

# AN ANALYTICAL CONTEMPLATION OF THE MEANING OF SOME SELECTED SCULPTURES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF JOS BUILT ENVIRONMENT.

ONOJA, J. E., KUTSHAK, C. I., SHA, N.

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## Abstract

Visual arts pieces, especially sculpture, have various purposes ranging from aesthetics, to non-aesthetic functions, usually assigned either didactic and other assigned purposes by the artist or commissioning patrons. In traditional African societies, art can transcend from art for art sake to more specific functions; similarly, in contemporary or modern art practices, artworks are created to serve certain functions like education, immortalization, commemoration and for landmark purposes which all form part of our collective cultural heritage. This paper is an analysis of the various sculptural pieces dotting the landmark of the University of Jos, Jos, Plateau State - Nigeria. Hence, the discourse is on the artists that created the works vis-a-vis the patrons, functions and projections for the future on productions of sculptures in the built environment in adding aesthetics while serving other functions. The works were purposively used in the collection of data for the study, while in-depth interview approach was used to understand the interpretative nuances of all the parties involved in the production of the works. The paper concludes by drawing inferences from the works cited and advances recommendations for future studies of other visual arts pieces on campus and the built environment.

**Keywords:** Contemplating, functionality, sculptures, built environment, a critique.

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## Introduction

The place of visual arts in the built environment cannot be overemphasised. Works like sculptures, murals, and various installations embellish various institutions, parks, recreational facilities and other facilities in the built environment. Artists have intrigued their viewer through breathtaking creations in the built environment, thereby making poignant

statements on certain societal issues and creating lasting memories of landmarks and immortalizing icons. These works, especially sculptural pieces, are important components in art criticism discussions and academic engagements. Damden (2019) posits that:

Public sculpture and built environment are inseparable in national development particularly in the areas of functionality and beautification. Successful landscaping

cannot be completed or achieved without sculptures and artists. Artists and sculptors to be specific are known to know the principles and elements of design that can set the environment to look beautiful and attractive to viewers. Such places usually become a tourist centre and also for advocacy.

In ancient times, artworks, for instance, sculptures, have been used to serve decorative, didactic and other functions determined by the artist or the commissioning patron. For instance, Willet (1971: 166) talks of the place of sculpture in arbitration and conflict resolution in a family setting among the BaWoyo of Cabinda, north of the mouth of the Congo River. He says that a woman having disaffection with her husband used specially prepared sculptured lids which she received from her mother and mother-in-law to pass a message of dissatisfaction to the husband when other relatives visited. Willett (1971: 166) reports:

...when the wife disagrees with her husband, she covers his food with wooden lid sculptured with figures, which conveys through the proverbial expressions they symbolised, the substance of her dissatisfaction. Of course, the wife chooses an occasion when her husband is entertaining friends so

that they, representing the community at large, can arbitrate.

Sculpture in African as in other climes have served various functions, which make the art form viable in reaching out with potent messages of aesthetics and other relevant drives in the society. In the words of Sani (2009) "Artist around the world imbibe what they are trained for. They are people who kick against oppression, and people who beautify and correct society through art. Artists have always played an important role in major events around the world." Hence, this paper examines, articulates and critiques sculptural pieces in the built environment of the University of Jos, Plateau State with the possible import of documenting and recording visual arts practices in the University community, the roles these works elicit, the critique of technicalities and inferences for future engagements using the visual arts. It is also pertinent to note that, this study bridges the gap of adding to the literature of environmental sculptures and a critique of symbols and allegories, especially in the University of Jos.

### **Entrance Statement**

The entrance into any space or institution is important. This is because the outlook of an environment from the entrance will sometimes give one a clue of the interior.

The gate, horticultural practices and sculptures are some visible forms in most institutional entrances. The motifs used for embellishments, colours, forms and fortifications sometimes could be considered as aesthetics aggregates for judging the visual outlook of any built environment. The University of Jos permanent site main gate in a link between the town and the gown as the sculpture piece titled Hand of Peace welcomes staff, students and visitors to the University community, and also, bids farewell as one leaves the community. The work depicts an open hand with a white dove carrying a leafy branch on its beak and taking flight from the tip of its two middle fingers. The work stands on a round pedestal painted with light green and decorated with green flowers, leaves and sculpted decorative leaves and draperies in a relief. On the pedestal also, are doves sculpted in a relief form and painted white with green leaf on the individual beaks, with legs and beak painted with yellow colour. Also seen on the pedestal base is the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) logo made in a relief form. This clearly shows that the work was a commission to the artist by the NYSC serving members in 2018 as part of their community service.

