MUSINGS IN THE GARDEN: SCULPTURE PARK AND THE AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT
The culture of sculpture parks is as old as art itself and exists in almost all communities across the globe. Such parks, their grandeur, serene outlook, artistic presence, and representations of a plethora of socio-political and economic issues mean a lot, especially to the people associating with them. Using an art historical analysis, primary and secondary data in the form of oral interviews, and extant literature, this paper studies the historical development of the Sculpture Garden of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria focusing mainly on its features, and functions, particularly within the University community. Although the Garden emerged from the necessity of providing space for the reservation and preservation of the outdoor sculptures produced by students ofthe Fine Art Department of the University, this paper argues that it now blossoms to provide a conducive atmosphere for the exhalation of emotion, empathy, love, and peaceful contemplation. This is absent in the few previous studies conducted on the Garden. This paper concludes that the Garden also serves many purposes different from art and aesthetics, including the proliferation of businesses while providing a serene environment for meetings, lectures, and shelter for lovers.

Introduction

The lead author of this paper having hailed from Kano, a state that practices and maintains an orthodox form of Islam, which frowns at all forms of figurative art, even his knowledge of at least, the semblance of a sculpture park was at its lowest ebb[1]. His visit to the Sculpture Garden

[1]For details on the nature of iconoclasm and aniconism in Kano see; Nasidi Nadir Abdulhadi. 'A Contextual Analysis of *Sufi* Saint Paintings in Kano, Nigeria'. PhD Thesis, Department of Fine Art, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria,Nasidi, Nadir Abdulhadi. 'A Contextual Analysis of Sacred Qādiriyyah *Sufi* Paintings in Kano, Nigeria'. *Vestiges: Traces of Record*, Vol. 6, Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford, (2020): 48-

(as it is commonly known) of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 2006, marked an important milestone in his understanding and conception of an art park, as well as its nuanced socio-economic and political roles, which inspired his academic journey to becoming an art historian a few years later[2]. During that moment, he did not only fall in love with the aesthetics of its sculptural collections but also, began to ponder on its functions and relevance to society, which became the foundation of this present study.

It is obvious that in many countries, sculpture parks play an important role in societies, one of which is cultural enrichment. This is because such parks provide an exceptional, artistic, and cultural experience for people to engage directly with artworks, an opportunity that is almost none existent in typical traditional museum settings[3]. The fact that park sculptures are located ina natural setting, often in a large outdoor space, they give visitors the latitude to appreciate art from different perspectives and within their contexts.

At their best, sculpture parks can also attract tourists from different parts of the world. This is possible, especially when such parks feature unique and historic sculptures of different sizes, forms, and contents. They may also have large-scale installations that are highly artistic and memorable on display.

Regarding education, sculpture parks also provide educational opportunities for visitors by offering guided tours, workshops, and educational programmes to understand the historical and cultural significance of the sculptures on display[4]. This no doubt paves the way for art appreciation and cultural orientation apart from inspiring future generations of artists and art lovers.

Sculpture parks also serve as meeting points for people within their communities. Some of the events that are often hosted in the parks range from concerts, festivals, worship, buying, and selling, to outdoor performances[5]. Apart from the fact that these events may foster a sense of belonging and togetherness, the spaces

63.http://www.vestiges-journal.info/, Nasidi, Nadir Abdulhadi and Muhammad, Aliyu. 'Iconoclasm and the Historical Evolution of *Sufi* Painting'. *Egghead*, Vol. 4, No. 2, Department of Fine Art, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (2019): 71-81, Nasidi, Nadir Abdulhadi. 'Sheikh Ibrahim Niass and the Making of Sacred *Sufi* Paintings in Kano (1946-1975)'. *Zaria Archaeology Papers*, Vol. 12, Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (2019): 177-195.

[2] Since that time, I became highly inquisitive about art, its meaning(s), aniconism and iconoclasm, an inspiration that encouraged me to get a PhD in Art History from Ahmadu Bello University, Department of Fine Art in 2021.

