

TITLE PAGE

**DEVELOPMENT OF SCULPTURE WITH ORGANIC FORMS: AN EXPLORATION WITH
CALABASH FOR THE EXTERIOR SPACE**

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PG/MFA/08/49355

**A PROJECT REPORT IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
AWARD OF THE MASTER DEGREE IN FINE ART (MFA- SCULPTURE)**

**DEPARTMENT OF FINE AND APPLIED ARTS,
UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA**

SUPERVISOR

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OCTOBER 2014

CERTIFICATION

Tafida, Samuel Wesley, a postgraduate student in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria Nsukka with Reg. No. PG/MFA/08/49355 has satisfactorily completed the requirement for course and research work for the degree of Master in Fine Art. The project report is original and has not been submitted in part or full for any other diploma or degree of this or any other university.

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Supervisor

Date

Dr. V. E. Ali
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Date

External Examiner

Date

APPROVAL PAGE

This project report has been approved for the award of the degree of master in Fine Art (MFA) in this university.

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External Examiner

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Finally to God Almighty who granted me the grace to start and finish this programme, all glory be to you.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my students Rukaiya Hassan, Hauwa Chindo, Mbeti Williams, Stella Matthew, Pembri Jonah, Rahila Garba, Ayashe Kefas, Hauwa Bakari, Blessing Sani, Zainab Tallafi, Akinmudi Aken, Godiya Mamud, Marvelous Ekuma , Keziah Daniel and Mbasire Geoffrey all of blessed memories, for the opportunities life never gave you.

PREFACE

The modern artist is in constant search of access to improve technology that makes possible the use of foreign medium, tools and devices as a result of constant demand of our growing society. This new trend has drastically shifted the focus of most African artists who clamour for the aesthetics and to 'what is selling now syndrome'. Ikwuemesi (n.d.) concur with this view as he says 'In the aftermath of post-modernism when it remained fashionable for artists to return to their roots and history in search of an identity Nigerian art, like much of other African art, has become very eclectic'. The researcher is influenced by the earthiness and spontaneity of some African art media. And if you look back, you will understand that since the emergence of cubism, the Europeans have always look to Africa for something novel. This research work titled: Development of Sculpture with Organic Forms: an Exploration with Calabash for the Exterior space, is not intended to introduce a new medium that could compete or substitute stone, steel or marble in terms of durability. It is however an

exploration with organic medium to stretch its limit as to be placed out door. Let us not be deceived, nothing is actually permanent, rather great ideas attached to the most mundane of medium possesses the tendency to outlive the generation of its maker.

This research work provides in print, the experience of the several processes the researcher undertook both in and out of the studio in a bid to establish calabash as a viable medium for sculpture that can survive outdoor.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Most natural objects have organic shapes because they reflect the free-flowing aspects of precise species and hence their irregular shapes. Some characteristics that help us to appreciate the shapes and forms such as surface, weight and mass, material composition and position in space add to our experiences and heighten our visual pleasure. When we draw or construct shapes, we need to understand how to interpret qualities such as lightness or heaviness. There is a striking difference in the quality or value contrast between rendering a cloud and rendering a rock or a mountain form. While the former has subtle flow and diffused edge, the latter is described with sharp surface quality, coarse and edgy structure.

The surface and shape of the calabash are two of many qualities that not only inform but also delight the eye. Visually experiencing smooth textured surface is often linked with past tactile encounters with the human skin. For the sightless, the tactile experience translates important impressions from fingers to brain. Both eyes and fingers can move easily across glass, finished wood, polished metal or processed gourd. However, some natural medium can be transformed into eerie or surrealistic forms by changing their texture or juxtaposition their various forms. Invariably, our psychological responses are heightened by seeing such unusual effect where shapes or forms are

positioned in space to generate a force or create a feeling of repose and stability, visual strength or action.

Nature, with its almost unlimited supply of forms, is a great source of design. It has always been a primary stimulus for artist and the calabash being an object of nature, could perhaps be an interesting medium for the researcher to begin.

In fact, there is no household item that is so responsive to human need as did the calabash in the ancient time. Its multiple functions to different people have not only made it common to all cultures but also popular. The etymology of the word came from sources that are quite equivocal. One came from Spanish '*Calabaza*, another, possibly from Arabic *Car'ayabisa* dry gourd or from Persian "*Kharabuz*, used for various large melons; or from pre-Roman Iberian *Calapacia*.' When people of temperate regions used the word calabash they are referring usually to the fruit of the calabash gourd. Or bottle gourd, *Legenaria Siceraria* (*Legenaria Vulgaris*) an annual vine of the *Cucurbitaceae*.

According to Bailey (1956) 'The original species of *Legeneria Siceraria* is probably from tropical Africa and eastern India. The Gourd families which include vine species that may exceed 700, with at least 100 different genera, are actually primordial."

Morton (1957) adds that 'the variously shaped and multi-coloured fruits of this species, dried and often varnished are usually utilitarian or familiar as decorations". While some use the calabash as bird houses, food conservers, dippers or ladles and musical instruments and so on, others see it as sacred.

Another variety of the hard-shelled fruit is the *crescentia cujete* or *crescentia alata*, popular as the calabash tree. Wayne's Word (1996) acknowledged that 'there are two species of calabash

trees that grow wild in Mexico'(p4). Similar species of *crescentia cujete* that is found in parts of Nigeria, however, is easily identified because it has simple leaves and gourd-like fruits. Yvonne (1995) confirms that gourds grow in most parts of Africa. When cut and dried, they are used as food bowl, serving dishes and sound boxes for musical instruments.

The word calabash and gourd have been used interchangeably over the years to mean the same thing, and they will also be used in this manner in this project report.

It is rather fascinating to note the diverse ways gourds are appreciated around the world. Modecai (1978) admits that, 'So important were gourds to the Haitians in the 1800's that gourd was made the national currency by the then governor of northern Haiti, Henri Christopher. To this day, the standard coin of Haiti is called the *gourd*'

In other parts of the world, the value of gourds goes beyond finances and ventured into food and health. According to a leading authority on gourd, Whitaker and Robinson(1986) 'early people in the new world that are diet conscious know that squashes are low in calories, high in fiber, and some are rich in Vitamin 'A'. They can be eaten raw in Salad, or fried, boiled, steamed, pickled, candied, dried, baked or made into pies and bread' especially by the Asians and Caribbean.

The ancient Chinese remedy for health recommends that doctors carry medicine inside calabash because it has fabled properties for healing. Whitaker and Robinson (1986) accept that the *hulu* is believed to absorb negative earth-based *qi* (energy) that would otherwise affect health hence, its use as traditional Chinese medicine core. In Hawaii, the ATM machines of University of Hawaii Federal Credit Union (UHFCU) are labeled *Kalabash* perhaps because they can be thought of as a large serving bowl for twenty-dollar bills. Further influence of calabash was evident on the soccer city stadium that hosted the FIFA world cup 2010. This great structure in South Africa has a shape inspired by calabash.

The *Crook Neck* gourds are carrier vessels for the popular liquors (*palm wine, brukutu, pito, ogogoro* etc) of the West African region. Also, *Kora*, a harp lute used today as the symbol of the most prestigious African music award is adopted from a calabash musical instrument. On a humorous note, people in most West African countries use the title 'second in calabash' often to refer to someone who is the second in command.

The BBC news of 6th January 2009 reported on 'Nigeria biker's vegetable helmets' where calabash was used to avoid a law requiring the wearing of helmet on motorcycle. Unlike the bikers, the people of *Argungu* took a positive twist by perfecting the art of fishing on round gourds as floaters. Most especially when they display their skills annually during the fishing festival in *Kebbi* state, Nigeria.

Summit & Wides (1996) reports that, New Guinea however, has one of the most remarkable use for gourds. Interestingly, is the use of *penial sheath gourds* for their males, which has considerable speculation among anthropologist about the purpose of such gourds. Yet, it is agreed that they serve more than just being a protective device for the penis but, also serve an important social function.