The hand is patinated with black paint and gold colour as a highlight; while the dove is

painted white, with a green leaf in its beak, its legs and beak painted with yellow colour respectively. The dove is depicted with its two wings widely opened up in-flight motion.



**Plate I:** Hand of Peace: Peter and Paul kirwe, concrete, 116 x 18 inches, 2018. University of Jos permanent site main gate.

The twin artists (Peter and Paul Kirwe) deployed the elements and the principles of art in the composition. Balance is a key principle of the composition and was well achieved in the work as the dove on top of the two middle fingers has a good balance while creating a good symmetry in the entire composition from the base to the top through careful distribution of the various elements in the composition. Proportion is

also stringently seen in the work as the dove, the hand, and the pedestal are proportionate to each other. The hand and the dove are made in a realistic rendition, showing all the modelling of feathers on the dove and vein-like network on the hand carrying the dove. Contours, movements and animated illusions are achieved in the hand which gives it a realistic look as the veins, the folds, the nails are well detailed.

The floral decoration on the pedestal gives the work an aesthetic beauty which reveals the level of creativity of the artist. The texture of the work is made both in simulative and tactile rendition. The focal point in the work is the dove, which symbolically depicts peace and most often referred to as the symbol of peace. Hand of Peace was a commission by the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members in the year 2018 in sending a message of peace to the University Community, the people of Plateau State and the world at large. It is pertinent to note that, Plateau state has witnessed several violent clashes which have led to the loss of lives and properties. The University community has suffered devastating losses of lives of people caught in some of the crises. The positioning of the work at the current location is intended to pass a message since that area is a commuter area in the built environment and entrance into the University of Jos.

In Christian iconography, a dove also symbolizes the Holy Spirit. Looking at the interpretation of the dove and the leafy branch (olive branch) at its beak, it is simply sending a message of peace to people. Peace, which we know is what every society and individual needs in order to achieve their set goals. Reason being that no area of our lives will have progress when there is no peace. Therefore, peace should be what we all must strive to achieve for a progressive society, and in this context the university environment and beyond. It is pertinent to state the obvious at this juncture, the artists have well utilized their materials, tools and ideas to interpret the requirements of their patron (NYSC) in order to achieve the aim of sending a message of peace to the society, making it a successful piece as it is serving the purpose for which it was created. However, the paints used on the work is of low quality and that gives the work a relatively poor finishing given that the work is barely two years from the day of commissioning and the paint is responding to the elements by peeling off and the green paints are fading, stains one's body or clothing when touched. This also brings to the fore issues of the patron's ability to pay well for an outdoor commission which will be more durable, perhaps a bronze cast or other more durable materials. However, amid intermittent hostilities in Jos and environs, The hand of

Peace succinctly captures and propagates the message of peace and extension of the olive branch to warring parties by drawing attention to issues of peace and conflict resolutions as expressed through the NYSC.

### Treasure in the Rocks



**Plate II:** Treasure in the Rocks, Mixed Media, Ogwara Harvey, 19 x 17 Feet. 2012

The mixed-media sculptural piece in front of the administrative block of the University of Jos is a hand holding a rolled scroll-like paper symbolizing certificate. At the top end of the scrolled paper is a form suggesting a graduation cap. Around the work, however, are rock boulders of different shapes and sizes forming the composition. The work has a base made in

a hexagonal shape that is, a polygon with six sides, directly opposite two sides are the University of Jos logo sculpted in relief form and painted with a yellowish-green colour. The graduation cap was made using cement and the ropes made with wire, made the work to be a mixed media, and it is also painted with yellowish-green, and the paper is painted with white colour the ribbon on the paper is painted with yellowish-green. The hand holding the paper is made in a realistic form showing all details of the hand, the contour, the veins, the nails. The stones are in their natural colours adding aesthetics and creative ingenuity to the composition. The points of attraction in the work are the hand, academic cap and the certificate. One theme derived from the work is the use of symbols that depicts academics and related allegories. Variety is another principle which is achieved in the work as the stones are arranged around the work in different sizes. The visual statement behind the work suggests a mood of hope for all students who are in their academic pursuit and staff engaged in cutting edge researches globally domiciled on the Plateau.