[3]Warren, Saskia. 'Audiencing artscapes: Encounters between art and audience at Yorkshire Sculpture Park'. Ph.D. diss., University of Sheffield, 2011, and Warren, Saskia. 'Audiencing James Turrell's Skyspace: encounters between Art and Audience at Yorkshire Sculpture Park'. *CulturalGeographies* 20, no. 1 (2013): 83-102, James, Patrick. 'Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield'. *Gardens & Landscapes in historic building conservation* (2014): 385-391.

[4]Aptekar, Sofya. 'Looking forward, looking back: Collective memory and neighborhood identity in two urban parks'. *Symbolic Interaction* 40, no. 1 (2017): 101-121, Eyres, Patrick, and Fiona Russell, eds. *Sculpture and the Garden*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006, Belcheva, Ina, Dominique Poulot, and Isidora Stanković. "'Sculptural graveyards': Park-museums of socialist monuments as a search for consensus." *Discussing Heritage and Museums: Crossing Paths of France and Serbia* (2017): 100-118.

[5]MacLeod, Suzanne. 'This magical place: The making of Yorkshire Sculpture Park and the politics of landscape, art and narrative'. In *Museum Making*, pp. 48-62. Routledge, 2012, Colfer, Colette. 'Creating Religious Place in Ireland: Hindu public places of Worship and the Indian sculpture park'. *Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions* 2, no. 1 (2015): 24-46, Skillingstad, Torhild Larsen. 'Cihu Memorial Sculpture Park. Iconoclasm, memory and the importance of space'. Master's thesis, UiT Norges arktiske universitet, 2016.

also serve as places for peaceful contemplation, cultural orientation, and art appreciation.

Like any other sculpture park, for many decades, the Ahmadu Bello University Sculpture Garden (henceforth; A.B.U. Sculpture Garden) also serves cultural, educational, social, and economic purposes. Despite its innumerable contributions, however, it has not received serious scholarly attention. Although Ogboto, Caleb, and Jari wrote interesting pieces on certain aspects of the Garden, most of the available literature tends to focus mainly on the art historical analysis of the sculptures and their functions, rather than the role of the Garden in the socio-economic and cultural development of the university community and beyond[6]. Besides, no effort was made to contextualise the Garden within the global discourses of the use, or abuse of park sculptures, andopen spaces, especially in relation to the notion of collective memory, identity, and social cohesion.

Apart from documenting the history of the A.B.U. Sculpture Garden, the paper argues that beyond its artistic representations, the Garden also serves a number of socio-economic and cultural purposes, which created a unique platform where people engage with artworks in situ, socialise, relax, and trade. Meanwhile, it also plays a significant role in biodiversity and conservation, especially by attracting different animals, ranging from birds, lizards, and other mammals, due to the Garden'sserene and geographically appealing environment, as a result of its green areas.

The empirical findings in this paper are largely drawn from fieldwork undertaken at the A.B.U. Sculpture Garden from September 2022 to July 2023. Amongst the informants were artists, students, the Fine Art Department staff, under whose custody the Garden was entrusted, and local tourists coming from Zaria and its environs. The data obtained was, therefore, corroborated with contemporary literature on the history, functions, challenges, and prospects of sculpture parks.

This paper is divided into five important, but related sections. While the first section serves as the introduction, the second section provides a detailed historical analysis of the evolution of the A.B.U Sculpture Garden. The third section examines the major socio-economic and cultural roles the Garden plays within the university community, while the fourth section brings out the major challenges confronting the Garden, especially issues related to uncoordinated human activities that temper with both the sculptures and the natural environment, weathering, absence of restoration, as well as lack of funding. The final section is the conclusion.

Department of Fine Art and the Emergence of the A.B.U Sculpture Garden

The Department of Fine Art at Ahmadu Bello University (A.B.U) in Zaria, Nigeria, was established in 1963. It is the oldest department of Fine Art in Nigeria and one of the first in West Africa. The department was founded by a renowned British art historian and painter, Kenneth Murray, who was the first Head of the Department. Most of the artists and teachers Murray worked with were artists who had previously studied at the then Nigerian College of Arts, Science, and Technology in Zaria, which was established in 1955 before it metamorphosed into the Department of Fine Art a year after the establishment of A.B.U in 1962[7].