The calabash has been used to transmit words that rejuvenate the spirit of Africa in her people, but the mysteries of this great fruit linger like the myths in the tales that they carry. The religious life of the African people was characterized by the uses of certain objects and vessels during their worship sessions in the ancient times. This was due to the presence of rituals in the worship pattern of the indigenous religion and one of the most prominent vessels used during those rituals is the calabash. The same calabash serves as containers for storing concoctions from the native doctors meant to ward off evil spirits, thieves, or even to charm people. Other circumstances where the

calabash is outstanding included masquerade dance theatres and burial rites, where women and children are mostly forbidden from participating.

Such uses of the calabash as the ones mentioned above have made it appear hideous, extremely sacred and repelling to some modern day Africans. The body of work intended in this research is however an attempt to pry into some of these mysteries through the explorations of calabash as a sculptural medium

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite its inherent qualities, prolong history of use, and commonality, work produced in calabash are stereotypically relegated to the confines of craft, religion or fetish, and not acceptable as sculptural pieces.

Works of art that art presented in calabashes are thus restricted to an aspect of art that have shallow meanings and which are produced by common skilled people". This is because most calabash works particularly in Africa either serve one utilitarian function or the other. But this case is even made worse by the introduction of plastics as substitute containers at a relatively low price which has adversely resulted in the low patronage of calabash works for either household utensils or decorative items.

From the available literature reviewed for the purpose of this studio research, there is no evidence of free standing large scale calabash outdoor sculpture in the open space in Nigeria elsewhere. In spite of the immense potentials that the calabash holdes for creative expressions, particularly in sculpture, artists have scarcely explored the medium elaborately for their studio works. Apart from the Fulani milk maids' calabashes which incidentally are regarded as craft, all other calabash works are mixed-media pieces where calabash is brought in as supporting element in the

composition. However, subjecting calabash to critical studio explorations to discover creative potentials locked in the medium and the means to exploit the potentials have formed the thrust of this studio enquiry.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objective of the research is: to create free standing sculpture with whole gourds so as to accentuate the variety of forms inherent in the medium, in an attempt to establish calabash as a viable sculptural medium.

The researcher will through exhibition of the research work rejuvenate appreciation for calabash from the public.

To stretch the context of the use of calabash to such limit of being placed outdoors.

To evoke a consciousness in the minds of government and policy makers on the need to formulate policies that promote Nigeria cultural relics.

The researcher is focused on exploration with various calabash forms for display outdoors with a view to reviving a public appreciation for the medium.

1.4 Limitation

Due to low patronage, calabash is scarce thereby, making it expensive in the few places where it is found. The acquisition of the product has become perilous lately due to the civil unrest of “Boko Haram” in most parts of the northern Nigeria. And in the eastern and western parts of Nigeria

the product is not found in the open market unless one travels to the villages. The challenge in the southern part of Nigeria is that of difficult challenge most especially during the calabash harvest season.

Sequel to the above, transporting calabash from several parts of the country to Enugu has been herculean. Though the material is light weight it is bulky and therefore, takes up more space that transporters had to charge higher fares or refuse transporting the items a times.

These among many other factors like language barrier between the researcher and the people in some local community where calabash is found.; and also the fear due to stigma that calabash is considered fetish makes some people unwilling to dialogue with the researcher, thus, dwindled the pace of the research.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Sculptures in open spaces in various media have been done elsewhere and especially in Nigeria. The bulk of the work of this research is an attempt to stretch the context of the use of calabash to such limit of being placed outdoors. This is in addition to bridging the yawning gap of such pieces in a material like calabash: an unusual phenomenon in the Nigerian landscape.

To pave way for other artists to venture into the medium and explore its limitless unique characteristics.

Definition of Terms

Anansi- In Ghanaian myth; an epitome of wisdom or a trick-star, prominent in Ashanti

oral culture

Burkutu- A local brew made from sorghum popular in the northern part of Nigeria.

Ha-le-mau-mau- Hawaiian sacred mountain

Hulu- Chinese word for bottle gourd

Jibue-A Jenjo (a tribe in Karim-lamido LGA, Taraba State) word for ladle

Nyame- The God of wisdom in Ghanaian myth

Obatala- The creator of mankind in Yoruba myth.

Oduduwa- A Yoruba deity of good will

Ogogoro- A local gin distilled from coconut or palm tree.

Olodomare- The Yoruba word for the Almighty God.

Pele- Hawaiian goddess of fire, hospitality, kindness and reward.

Pito- The Hausa word for *burkutu* that is not yet fermented.

Poi- A Hawaiian word for portage.

Shantu- A popular musical instrument derived from calabash, usually played by women

and teenage girls in northern Nigeria.

Shinto- A Japanese cult that believes in the generative force of nature coexisting with

humankind.

Zana- Mat- fence made of straw / grass that is popular as screen, wall fencing in northern Nigeria.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter deals with the review of some relevant literature, especially as it concerns the environments, functionality and media of the array of works in this study. From the Stone Age to the present day, the use of sculpture reveals a history of multitude of functions. Whether enclosed within an architectural space, attached or free standing in the open air; Ogundipe (1988) states that “sculpture, from the pre-historic time has been executed to enhance the environment”.

According to Peterson (1997) ‘that environment thus including social, physical and metaphysical world of man’s state of being is in line with his many expedition’. Duchamp (1950) argues that creativity develops from exploring, experimenting, and the believe that you will better understand the possibilities inherent in a material if you see how human hands shapes them. Oldenburg (1976) concurred that one can transform everyday objects into art. He developed sculptural forms from common household object such as clothespin blown to an enormous scale. At such a gigantic size, these items appear both comical and frightening. He adds that the expansion celebrates the forms of the commonplace object and changes it into something surprisingly different. He explores and recognized the mysterious nature of everyday reality that no one had thought to be art.

Nevelson in Buser (2006) disagrees with Oldenburg. In her opinion, intuitively arranged found pieces in boxes stacked on top one another will make the solid shapes in the box both stand out from the far surface and sink into the shadowy depth of the box. The paradoxes of utilitarian objects and intuitive design, of regularity and irregularity in the design, with rich array of masses and dark voids, made Nevelson’s work appear mysterious like the indecipherable hieroglyphs on the walls of an ancient ruin.

Both the outline of a shape and the surface of a form carry messages. Artists often use free-form shapes and forms to symbolize living things. When they want to please and soothe viewers, they use shapes and forms with smooth curved outlines and surfaces that tempt us to touch them. When you see a certain shape or form in a work of art, you may think of an object from real life. Any feeling you have about the object will affect your feeling about the artistic work. Artists use this relationship between art and the environment to communicate to you.

Pfaff (2003) looks at it from another angle, that sculptures can be made to transform the whole of an interior space to create an environment into which the viewer enters and moves and which then surrounds the viewer on all sides. In her work *Neither Here Nor There*, the viewer becomes part of the art work.

The direction of this research is however, to examine how the inherent properties in an organic medium can enhance its proper utilization, which is rare. Few artists like Petah Coyne developed a personal style in sculpture in which she suspended large scale masses of organic material such as tree branches, hay, and mud from the ceiling of a gallery or museum.

Coyne (1953) affirms that 'working intuitively on each piece without preliminary drawing or clay models, just tied, wrapped and bound the material together with clay and mud is fun. "Branches and twigs often project from the mass like tentacles'. Her work challenges our expectation of sculpture because they are made from impermanent material, which in fact will disintegrate and rot, and also because the masses defy gravity. Instead of resting securely on the floor like ordinary sculpture, they are suspended. The air around them seems to be sustaining their growth; these enchanted creatures from some fairy tale are weighty yet seem fragile and vulnerable in space.

