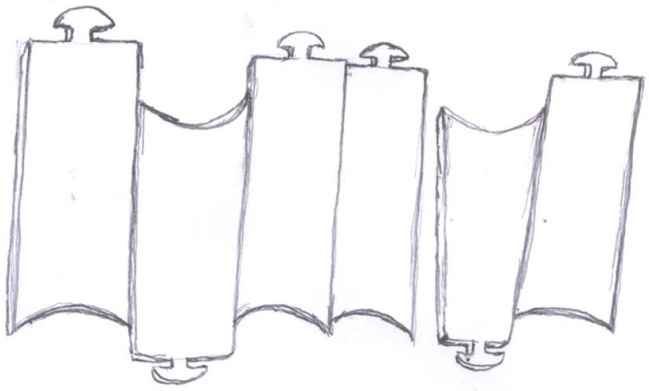

Figure 3: Placement Pattern of Allo, Ink on Paper, 2002.

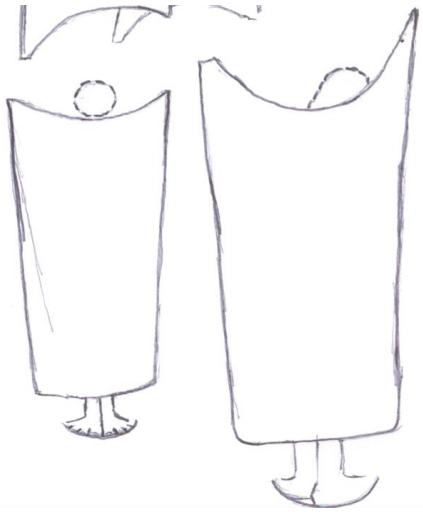

Figure 4: Associating *Allo* with Figure, Ink on Paper, 2002.

The physical structure of *allo* was also analyzed (figure 2) and it was discovered that the plane body of *allo* is made up of three structural lines and one curved line. Two of the structural lines run vertically and meet one horizontal line at about angle 90^{o}, forming two square shoulders at the upper part. The curved line is almost a semi-circle with both ends blending into the vertical lines, creating two pointed ends used as the stand at the lower part. In some *allo*, the handle is a piece in a crescent form, carved separately and fixed on the body support at the position of head and neck. In other cases, the handle is a small square attached to the center of the horizontal line at the position of the head in a figure. Both concave and convex lines as well as plane-geometric lines are obtainable in *allo*. Manipulation of these lines creates a variety of forms like square, rectangle, triangle, circle, and semi-circle. Most times, the physical structure of *allo* creates an impression of perspective as the width of the board appears wider at the lower end, and gradually reduces to the "shoulder".

It was discovered that at each position, *allo* appears like a different natural object and can symbolically be used to represent such an object in sculpture; with or without supplement. Positioned to stand up erect, *allo* looks like a man walking and wearing a free gown (agbada), with a hat on his head. When different sizes are placed to over-lap in this position, the collection of *allo* would look like an academic procession. When placed side by side (figure 3), it looks like a prayer session of some clerics. When *allo* is turned up-side-down (figure 4), with a little manipulation, it looks like a person standing up erect, wearing free-gown, with his two hands raised up, and the handle forming the feet. Any small supplement at the center of the upper curve, which appears like raised hands, would represent the head. When an *allo* is placed horizontally, it looks like a bird flying. The curved handle, when placed, with the two end-points pointing up, looks like a crescent. If two of it are placed together, with two ends of each being at the tip of the other, it appears like a full moon.

This association readily provided symbolic forms with which natural objects were represented in sculptures designed in this research. Attempts were also made at this stage to adapt these observed characteristic features of *allo* in their natural forms into sculpture. This stage indeed laid the foundation on which further works were developed.

Results of Direct Exploration

For the purpose of modesty, only three works produced at each stage of the exploration techniques are presented in this paper. Although most of the works in this category were wood, a piece of modeled relief (figure 5), is included to capture its full scope.

Figure 5: *Majelisa*, Concrete, 40cm X 46cm, 2002.

Figure 5 is titled *Majelisa*, and it is a direct-cement modeling used to adapt the overlapping placement and natural weathering processes of *allo* (tilting, cutting, cracking, and decaying) on a non-wooden medium. The work suggests three figures in alignment and the individual tendency to tilt from one group and align to another, typical of our political assemblies, the *Majelisa*. The work, measuring 40 x 46cm, is proposed to decorate the wall of a state or national assembly chamber.

Figure 6: *Ilimi*, Wood, 91cm X 58cm, 2002.