The major reason that necessitated the establishment of the Department of Fine Art at A.B.U was to provide a solid foundation in the visual arts for students who wished to pursue careers as artists, art educators, art historians, and curators. Besides, the curriculum at the department was interdisciplinary, covering a

[6]Ogboto, H.A. The Fine Arts Sculpture Garden of the Department of Fine Arts of Ahmadu Bello University in Samaru Zaria. Unpublished B.A Project, Department of Fine Art, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (1983), Caleb, Samuel. History of the Sculpture Garden, Department of Fine Art, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, a paper presented at the Zaria at 50 Conference, Department of Fine Art, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 22-26 November (2006), 2-14 and Jari, Jacob. Pathos in the Garden. *The Studio: A Journal of Contemporary Art Practice and Theory* (2009).

[7] Babalola, Daniel. Zaria Art School: A Brief History. In: Buhari, J., Simon, O. I., Caleb, S. and Lamidi, L., *Zaria Art School 50th Anniversary Exhibition*, Abuja: National Gallery of Art (2009), 125-126.

wide range of visual arts such as painting, sculpture, printmaking, ceramics, and textiles[8].

The Department of Fine Art at A.B.U has produced many notable artists who made significant contributions to the Nigerian and African art practice. Some of these notable alumni of the department include Yusuf Grillo, Uche Okeke, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Ben Enwonwu, Dele Jegede, and Kolawale Oshinowo, among others[9].

In the 21st century, the Department of Fine Art at A.B.U remains one of Nigeria's leading schools of art. It also continues to produce talented artists and scholars who contribute to the development of various aspects of the visual arts in Africa and beyond[10].An attempt to provide a safe and enough space for sculptures produced by the Department of Fine Art students paved the way for the emergence of the Sculpture Garden, which is the paper's central focus.

The A.B.USculpture Garden as it is commonly known is an outdoor 'museum'[11] located within the campus of A.B.U. It was established in 1975 to provide a space for the display and preservation of sculptures created by students and faculty members of the Department of Fine Art (Fig. 1)[12].Ogboto states that the two chief objectives for the establishment of the Sculpture Garden were the preservation and exhibition of the sculptures produced by students[13]. The first work to be mounted in the Garden was a male model sculpted by A.O. Shodeinde[14]. While some of the works were produced in the Garden, many were created in the studio and later moved there.

[8]Ogbechie, Sylvester Okwunodu. Ben Enwonwu, Zarianist Aesthetics and the Post-Colonial Criticism of Modern Nigerian Art. In: *The Triumph of a Vision: An Anthology on Uche Okeke and Modern Art in Nigeria*, London: Pendulum Art Gallery (2002), 247.

[9]Okeke-Agulu, Chika, and John Picton. 'Nationalism and the Rhetoric of Modernism in Nigeria: The Art of Uche Okeke and Demas Nwoko, 1960-1968: [With Commentary]'. *African arts* (2006): 26-93.

[10]Some of these artists and scholars include; Tonie Okpe, Jacob Jat Jari, Jerry Buhari, Kefas Danjuma, Duniya Giles Gambo, Lasisi Lamidi, Kenneth Okoli, to mention, but just a few.

[11]Though it is not a museum in the truest sense of the term, but it has been serving in the same capacity.

[12] Please, for more information, see; Ogboto, H.A. The Fine Arts Sculpture Garden of the Department of Fine Arts of Ahmadu Bello University in Samaru Zaria.

[13]Ogboto, H.A. The Fine Arts Sculpture Garden of the Department of Fine Arts of Ahmadu Bello University in Samaru Zaria, 10.

[14]Unfortunately, the work is no longer available in the Garden.



Figure 1: The Frontal View of the A.B.U Sculpture Garden (Source: The Authors, 2023).