Sculpture is actually present in real space; it creates a duplicate of reality that shares the space we physically inhabit. Moore (1979), Postulates that the art of sculpture create solid object that take up real space, he went further to say that:

Sculpture has real mass-that is to say, solid forms and 3 dimensional shapes that have weight and project themselves into space. Sculpture also shape space itself. The empty spaces between the masses create voids that are an essential part of the experience of sculpture.

All objects take up space. A human being, for example, is a living, breathing form moving through space. Shapes and forms are defined by the space around and within them. Objects therefore depend on space for their existence.

Sensibility therefore, is the end-product of a complex process, partly deriving from the individual artist's psychological consciousness of the social forces prevailing in his environment.

Anatsui (1987) emphasize on the need for the artist to understand how to strike a balance between material, idea and the environment as an integrated whole. When he state that:

The image, being the eventual evidence of the working of the mind and sensibilities of the artist, is a total visual statement. It inevitably reflects what bugs the artist at a particular time, specific place and in a definite medium. Depending on how sensitive the artist is to these, his statement can be meaningful, authentic, relevant or otherwise.

Gabo (1916) agrees that the strength of an object is not to be identified with its massiveness. For example, a study modern bridge can be constructed of an openwork steel structure rather than a solid mass of stone. In *Constructed Head No 2*, the intersecting thin planes segregate and define the space of a human bust. They open up and 'measure' the space of the head. He confirms that 'The

cells of space became the primary element in the sculpture' (p112). Furthermore, the surrounding space easily invades the inner space such that the two became one environment. Gabo's work expresses the modern awareness of the continuity of all reality.

In the recent time, creation of sculptures for more practical functionality involves a performance by the people. The advent of scientific methods and discoveries had led to an industrial society, which brought a trend of the use of synthetic materials as well as a search for new order and social commentary. Janson (1973) declares that painters and sculptors were affected by the adverse effect of modern day machines, which may have brought the complexity which led to the world chaos. In appropriate response to such disorders the artist may often have to weld an array of factors to satisfy his personal and public desires. This may involve creating a not so aesthetically pleasing works but, works that are metaphoric and philosophical.

In the category of such sculptural object, Magic (2005) speaks of the many newly invented pneumatic material as balloons which serve as play sculpture in parks and garden. Quite noticeable in this trend too are ceramic sculptors like Lisa Lee who uses the face of a large granite boulder as a press mold for forming the front of her sculptures. The sloping granite rock form, which has no undercuts, keeps the tall piece from tipping over, and because of its porous the clay slab will easily release from the boulder. Similarly, Danielle Ashton found the bark of a large tree to be an ideal natural press mold, she pressed two clay slabs against a tree to capture the bark texture and let them dry.

Every medium has its own special qualities whether you want a feeling of warmth from the colours you are painting with, or a look of smooth perfection in the façade of the building. Oppenheim (1936) Accept that, the soft fur may appeal to the sense of touch, when referring to his work "object". He went further to say, "but when holding a liquid it would feel disgusting in the

mouth". The irrational combination of the two awakens contradictory sensation and at the same time heightens awareness. The fur-line teacup reconstructs a dream where the impossible juxtapositions can happen.

According to Brown (2006), some sculptors, unlike their predecessors of little more than a century ago, clearly do not feel bound-either by academic formulas or by the weight of cultural tradition – to a common mode of representing.

Arleo (2004) insists that "sometimes a work of art taps more deeply into us when it has no specific features and so resonate as an archetype". It is not enough to only render the shape, size and position in space. One must also think of its intrinsic nature: its purpose, meaning, and how it feels to touch, knowing the texture, temperature, depth, and opacity of the medium bring intimacy.

Many natural media are manageable because there is a sort of natural economy in doing things and seeing the result in a few days or within a few minute, while the instinct is still driving you to work.

Kimio (1987) says, 'Although no one style, medium or subject dominates contemporary Japanese art, much of it does spring from ideas or beliefs that have been integral to 'Shinto', a belief in the generative forces in nature and in humankind'. Despite their relatively abstract nature, his work asserts the life forces found in natural materials, thereby engaging viewers in a consideration of their own relationship to nature.

Mattes (2004) is an intriguing example because her work evokes in us the action of water on geological formation on clay, which she says "suggests a metaphor for the soul's journey through life. Whatever the artist medium of choice in sculpture, when you work in the studio with a material,

whatever you do it is resisted at times by the material. But it is during such engagement and interaction between the material and the artist that great ideas are born.

2.2 Sources of Inspiration

in recent years, the use of calabash as house hold utensils and container are fast being replace with plastics, which is modern and more hygienic than the calabash. Below are pictures of plastics containers showcased with content, even in the most remote village



Fig 0.1: A palm wine and palm oil dealer's shop.



Fig. 0.2 Plastic containers as household utensils

Similarly, many sculptures have turned to modern synthetic media such as plastic, which can be cast or painted to look like a variety of other material. It is good to follow the trend but, it is catastrophic to do so at the expense of social values and artistic intellectualism.

Yusuf (2006) Opines that “ Within a broad spectrum of functions of sculpture engendered by human needs both practical and aesthetic, the artist may often have to weld an array of factors to Satisfy his personal and public desires.”

They may involve creating aesthetically pleasing works to satisfy certain needs all picks for inspiration. Whether it is the ‘Bear’ by Tim Hawkinson of a massive 270,00lbs of stone or Magdalena Abakanowicz’s ‘Back’ of organic fibrous material, they relate obviously, to a collection of object, to assemblage and to additive sculpture. Organic medium obviously has a tendency to withstand the forces of nature regardless of the appearance. Intriguing works of Uchechukwu : *The Globe* ‘made of hundred of stories fuse together by a network of metal that creates, outdoors.’

Surprisingly, so can a fragile strand of straw or raffia when tightly fitted or knitted together to form a thatched roof like the typical *zana* matted fence that is popular in the northern part of Nigeria.

The inherent qualities and not the physical appearance of the medium should be key to gain a bit of different reactions of aggregate of particles, or stratification. Where in each case, the material itself remains the structure and could appeal to our emotions.



Coyne
Branches,
with Clay.

© Whitney
York



"Roots" (1953)
Roots and Twigs

Museum New

MagdaLena Abakanowicz "*Backs*" Organic Fibrous Material (80pieces 1976-1982)

Size: 24 X 19 $\frac{5}{8}$ " X 21 $\frac{5}{8}$ "; 27 $\frac{1}{4}$ " X 22" X 26"; 28 $\frac{1}{4}$ " X 23 $\frac{1}{4}$ " X 27 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

© Preble (1999) Art forms: An Introduction to Visual art. Longman USA



Kimio T; Title: '*branches*'(1987)13"1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " X 14'9 $\frac{9}{16}$ " X 3'11 $\frac{1}{4}$ "TreeBranches .Paris.



©Top garden. Zakibiam Benue State Medium;Straw(2008)



Onyishi U.; *The Globe* ,Medium: Stone and Metal; (2004) 7ft diameter. University of Nigeria Nsukka.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The body of work in this research was carried out in the studio. However, several information about calabash that were gotten via the internet, book and journals turned out to be most helpful to the researcher. Exploring different arrangements of calabash has in a way sharpen the perception of the researcher in creating composition in space; noticing how tension develops between flat and curved shape, how jagged forms and soft forms suggest different kinds of feelings.

Idea- Inspired by the few artist who have successfully worked with organic medium for outdoor sculptures regardless of the durability of such a medium to withstand the constant change in weather and temperature in the face of the present global warming.

The researcher studied works of scholars like Abdulrasaq Yusuf, Onyishi Uche, Kimio Tsuchiya, Petah Coyne, Magdalena Abakanowicz and so on. Ultimately that motivated the need for researcher to explore calabash as a medium that is common place yet, which has potentials that has not been fully exploited and utilized for sculpture.