This work holds deep-seated allegories, one can say that, while time spent at the university brings fond memories and happy/ sad experiences for most, university life is not without its rough patches which

bring out the treasures from the rocks. The rocks, which are broken into sizable stones round the hand signifies the difficulties and the challenges one has to pass through while pursuing their academics. The stones are made of different sizes, which one is of the opinion that, it is the hand that is in the middle of the stones that struggled to push up and come out of the stones and rugged terrains, which signifies the problems and challenges in an academic pursuit to become victorious in school and life in general. Some of the problems include; the tedium of studies, financial difficulties, working while in school, feeling homesick at times, depression, various sicknesses (health conditions), fake friends, unruly roommates, wild parties, relationship and also choosing the area to major in (professional courses). These are just a few out of the many challenges students experienced. So, going through the university education amidst challenges and problems to get to the zenith, symbolizes the strength and courage of the individual for achieving the good times of success which usually outweighs the bad experiences encountered in school. This suggests victory amidst storms of life. The hand standing up straight, raised in victory at the middle of the stones signifies problems and challenges the hand significantly defies to get to the joy and victory that comes after these challenges,

this is also signified with the certificate and the academic cap, which both stand as a symbol of graduation and the joy that comes afterwards. In essence, the work symbolizes victory in academics' pursuit, despite the struggles and challenges faced in the University of Jos. At the base of the work which is made in a hexagonal form, on its two opposite sides, carrying the university logo made in a relief form, which represents the foundation or the platform for the success story.

Suffice it to say that, the composition depicts the message which the commissioning patron intends as interpreted by the artist in symbols, shapes and forms within a given landscape space in the University of Jos. The artist was able to pass across as the message in clarity one supposes to all students who are in their academic pursuit, that for those who endure the hardship in school the result is victory, joy and celebration. And the work is also pleasing to the eyes in the built environment as it is situated in a spacious area towards the administrative block of the University of Jos. The artist made use of his tools and technique in executing the work. The work is a successful piece in its interpretative nuances, due to its originality in interpretation.

## The Academic



**Plate III:** The Academic, Robinson Ijeh, 144 x 20 inches.

The front of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) secretariat, University of Jos Chapter, permanent site, is graced with a sculpture. The work was executed by Robinson Ijeh, a Jos based Sculptor. It is a depiction of a stylized human figure placed on a round pedestal base made from cast pillar. The work is a three-dimensional form, making it a sculpture in the round. The statue is painted with silver colour with the pedestal base painted white. The artist made use of cement as his medium and casting technique for executing this work with a smooth textural finish.

The composition is a stylized work combining realism with biomorphic

abstract forms in the composition. The head down to the chest was executed in realistic form, while from the stomach down to the legs region is depicted in a biomorphic abstract form. This statue depicts a male – like human form in a doctorate convocation regalia and all the paraphernalia of academia. The physical features that make up this composition are academic cap, the cape, the gown, partly depicted in an abstract form, the two hands both having broken chains, the left hand is placed on the chest holding two books and the right hand is raised. The work has an open stomach showing circles of different sizes and lines that create depth, and beneath the stomach, the legs are represented in an abstract form showing it in motion like movement. The left leg in front and the right leg behind. In between the two front legs is a shape that creates depth, with the inside having balls almost round in shape, made in various sizes and looking at the back view is the same shape with two balls as the ones in the front. From the left and right sides are three triangular shapes breaking from the gown and one round ball at both sides, Making the number of seven round balls of varying sizes in the composition. Forming the base of the statue are ten blocks that form the base of the statue. The physical expression of the statue is depicted in motion; the facial expression is showing focused attention without a smile on the face.



One of the elements of design used in the work is a simulated line. Lines in forms are used in creating this sculptural composition, and to support the form used in creating shapes like circles and rectangle. This also rendered structure, growth, depth, distance, rhythm, movement and a range of emotion in the work. Vertical lines have been used to depict height and strength in the work; shapes are depicted in solid three dimensionalities. To representing the abstract, geometric or organic circles are used in a continuous movement. The use of lines in the work has also created contrast and sense of depth in the work. Colour, as an element has also been utilized in the work as the work is painted with a silver colour which creates tone and harmony. So also texture, which accentuates negative and positive spaces. Symmetrical balance has been achieved in the work as the work is placed on the pedestal, it stands without any support. This balance has given the work a sense of beauty. Movements are also portrayed in the work as it is achieved using circular shapes that are made at both the left and right sides of the back.

Interpreting this work by the elements that make up the composition like the academic regalia, it is a traditional form of clothing for the academic setting like the University of Jos. Academic dress generally consists of the gown, cap and the cape on the gown.