The Sculpture Garden features a collection of 369 sculptures in a variety of styles and media, including metal, and concrete (Table 1)[15]. Many of the sculptures were created by prominent Nigerian artists who studied at A.B.U such as Bruce Onobrakpeya, Yusuf Grillo, and Ben Enwonwu, among others.

Table 1: Categorisation of Sculptures in the A.B.U Sculpture Garden

S/N	Type of Sculpture	Media	Number
1.	Metal sculptures	Metal	29
2.	Female representations	Metal, concrete and mixed-media	51
3.	Male representations	Metal, concrete and mixed-media	97
4.	Reliefs	Concrete	3
5.	Abstracted	Metal, concrete and mixed-media	103
6.	Works to be restored	Metal, concrete and mixed-media	43
7.	Nude Sculptures	Concrete and metal	11

[15]Please, see table 1. For more details on the images see figures 1 and 2.

8.	Child representation	Concrete	14
9.	Animal representations	Metal and concrete	18
		Total	369

The Sculpture Garden, which occupies a space of about 80 sqm is open to the public and serves as an interesting destination for tourists, art lovers, as well as students of art. The sculptures are stylistically arranged to create a visually engaging experience for visitors. Some pieces of sculptures are placed on pedestals, while others are placed on the ground, allowing direct interaction between the artworks, the audience, and the surrounding environment. The A.B.U sculpture garden is an important cultural institution that projects Nigerian artists' artistic talent and creativity and serves as a testament to the region's rich artistic heritage.

The sculptures cut across different themes and sub-themes. Apart from promoting Afrocentric perspectives in both media and content, which originated from the struggles of the Zaria 'Rebels' in the 1950s, the sculptures are classified into five categories namely; social, political, economic, military and natural (Table 2)[16].



Fig. 3: Jimoh A. Umar, *A Child Beggar*, 2017, Concrete (Source: The Authors, 2023)

[16]See; table 2.

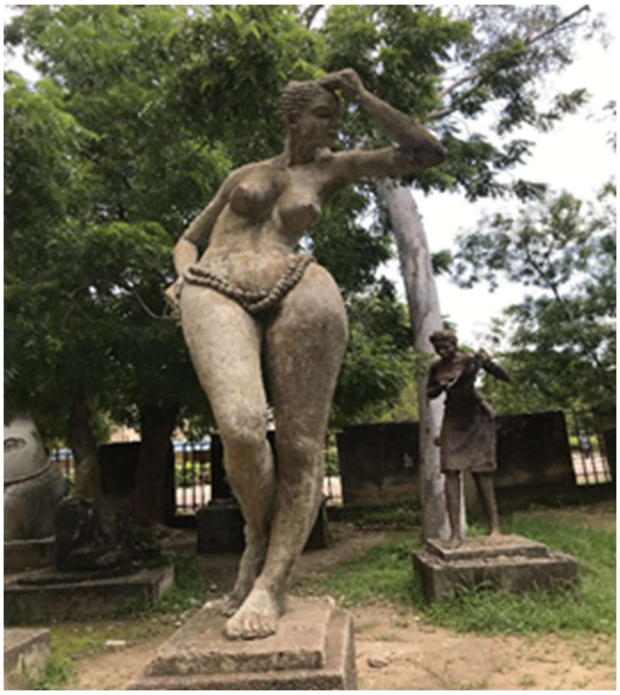


Fig. 2: Unknown Artist and year, concrete,*Nude*, (Source: The Authors, 2023)

Table 2: The themes, sub-themes and titles of selected sculptures in the A.B.U Sculpture Garden

Themes	Sub-themes	Sculpture Titles
Social	Religion	Pray for the Nation, Dilemma of a Nation, Sango, etc.
	Culture	Drunkard, A Hunter, Genius, Plod Evolution, Aftermath, etc.
	Entertainment	Le Rhythm de la vie, Let's Play, Eyo, Rhythm of Africa, etc.
	Education	Philosopher, Space, Age, Knowledge is Power, etc.
political	Nationalism	Peasants' Day, Kwame Nkrumah, Herbet Macaulay, etc.
	Leadership	Abacha, Yakubu Gowon, Olusegun Obasanjo, Invisible King, etc.
economic	Agriculture	Feed the Nation, The Farmer, etc.
	Trade	Dignity of Labour, Nono Hawker, etc.
military	Law	Justice, Injustice, etc.
	Warfare	Defence, Where Next? Sarauniyar Zazzau Amina, etc.
natural	Man	My Heritage, Motherly Affection, Child, Expectation, etc.
	Animals	False Love, Anthill, Peace, etc.
	Death	Peril, Suicide, etc.