The recent passing away of an African hero, one time south- African president, Dr. Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela became a eureka factor. The late hero has so many attributes that are similar to calabash for instance Longevity, cross-cultural influence, humility and lots more.

Sourcing of Materials.

Having purposely selected calabash as the main medium for exploration, the researcher went on a quest to collect them. Taraba state, Nigeria, is blessed with a lot of untapped resources. Agriculture is the mainstay of the people because of the vast fertile land, most of which are left to fallow. Most time, this fallowed ground however become breeding ground for vine gourd which grows wild. Aside wild, Tella in mutum-biyu Local Government Area of Taraba state is famous for its numerous calabash vine cultivation. The researcher has to either pick up some calabash from the street or buy from calabash farmers or middle men and sometimes have to travel outside Taraba to get other varieties that are not found within the state.



Fig 3.1A from talla market**Fig3.1B wild vine gourd inJjalingo, Taraba****Preparing the Calabash**

Most of the calabash are picked up from the streets, dump sites and people's back yard. Thus, needed to be properly cleaned before they are ready for use. With a little detergent in water and a damp hand towel, the outer surface is gradually wiped clean and allowed to dry. After about 30 minutes the calabash is either cut in halves or just a little hole is made to allow space for the artist to remove the fibrous fluffy interior that also consist of the seeds. Sand paper is then use to smoothen the inside and the rind.

Materials and tools

The major material for this project is the calabash. However, in the course of exploration Other materials come in either as reinforcements, supports, or adhesives to attach one part of an object to another. The materials used here include metal, rod, wire mesh, resin, local dye, glue, stainless steel pipe, binding wire which were carefully manipulated with tools like, pliers, screw driver, electric and manual jig saw, fret-saw , file, sand paper and fabricated cutting tools.

Step 1: Sketches.

Working in the studio the artist produced several thumbnail sketches. Sometimes the researcher carefully chose calabashes and gourds that could suits the selected sketches he intended to work on. But in most cases, intuition plays an important role. This is why some finished works look slightly or very different from the initial sketch. With the aid of marking tape and wood- glue, the

research occasionally produce a rough assemblage with calabash. if the composition is not satisfactory, it is recognized again and again until the artist finds in it a sense of order. Some works that do not make much sense are put aside. However, whenever an arrangement is found right and interesting the artist uses binding wire, copper wire, screws, bolts and knots to carefully couple the calabash tightly to secure a balanced composition. Some of the sketches produced during the studio works are shown below.