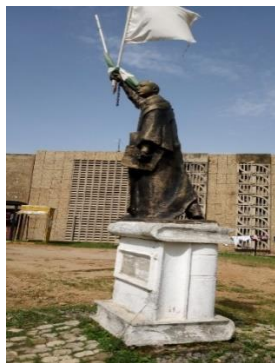
Also, the right hand of the statue is holding two books. Books represented in the work are an essential part of an academic's daily life. Books are considered as sources of wisdom, knowledge and Positive values and one can learn so many good things and positive values from the books written by famous people. Through books, we can be a part of people's imagination and improve research and learning in general.

The left hand raised with broken chains symbolically connotes freedom and liberty through knowledge. A typical example of this work is the statue of liberty found at the harbour of New York City in the United States of America. Added to that, the statue is standing on ten blocks which forms a solid base to it, this block can also signify books which means that the freedom and liberty are based on knowledge which is the foundation upon which we must all base our human ideologies and knowledge. Today, the COVID – 19 pandemics which is ravaging the world needs the knowledge base of academics' researchers in the field of health to stem the tide of the wild and widespread of the disease. Breaking free from the shackles of ignorance and uninformed stance can help a great deal to stop the spread of the pandemic. The artist, through the work, was able to interpret various issues laced into a sculpture as seen in front of the ASUU secretariat.



From the stomach down to the feet region is an abstraction of forms made of linear rendition that create shapes and also depicts the statue in motion – like movement. Abstract sculptures past and present are influenced by a variety of art movements. However, this work can be streamlined by relating it to a particular art movement/period known as cubism which spans through 1905-1920. It is majorly characterized by pre- and – post World War 1 art experiments, new forms to express modern life. Cubism was an early 20th-century art movement founded by two painters: Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in Paris around 1907. It began as a painting style in which figures and forms were broken into angular, geometric shapes like shards or cubes. Cubism created new ways of viewing things that didn't involve copying or reproducing what one saw in real life. Artists were no longer worried about showing a single view or vantage point. Instead, they played with forms.

### Freedom Square Sculpture



**Plate IV:** Freedom Square Sculpture, Robinson Ijale, concrete, 130 x 36 Inches.

Students have always been at the forefront of social change and advocacy for good governance and social justice. This is probably the reason for their interest in commissioning and using sculpture as a symbol for their struggles and social rights movements. The Student Union Government (SUG) of the University of Jos is not left out in this struggle as practised on various campuses globally. The work, symbol of struggle at the Abuja hostel was produced by Robinson Ijeh. It is a statue of a student in a matriculation gown standing on top of piles of books which form the pedestal. The Student is seen holding two flags at the right hand that has a broken chain while the left hand is clung to books, broken chains and graduation cap. The sculpture was a project of the SUG in the year 2011/2012 academic session under the leadership of Dashuwer Nantakas SUG President. The work is a mixed media in metal and cement, patinated in gold and black paint. The work shows an active movement pose with a focused expression on the face.

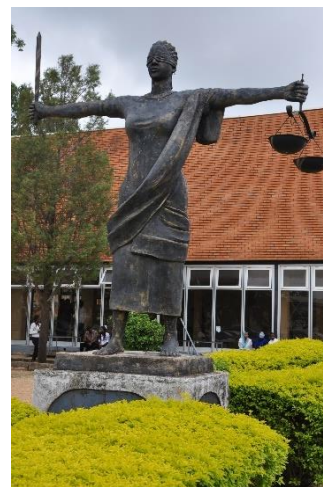
A cursory look at the work gets one thinking about so many things. Some think it looks like an image meant for the shrine, others think it is a symbol of struggle, while yet a particular group think it signifies unity. It, however, represents the need for passing a message of the struggle in

students unionism. This brings to the fore the various reactions an art piece can elicit, propagate and stand for through people's perception of symbols and allegories. In an interview with the SUG President Dashuwar, he opines that every part of the statue symbolizes different things. according to Dashuwar,

the student in a matriculation gown shows that he is a bonafide student, he is in motion which means as a student we are also involved in the struggle for a better society and a better environment to study. He is standing on a pile of the book which means the struggle is based on knowledge and the knowledge is the foundation upon which we must base our ideology/ philosophy". He goes on to state that, It also signifies that you cannot be a part of the struggle if you are not a part of this citadel of knowledge- University of Jos. The blue flag is the University's brand flag while the white flag is for the union. He is holding the flag showing his pride in the University System and the union. The broken chains signify liberation or victory at the end of the struggle.

Dashuwar further explained that "the location of the statue is symbolic because, Abuja hostel is the centre of the struggle- Aluta, with the bold inscription Aluta Continua, Victoria Acerta. He added that the purpose of creating this statue was to reawaken hope and an environment conducive for learning must continue".