In figure 6, forms of *allo* were carved and burnt on wood to suggest three figures gazing at heavenly bodies. The heavenly bodies like the star, moon, and sun are also suggested with *allo*-forms. The simple placement style of *allo* pieces represents the figures in a kind of academic procession. The

general disposition here highlights the importance of in-depth study (*Ilimi*) in the overall well-being of mankind.

Figure 7: Ranka Shi Dade, Wood, 127cm X 61cm, 2002.

Figure 7 is a nine-piece work made to consider the effect of *allo*-forms with other crafts in a single design. The work shows planes, curved and structural lines of *allo* mixed with pieces of calabash. It shows *allo*-forms turned with the curved stands upward and the handles downward, symbolizing a session of a musical group. A piece of calabash (tilted like *allo*), placed at the upper end of the *allo*-form suggests the head. The bigger piece of calabash around the center part of the work suggests a musical instrument. The curved and structural lines looking like the head and neck of an *allo*-handle, suggests a hand on the musical instrument. The forms representing the *allo*-handle at the lower part of the work, suggest the feet of a figure. The work symbolizes a collective good wish and respect of a leader (*Rankashi dade*) always demanded on the subjects by religion. The proposed location for the work is the palace of a traditional ruler.

Results of Indirect Exploration

Works in this category are mainly modeled concrete in the round. Three pieces are also presented and discussed here.

Figure 8: Meditation, Concrete, 38cm X 28cm X 36cm, 2006.

In figure 8, the concave and convex natures of allo-forms are adapted to suggest a kneeling figure realized in concrete. The form of allo-handle is placed at an unusual position, suggesting a head of a figure in meditation. The work measuring 38cm x 28cm x 36 cm, also explores the standing ends of allo, in which one is usually more pointed and a little longer than the other.

Figure 9: *Mai Gida*, Stone Chips, 56cm X 42cm X 20cm, 2004.

In figure 9, the curving, structural, and protruding features of *allo* are adapted in realizing a simple reclining figure in stone chips. The perspective tendency of *allo* is particularly explored in the work which measures 56cm x 42cm x 20cm.

Figure 10: The Story that Kevin Told, Concrete, 43cm X 41cm X 28cm, 2002.

The work shown in Figure 10 is a round cement-cast, influenced by the forms and placement styles of *allo*. It suggests multiple figures in variety of sizes, lumped together like pieces of *allo* after a study session. A circular form (generated by joining two curved *allo*-forms) perforates the chest area of each figure in a position little different from the other, creating yet a difficult task in casting. This problem was solved by adopting the semi-circle curve of *allo* in partitioning of the clay-model during mould-taking. The work symbolizes holocaust; currently perpetrated at all corners of our country. It is proposed to be sited at the front space of a war museum.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to aesthetically adapt forms generated from allo in the creation of sculptures. In the process of work, *allo* was observed and its forms and associated elements were directly and indirectly adapted in production of 24 works out of which six were presented and discussed in this paper. Two of those presented are wood, and the other four are concrete and compressed stone chips. They are mainly abstract representations and symbolism of some social concepts used in highlighting chastity and condemning crime (which *allo* is committed to) in human relation. Characteristic features of *allo* are observable on each of the works.

Analyses of the works showed the following findings: At any position and at any slightest touch, *allo* suggests one object or another, aesthetically rich in sculpture composition; *Allo* possesses forms which could be used in realizing most postures and other features of figures in simple ways; *Allo* harmonizes easily with other crafts and its forms are adaptable to many media and processes of sculpture. Both relief and round sculptures in wood, concrete, stone and terra cotta produced in this research have forms of *allo.*

It was concluded that there is only a thin line, which separates *allo* as craft and *allo* as art. Natural weathering processes like cracking, tilting, burning, decaying and physical actions of carving, modeling, casting, and placement style transformed *allo* into sculptures. The works have stood both academic and professional exhibitions and attracted great appreciation and commendation. Thus, *allo* and sculpture are well related both in structure and essence; harmonizing conceptions of them is possible and resolving the controversies about them tenable.

Recommendations

Based on the outcome of this research, the following recommendations are made:

(a) Artist-researchers should look more into the possibilities in *allo* and execute public sculptures that are influenced by its features as the exhibitions of the results of this research have mainly been indoors.

(b) There are still many other traditional crafts that have not been related to art. Artists should be encouraged to adapt them, craft being a good complement to art.

(c) Exploration of local crafts should be made compulsory in art institutions in order to blend civilizations and save noble cultural identities from being completely eroded.

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