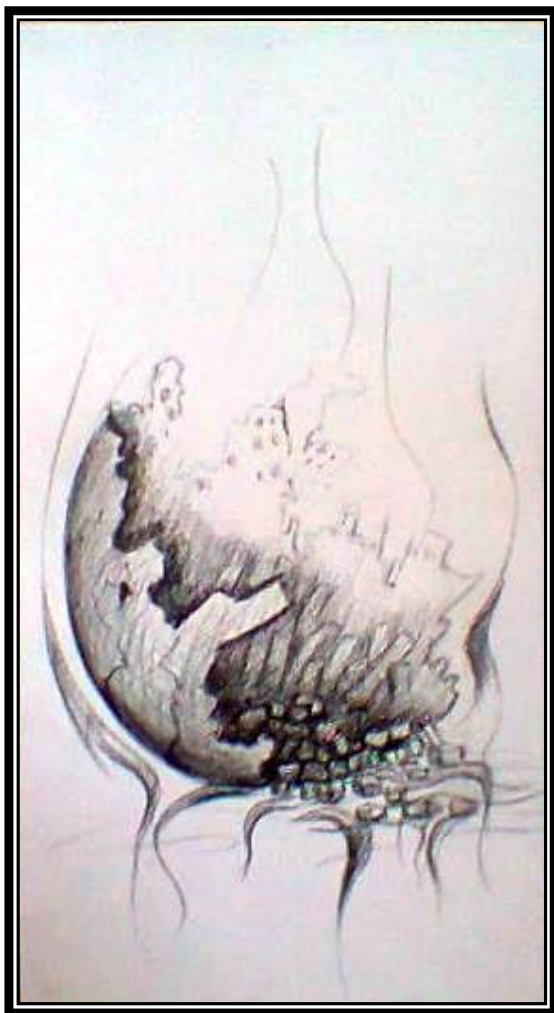


Fig. 3.2



Fig. 3.3



Fig. 3.4

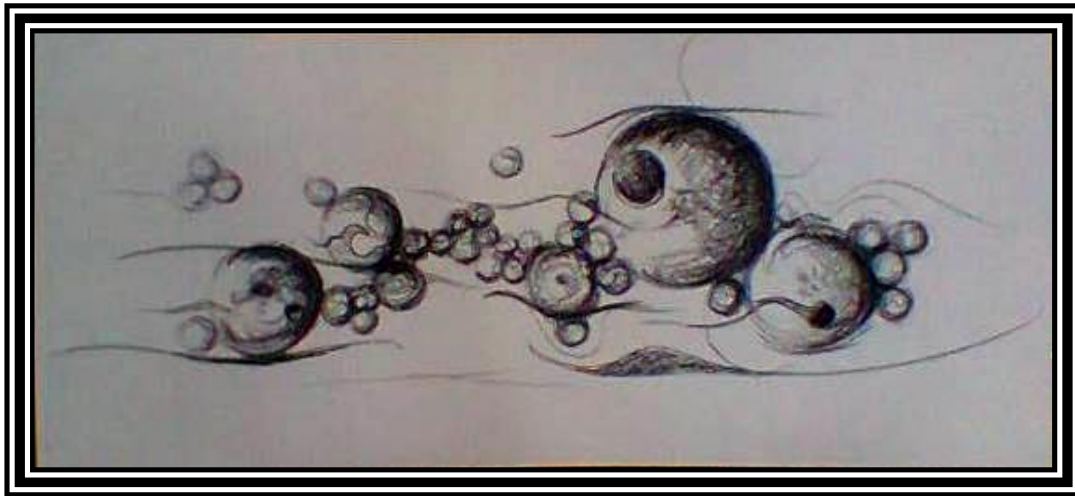


Fig. 3.5



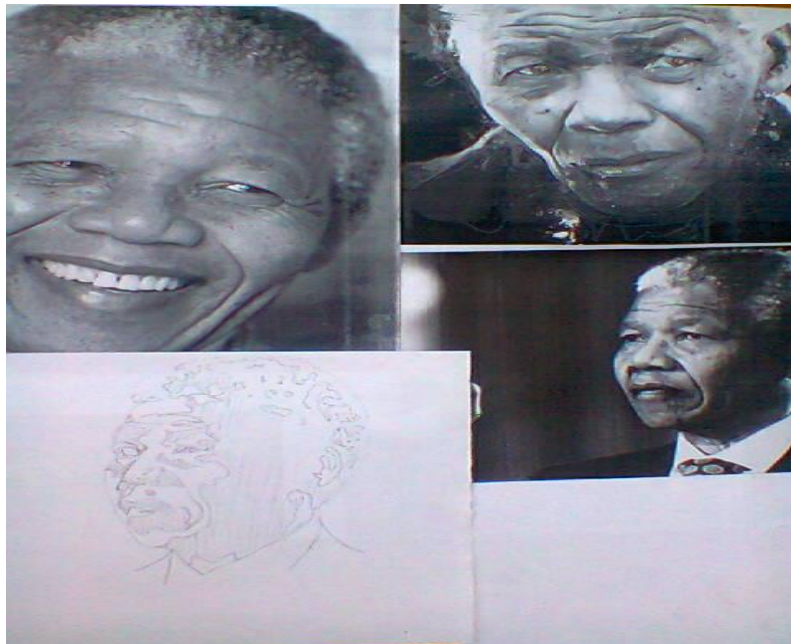
Fig. 3.6



Fig.3.7



Fig. 3.8 A
cross section of
Madiba's portrait
for studio
exploration



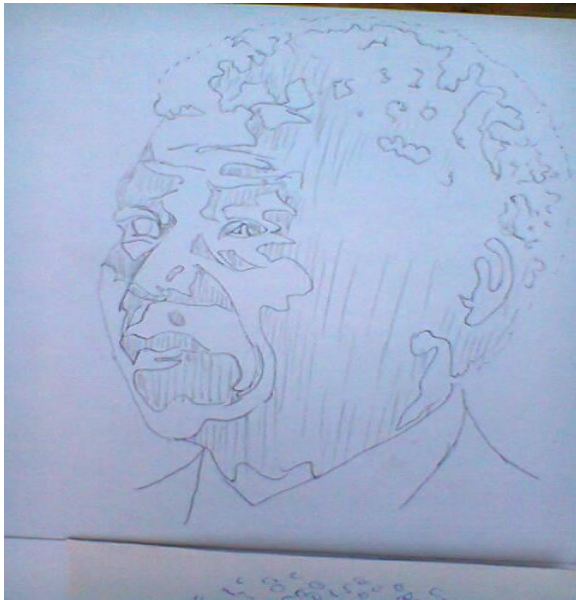


Fig.3.9 selected

portrait for sketches



Fig.3.10

Fig.3.11



Fig. 3.12

Fig 3.13 A

Exploration Drawing for Final Project



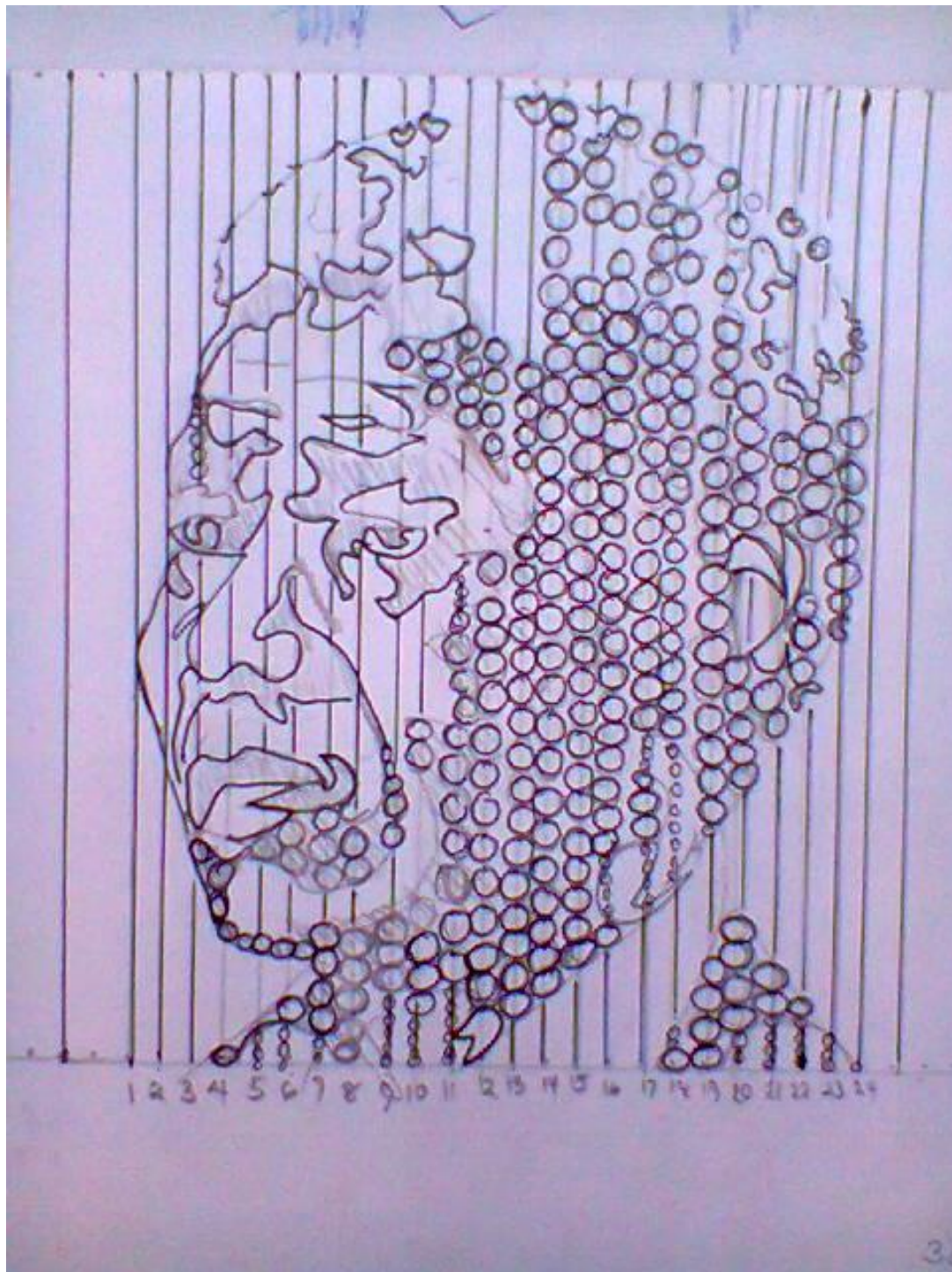


Fig. 3.13 B

Step 2 : Production of Maquette

Most of the sketches which the researchers feels a strong emotional attachment to, where enlarge to enhance their detail. While sometimes, Maquette in clay, stereo form and small calabash is use to produce a miniature replica of a work. This process actually helps refine ideas and solve three dimensional problems.



Fig. 3.14



Fig. 3.15

Step 3 : Installation

Haven
produce and how to
artist got 25 pieces
pipe and fixed them
about eight
The length of one
approximately 3
with the aid of
the maquette the



decided on what to
go about it the
of stainless steel
at a distance of
centimeter each.
pipe is
meter long. And
some sketches and
artist starts to

install some small round calabashes by allowing the pipe go through the holes already created on the calabash. The process is like fixing beads to a long needle.

Some places on the sketch were marked negative, meaning blank space while others were marked positively, meaning fix calabash. The artist uses ruler, masking tape and markers to calculate, measure and mark specific points on the pipe where certain calabash pieces will stay.

The whole idea is to enlarge the drawing to the scale of one centimeter on paper equals to twenty centimeter on ground.

Fig 3.16 The Artist Installing Calabash to Steel Pipes

Step4 Carving

Intricate areas like the position of the eyes and ears have to be cut out of larger of calabashes. Rather than stacking one onto another, these larger calabashes were carved specifically to fit exactly into those spaces they were meant to fill.

Step 5 : Application of Resin

The outer surface of the calabash is water proof hence, it can withstand weather if place outdoor. However some parts of the calabash that were cut are thereby exposing to insects, rain and other factors. That is why the artist have to use resin to make such areas equally water proof.

Finishing

For finishing , artificial coloring of some pieces of calabash is done with local dye for patina effect bearing in mind the monochromatic nature of the material. The result is the deep green, grey mixed with tan-brown hue that gives this three dimensional calabash an effect that looks more like an antique masterpiece. Finally it is coated with resin.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS:

ABACUS

This project piece intends to bring back calabash onto the landscape after many years of public neglect as household or industrial item. Such prevailing character can also be attributed to Nelson Mandela who's portrait the work bears. Mandela after many years of incarceration did not only walk as a freeman, he rose to become the first black president of the most popular apartheid nation in the world.

Calabash has been used for multiple of function; however, this researcher is stretching the limits in a bid to find new probabilities for the medium by placing it outdoor. Since this work is an impression, it is not expected that everyone should identify Mandela because it will take a forensic scientist to do so. But as a lay man or one who has just a peripheral interest in arts it will be possible to identify the silhouette of a human head in three quarter view that emerges from the scattered forms. Now! That is the Eureka moment. The point where the viewer has found out for himself what impression is behind the art.