### **Lady Justice**



**Plate V:** Lady Justice, Faculty of Law, Bauchi Road Campus, University of Jos.

The Faculty of Law, University of Jos is graced with a colossal statue of the Lady Justice and another Balance Scales sculptures at the approach façade of the Faculty's Landscape. Lady Justice which is the interest of this paper, shows a colossal blindfolded female figure holding a sword in her hand and balance scales also known as justice scales on the left hand. The pose is relatively rigid with the legs in a slight movement like posture. The work was

created in cement and patinated in black and gold.

The historical antecedents to the acceptance of Lady Justice as a law symbol come from belief systems in Greek and Egyptian times. Themis, the Greek goddess, represented the law, order, and justice, while the Egyptians had Ma'at, who stood for order and carried both a sword and the Feather of Truth. According to *The Meaning Behind the Lady of Justice Statue* (2019) the balance scales represent impartiality and the obligation of the law (through its representatives) to weigh the evidence presented to the court. Each side of a legal case needs to be looked at and comparisons made as justice is done. The Sword symbolizes enforcement and respect and means that justice stands by its decision and ruling, and can take action. The fact that the sword is unsheathed and very visible is a sign that justice is transparent and is not an implement of fear. While the blindfold's original significance was that the judicial system was tolerating abuse or ignorance of aspects of the law. However, in modern times, the blindfold represents the impartiality and objectivity of the law and that it doesn't let outside factors, such as politics, wealth or fame, influence its decisions. In other parlance, Martinez (2016) echoes that, this symbolizes that justice is "blind". Justice is supposed to be

objective, without bias; never favouring the strong nor the weak, the rich nor the poor, the righteous nor the wicked.

The various symbols used to create the allegories of the Lady Justice was succinctly summarized by Martinez (2016) when he avers that:

Lady Justice is ultimately a symbol of neutrality, as justice itself must be neutral to be truly called justice. All of her symbols emphasize that justice should never work in favour of any man and that the judgments of justice should always be carried out impartially, with the power of Reason and the power of the law, which is Reason codified. She serves as a reminder that the concept of justice is universal and timeless, as the Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians knew and as we know today.

The universality of the Justice system is herein advanced through the allegories embedded in the symbols created by the artists through the dictates of the patron. Art is a universal language, and the use of sculptures rightly deployed in the built environment has a way of passing across the relevant messages to the populace and

also creating law and order through what the work instils.

All the works discussed have sublime meanings and a substantial number have masculine forms. Perhaps, this is because, in Africa, masculinity is celebrated and the artists whose works were discussed are males, stimulating gender issues in the visual arts field. This is however not an excuse to cause gender biases, but rather, the messages imbued in the works requires some masculinity to advance the stories while carrying poignant feminine symbolism in others. In the same vein, Eugene Delacroix work *Liberty Leading the People* (French: *La Liberté Guidant le peuple*) is a painting commemorating the July Revolution of 1830, has a woman leading the revolution in France. The potency of the allegory to one's mind is that women can also lead liberation matches in peace and conflict resolutions, academic struggles, unionism and other social rights movements with outstanding results. Little wonder, *Lady Justice* with the veiled face and holding the scales and sword is pivotal to justice, equity and fair play. In a society where there is so much injustice, the symbol of justice stands as a reminder that irrespective of the gender, *Lady Justice* in her feminine nature can also wield the sword and dish out justice and equity from

her scale of balances without minding or seeing whoever is concerned.

## **Conclusion**

The works presented in this article surmise issues bordering on academics, peace and conflict resolutions, unionism struggles, justice and equity and other issues on the populace in the built environment. Perhaps, if Art Critics engage with these sculptures, several other issues will be raised to encourage the creation of more environmentally relevant sculptures in the university community and other public spaces. The place of sculpture in the built environment is apt in the statement of WJP Studios (2010) "We make immediate associations to a long-gone culture through their artworks left behind. For instance, when we think of ancient Egypt, we think of the Pyramids and the Sphinx among other things. Their art helped define who they were long ages after the last of the Pharaohs had perished". In the same vein, years after, people seeing sculptures created to commemorate certain events can always travel down history lane and glean some information and learning. In light of the foregoing, the visual arts should be encouraged in institutions of higher learning to consciously create relevant works in vantage areas to pass important information, record history and beautify the environment for the general aesthetic

outlook of a place. It is also pertinent to state that, people and places are associated with known landmarks and art forms, therefore, following the acceptable practice

of creating a sculpture to commemorate and immortalise a time frame in history should be upheld.

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