In this chapter, the analysis of the main project is born out of exploring the character of the calabash as it relates to some social phenomenon that affect our views of life.

When several dynamic forms spring from base and their variously directed extensions are assembled, they create compound forms with compound surfaces which may either be virtual or tactile.

Description

At first glance, one will see a lot of small round objects unevenly distributed along some row of long vertical metal that are spaced at equal interval along the same line. Each round object of about 5cm to 12cm in diameter is attached to a pole of about 3 meters high, where a single vertical line may have close to twenty pieces of object attached while some may have fewer or even none. But as one recedes from the work, the forms tend to fuse and the picture emerges. The subject is the portrait of Nelson Mandela in calabash installed on vertically arranged stainless pipes, that incidentally dominate the landscape like a colossal Abacus .

Conceptual Approach

Installation can be described as a kind of art making which rejects concentration on a single object but a consideration of the relationship of objects and their context. Suspending a single round calabash is a beautiful thing. But when two join together, the combination injects a new element where the neutral flat plane between them detracts from the pure positive character of a single sphere. And as more round calabash join together, they ultimately become phenomena with smaller positive texture that become mass before us. The image eventually appears to be a dotted form that portrays an impressionist silhouette of Nelson Mandela.

Stylistic Approach

The calabash, despite its woody properties has certain qualities like unique shape, hollowed interior and its smooth water proof outer skin. The varied sizes and shapes of the calabash complied with its contrasting high weight has made the medium quite suitable for sculptural exploration.

Some specific sizes of calabashes, all of which were about the same size were installed one after the other, pole by pole to meet the design specification. It is almost like walking working with tessera, fixing one piece at a time to produce a huge mosaic in space like uche onyishs *Globe* of stones.

The technique adopted for this work is perhaps closely related to the impressionist painting technique of the 19th century France that has Manet and Renoir as its exponents. But the absence of colours made the pale-yellow, and brown hues of the calabash appear appealing against the complex net work of vertical pipe catered form

It is however, the concept of chiaroscuro that the artist adopted by turning areas of shade into forms and areas of high into space that remains remarkable because it is unconventional to sculpture. Painters and graphic artists have for years been expressing where light shade or shadow should be seen on their art. The sculptors, however, do not have that privilege since the direction of source of light or the position of the object when either of them is moved. But with this work the researcher has been able to capture light and shade outdoor regardless of illumination and time on a three dimensional piece.

The work still leaves us with a question, is it a burst or a portrait? Is it flat? or is it round? Stylization of any plant, animal or human figure is not necessarily deliberate. The culture in which one lives may condition one's capacity to see things in simplified form in relation to nature. Onyinish (2005) postulates that: "arts is a very complex journey with smilingly no terminus, a creative index from which the interaction between nature and man is gleamed" In effect this exploration has been

able to solve a sculptural problem, by providing the viewer the ability to see through a three dimensional Sculpture. Hence the environment is no longer the background but rather integrated into the work.



Fig. 3.16 B Title: “Abacus” medium: Calabash and Steel Pipes. 2014

Size 373 cm x 30 cm x 369cm © Tafida. S.W

An artistic masterpiece of this nature is difficult to describe in a few words, not so much because of its complexity, but due to the fact that it strikes awe into the observer. The uniqueness of the medium employed makes the work more interesting as one marvels at how much aesthetic good can hide in the midst of simplicity and common things like a calabash gourd. Secondly, such a sight is not an everyday occurrence in the world of sculpture or landscape decoration.

The use of calabash as a household item is very common among West African nations, as it symbolizes a lot of things in the households where it is so used. However, the functions of calabash exceed the utility role it plays in the home. It extends to a decorative piece as can be seen in calabash decoration which employs techniques of production like carving, painting, scraping, engraving, pyro-engraving, etc. This particular piece of work is a bold variation and an experiment in the vast world of art, giving dynamism and opening a new door into a planet of myriad further possibilities.

It is worthy of mention that this artwork is a vertical sculpture in the very round. Although the artist included materials like twine, steel pipes, resin etc., the main medium is calabash. In this approach, little or no decoration is made on the calabash; rather, the calabash is the decoration itself. Since the calabash is not decorated in any real way, it maintains its original yellow-ochre colour throughout the work which makes the work a monochromatic piece. Different shades and sizes of calabash were brought together in a composition which gives the semblance of dotted lines moving in different directions to form a picture. The picture so formed is not laid against any particular background but rather becomes an integral part of the landscape.

Taking a casual look at this artwork, the first time observer may see a fine but irregular, child-like arrangement of calabashes forming an abacus and held together by wires on steel pipes and marvel at the patience of the artist. Another closer look will still lead the eye in an entirely different direction to see a form or many forms in one entity. At some point, the forms on the far left of the work appear to be that of a contortionist dancer in a wild dance like Ben Enwonwu's 'Anyanwu'. This composition of seemingly unrelated objects is reminiscent of the surrealistic paintings which began around 1920 where artists sought to capture the unknown or imaginary realm of the inner workings of the human mind. By achieving this feat, the artist has displayed great skill even when that was not the intention.

As is the case with several artworks, what is often interpreted from an artwork may not be what the artist intended, rather, the human mind with its many capable interpretations gives additional meaning to a piece of work with factors like environment, time and emotion playing a vital role in determining meaning.

At a more distant view, the myriad of calabashes seem to assume solid form – the form of a human head in $\frac{3}{4}$ view. This is characteristic of most assembled artworks like collage and mosaic. In the distance, colours begin to blend into one another and make a complete picture while at close range, the various assembled items appear detached from each other and give a rather individual meaning rather than a whole picture. The real icon depicted here is not easily or readily recognizable, and this recognition may not be necessary.

By employing the principle of omission theory postulated by Hemmingway, the artist leaves strong spaces for the observer to complete the image in their mind, unconsciously. The arrangement of the calabashes does

not allow the calabashes to fill everywhere as this will require the use of more calabashes and the introduction of colour to depict light and shade, protrusions and depressions. Light and shade effect has tactically been achieved by leaving blank spaces to depict light and lines to depict shade or vice versa. Due to the nature of the rounded calabashes, the contour of the sculpture is smooth and gentle to touch and to the eyes. The relationship between shapes is not complicated as there are only round shapes and straight lines combining to form a proportionate representation of the human head of an icon in three quarter view. There is a good relationship between shapes and space where space even appears more than shape, leading to a complete whole. This reflects the artist's mastery of forms and the elements and principles of art.

As earlier stated, the intended meaning of the artist may certainly differ from the perceptions of the observer or critic. In this work, there is a competition between beauty, meaning, function and medium. The absence of a background against which to contrast the colours and the form leaves room for further modifications or experimentation. The background is not completely absent but, since it is the landscape that forms the background, there is a lack of solidity and a range of unplanned natural colours forcing themselves into the whole picture. Some might say that the sculpture and the environment have merged into one as no single artwork stands alone because all art is about other arts.

In a nutshell, this piece of work is daring and challenging in its seemingly deceptive simplicity. The medium used has been hitherto relegated to the world of craft and lesser arts but has suddenly gained prominence and, could this be the reemergence of the calabash into the world of sculpture?

CHAPTER FIVE

Myth and Fables around the Calabash.

African societies are known for the close rich family values, enshrined in folklore, proverbs and stories which add up to make their unique social system. The words of our elders, they say, are words of wisdom. The calabash in many instances is used to either lock or unlock these words. For instance, Anansi in Ghanaian myth is an epitome of wisdom. In one popular myth, on Ashanti tale by Verna Aardama. 'To catch the hornet, Anansi filled a calabash with water and poured some over a banana leaf he held over his head and some over the nest, calling out that it was raining. He suggested, the hornets get into the empty calabash and when they obliged, he quickly sealed the opening. Anansi handed his captives over to Nyame. Nyame then rewarded him with stories, which now became known as Anansi stories or Anansesem.

In 'A calabash of *'poi'* where Pele, the goddess of fire, hospitality, kindness and rewards, blessed the poor family after being welcomed with three calabash of *'poi'* as against the rich family which she cursed for being stingy. The blessing pronounced on the poor beneficiaries went thus: Thorpe (1924)

When your neighbour plant taro, it shall wither upon its stem. His bananas shall hang as green fingers upon the stalk, and the cocoanuts shall fall upon his favorite pig. When you plant taro at night, you may pull it in the morning. Your cane shall mature overnight and your bananas ripen in one days sunshine. You may have as many calabashes of crops as there are days in the year!(p96)

Saying these words, Pele trudged out of the gate as she disappeared toward Ha-le-mau-mau in a cloud of flame.

In the book *Yoruba Myths* on how *Obatala* lost the calabash of good character by Beier (1980). “The tether does not enter the ground easily. He pronounces the oracle for *Obatala*, on the day he and *Oduduwa* entered the world” (p82). On that day they went to *Olodumare*, to obtain the calabash of good character. *Olodumare* then taught *Obatala* how to create human beings and animals which is greater than anything else. One day, *Obatala* got drunk on palm wine. On that day he made albinos, hunchbacks, blind people and lame people. Since then they live in his shrine but *Obatala* has abstained from palm wine ever since and his devotees are also forbidden to drink palm wine. So they broke all their calabashes.

Similar Stories like these were also written in “*The Calabash of Wisdom and other Igbo Stories*” collected and translated by Romanus N. Egudu. In this queue, are many young talented African writers like Helon Habila, Chimamanda Adichie and others who have perfected the art of creative writing.

Proverb however ancient has always remained fresh when it is used. With sayings like “mouth to mouth we kiss the calabash as homage to the wine that binds us”. This quote is a toast to friendship that is made popular in *Burkutu* drinking ‘joints’ in north eastern Nigeria.

A man can never be too drunk to drink with the calabash through the nostrils (you may be drunk but it is foolish to drown in your beer)

[Igbo]

Beauty is an empty calabash (every woman is beautiful depending on what you want to see).

[Kundu/Cameroon]

If you drink the neighbour’s wine, don’t take away his calabash (do not take your host’s wife to bed no matter the hospitality)

[Ngbaka/Central Arab RP.]

Calabash speaks the language of the gods, the wine interprets it. (A quiet man marries a noisy wife).

[Ngas/Yoruba].

Calabash is poetry, drink again you will hear (Everyone is guilty if you probe.).

[Jenjo]

A foolish girl despised a calabash; only as a woman will she repent. (What a virgin says no to, a wife says yes to).

[Tiv/Yandang]

Out of a blessed gourd flows great wine (A great man speaks wisdom).

[Igbo].

It is foolish to break the gourd in the excitement of your drunkenness (be careful what you do today, tomorrow is just another day)

[Hausa].

It is the broken calabash that gave birth to the '*jibue*' (it is the last quarrel that led to this fight).

[Jenjo].

A wife is like an old calabash: you don't let your friend keep it for you (what you have but you do not value, someone has his eyes on it).

[Fulani/Jenjo].

"To hide in a calabash" when secrets are hidden-in calabash you don't burry it in water (in a matter of time, the truth shall be revealed),

[Fulani/Hausa].

A wise woman seeks the counsel of the '*shantu*' to mend her marriage. The foolish one breaks her home with it. (The character of a woman keeps her or send her parking from matrimony).

[Hausa].

It's not all calabashes that go to the stream. (Not every woman is a mother: to a barren or a woman with out male child).

[Nupe].

Liquor loses its zest if not served in calabash. (Say the right thing at the right time or else its essence is lost).

[Cameroon].

The co-wife is like a calabash, it does everything for you (the same thing that makes you cry can make you smile).

[Hausa]

There are two sides to every calabash the container and the content. (Two sides to every man, his looks and his character.).

[Nupe]

The goat that broke the calabash had its head in it. (There is a treacherous one within).

[Jenjo].

Poetry still plays a very important role in our lives. Little wonder then that most African tribes still continue with oral tradition of their histories: stories, poetry and folklore. Works of art, both ancient and now still hold the people's heritage despite their fast changing environment.

Egonwa (1994) concur with the view that, ' the modern African artist no longer sees his art as an offering vehicle to the gods for the solution of his social or economic problems which he now understands better as a function of the failure of his political leaders. Rather, he uses his art to point at, telling but disguised human issues like the visioner.

CALABASH AS A CREATIVE RESOURCE

The visual qualities of forms can be dynamic in diagonals, vibrating, wavy, spiral, or zigzag lines which invoke movement, whereas horizontal and vertical line may suggest stunt and ascension respectively. Exploring forms help us in recognizing a sense of visual order where many different parts are brought together to form a unified whole. Gatto (1978) postulate a set of questions that involved thinking about the purpose for a work of art, “what effect do we mean to have with what we make? Who will see it or use it? What is its function and what are the relationships of the different part to the whole?”

Calabash is a hard fibrous structure, composed of specially hardened cellulose and lignin. The walls of the calabash consist of cellulose that constitutes 70% of the dry cell wall while lignin fills the spaces between the cellulose networks. The celluloses become arranged in short threadlike fibrils. The cellulose wound in this fashion is as strong as an equivalent thickness of wood while lignin is also add rigidity to the cell wall. Structurally ,the dense aggregation of wood cell in calabashes is secondary xylem elements interlaced with rays. This has therefore placed calabash on the same pedestal with wood

However, unlike wood, the calabash has special attributes such as its unique form, hollowed interior, helix shape and its smooth waterproof outer skin. The presence of a special toxin called tetracyclic triterpenoid cucurbitacins compound is also largely responsible for the bitter taste that keep termite away from the calabash, unlike wood. That however, explains the reason why calabash can be sawed, carved, burnt, screwed, recycled and can also survive temperature and pressure hence, it is primordial.

In the quest for newer forms, the researcher believes that calabash could be placed outdoors to stretch its limit as a sculptural medium. As such emphasis was based on the character of the calabash as a creative resource in the studio. Qualities such as fragility, unique form, light

weightiness, malleability when fresh and retains shape when dried, soft woody nature, the presence of void and so on, inspired the researcher to produce the sundry set of works in the studio.

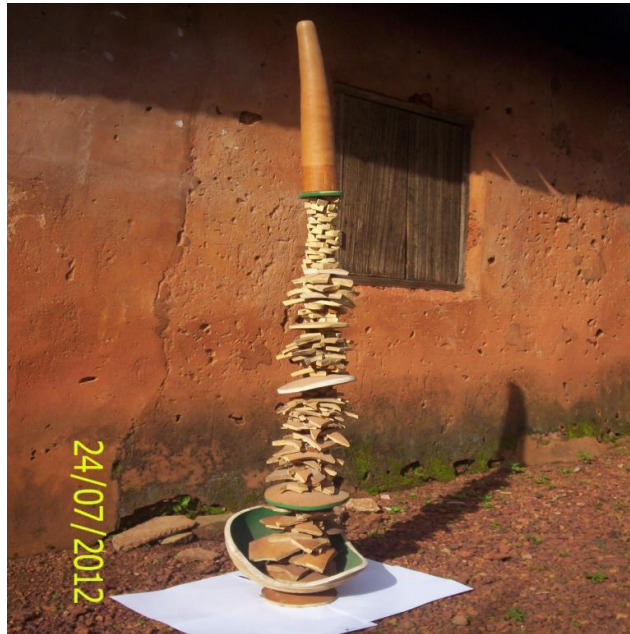


Fig. 4.1. Title: *"Plenty Palava"* (152.4cm X 15.24cm); medium: calabash.2012

© Tafida S.W

Fragility – When we think of calabash, what ordinarily comes to mind is its inability to withstand pressure to a certain degree. If calabash should fall from a certain height or hits against certain

surfaces, it breaks. Breakability hence, becomes a positive attribute of this medium which the researcher is exploring. Rather than discarding the debris, they are manipulated to form various possibilities to either find meaning or Aesthetics.

The risk involved in working with something fragile and light weight brings fear. The researcher's assurance is the adventure involved in the whole intuitive thought process where peradventure a gourd is broken; the pieces automatically become raw material for subsequent artworks. '*Plenty palava*' is the title of the work in fig. 4.1. which suggests all the trouble and risks involved in working with such a delicate medium.



Fig. 4.2 **Title:** '*Carry go*' (91cm X 30cm) medium: calabash. 2011

©Tafida S.W

Form – The Contour outline of the calabash in its self is inspiring. People are ordinarily tempted to touch the calabash. Working with calabash in the studio avails the researcher the vast array of

shapes and sizes that the medium has to offer. The organic form of this medium arouses a feeling of being around something that has a life of its own. And as studio work gets really tight impressions and mystic images immerge and fade away; that is when design and impulse moved the researcher to create, mounting one calabash on another to form compositions that look like a three dimensional mosaic of ovals and concaves, then back into oblong and convex structure. Fasten together with binding wire, screws, bolt and knots. The title, '*carry go*' is an expression of the functionality of the calabash, both as a medium of art and as a utilitarian object particularly its age long romance with the head of the rural woman and the back of the skilled palm wine tapper.

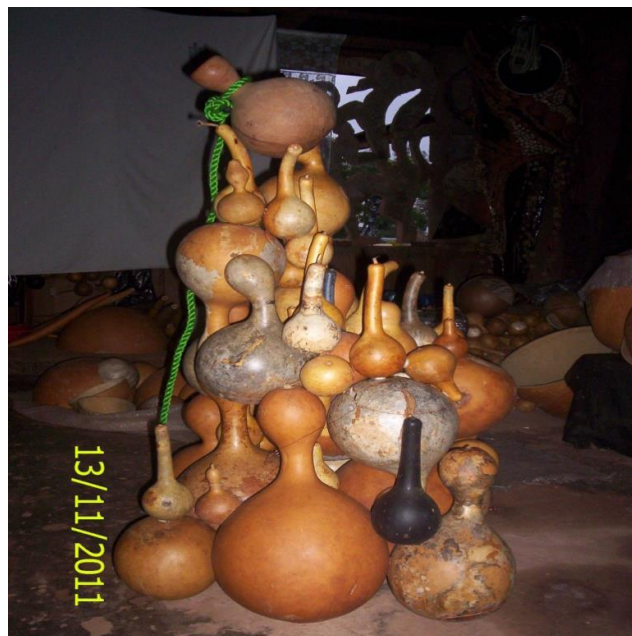


Fig 4.3. Title: "*All of the above*" (131cm X 73cm X 61cm); medium: calabash.2011

Weight – One may often be eluded by the shape and size of the calabash to think it is a mass. That to the researcher is a great advantage of this medium, quite unlike a lot of media in sculpture, larger pieces of calabash and hundred other small pieces of calabash are superimposed and fastened to each other with fish string suspended from the ceiling to give that mix feeling of mass and yet, weightless, a kind of optical illusion because the mass defy gravity.

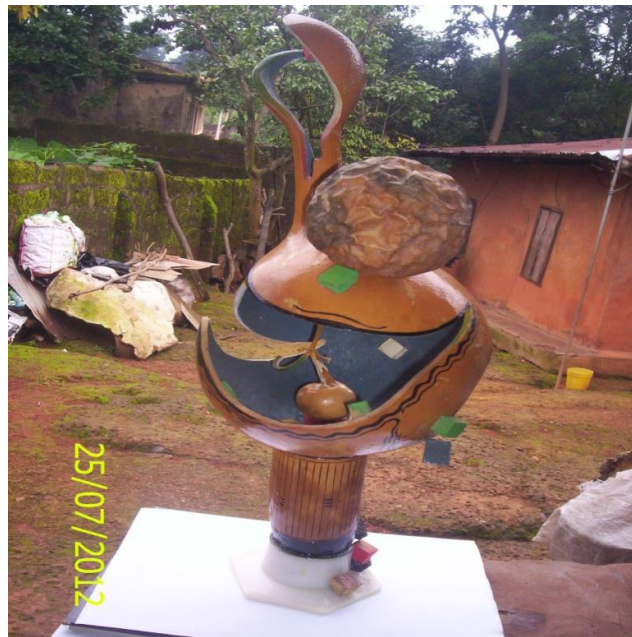


Fig. 4.4 Title: *"From Generation to Generation"* 45cm×18cm calabash 2002



Malleability – Young vine gourds that grows wild on the street of Jalingo are often collected while fresh and greenish then let to dry. But after an accidental incidence that occurred with hot water, I was tempted to explore. Soon after heating water to boiling point it is poured on a bat of ten to twenty pieces of gourds. It is stirred twice or tries to allow the hot water touch every piece then removed after twenty minute.

At first, the gourds seem normal but as clock ticks, they began to lose shape by shrinking and folding. The hard shell actually becomes malleable the end result is not just unique but amazing. The perfect smooth surface soon became rough and undulating as the gourds dry and turned brown. The wrinkled effect gives it a vast contrast as it lies beside other calabashes.

Space: Any three dimensional form, pierced or with hole is penetrated by space. Air actually becomes an integral part of the structure by occupying its interior space. Holes connect one side of the form to the other. As such, our eyes move into, around and out of the open spaces so that the shape and the environment have a balance relationship. Ultimately space invades the form and the form occupies its surrounding space.

A work of art integrated into a particular location, can be called site specific.



Fig. 4.5. title: 'Concubine' 213cm X 122cm Calabash 2010© Tafida S.W

The work titled '*fence and beyond*,' is a dual panel supported by 6ft X 4ft wire mesh secured to a seasoned wood frame. The creative experiment on this work is to produce a kind of see-through screen where, unlike most regular panels, the environment becomes part of the work. Thus the space created tends to give the viewer a new experience where space becomes an integral part of the art. The created space not only pulls you into the work, it makes you want to go around it as well, hence, making it one of a kind three dimensional panel. The philosophy that inspired this is the human existence: the rich and the poor, the small and the big, the haves and the have-nots who live just a fence away from each other. They see each other, hear each other but there will always be a barrier that is created by our social disposition or stratification.



Fig.4.6A. '*Fence and beyond A*'182cm×120cm Calabash, wire mesh.



Fig.4.6B. Title: *'Fence and beyond B'*

On one side of this work, the pieces of calabash are few, well spaced and colourful indicating affluence while on the other side, the set of calabashes are closely packed with no colours expressing the 'no light' syndrome, no good street and the chaotic life style associated with the slum.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

When we use words like into, under, around, behind or surrounding, we are speaking of three-dimensional space. This '3D' realm includes solidity, volume and mass. Yet aside the object the surrounding, or negative space is integral. That space is a vital part of the object itself.

We are not often conscious of the space surrounding solid objects, especially if that space seems unlimited. But when it is contained, we become acutely aware of it, as in filled with smog, dust, smoke or fog.

It is the unique shapes of the calabash that allow something different to happen in one space vis-à-vis what's happening outside of the space. It can transcend its space and permeate into our senses of fascination that reminds us of the contours and flows of the human body. It is even more interesting in that, a particular sculptural problem is solved. That the vessel has a 'skin' that our vision stops at, and it also has an orifice or an entry into that space which immediately reveals the thickness of the rind, it is quite unlike bronze or marble.

A far broader range of media are available, permitting work that is experimental in the broadest sense. Which I believe is an opportunity for artist to work on a huge scale, or to create using materials not usually associated with conventional art classes. Either way, it is not an impressive array of art materials that matters but, the experience of creating in the context of a safe, therapeutic relationship between man, material and environment.

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