The Functions of the A.B.U Sculpture Garden

One of the important functions of the Garden apart from the fact that it creates a conducive atmosphere for people to interact directly with the artworks, an opportunity that is missing in a typical museum setting, it serves as a meeting point for lovers, students, staff and outside visitors[17]. The provision of concrete chairs and the artistic colouration of the Garden have been attracting many visitors who use it as a place for socialization, meetings, tutorials and peaceful contemplation[18]. Along this line, Agada and Caleb opine that the Sculpture Garden has 'been speaking, singing new tunes and addressing societal issues in visual forms'[19].

Due to the presence of endless visitors during and after festivities, many businesses also evolved (Fig. 4). For example, Malam Sani Sansiro20 has been selling kebabs, and locally-made bread for over twenty (20) years21. The business attracts many customers who normally come to appreciate art, enjoy the Garden's natural setting and catch some fun. Attached to this business is a special kiosk where drinks of different kinds are also sold to visitors.



Fig. 4: Malam Sani Sansiro roasting meat (Source: The Authors, 2023).

From ecological and conservational dimensions, the greener nature of the Garden and its quietness attract different species of birds, animals such as lizards and rats. Some of these animals also find shelters inside broken sculptures, while the birds have created their nests on the trees.

The Garden also serves as a safe haven for smokers amongst both students and staff[22]. As a result of the strict university laws against smoking in public, smokers found the Garden not only serene, but also secretive[23]. Recently,

[17] Interview with Ade Lanke Peter, Sculpture Garden, 2nd September, 2022.

[18]Focused Group Discussion with the lecturers of the Department of Fine Art at A.B.U, 7th September, 2022.

[19] Agada Onya Ladi and Caleb Samuel. Visual Communicative Philosophy of the Sculpture Garden at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria: A New Consciousness. *Journal of Media and Aesthetics*, Vol. 5, no. 1.

[20]Interestingly, he too was an apprentice to his father who finally left the business for him to run due to old age.

[21] Interview with Lasisi Lamidi, Sculpture Garden, 8th January, 2023.

[22] Interview with Misses Sarah Ade Peter, Sculpture Garden, 9th July, 2023, and Interview with Maryam Yahaya Adati, 19th February, 2023.

[23] Interview with Abdulkareem Abdulkareem, Sculpture Garden, 1st July, 2023.

however, the Fine Art Department of A.B.U has also criminalised smoking in the Garden.

Most importantly, the sculptures in the Garden serve as educational materials for art historians who write on different aspects of their contents, or aesthetics. It is also an open studio for practical students in the sculpture and painting sections, who use them as reference materials.

Challenges

Despite the special socio-economic and cultural functions of the Garden, it also confronts the following challenges:

1. Many sculptures have no titles, names of artists, and year of production due to weathering, poor execution, or visitors' bad handling.

2. A large number of sculptures need to be restored and;

3. There is no funding, especially from the university management to manage the Garden in line with best global practices.

Conclusion

Contrary to previous studies on the sculpture Garden that focus mainly on the art historical analysis of its sculptures, this paper traced its historical development laying emphasis on its features and functions. Though the Garden emerged from the necessity of providing space for the reservation and preservation of the outdoor sculptures produced by students of the Fine Art Department of A.B.U, this paper argued that the Garden provides a conducive atmosphere for people to interact directly with the artworks, while serving as a meeting point for lovers, students, staff and outside visitors. The paper concludes that beyond its artistic and aesthetic values the Garden also serves many socio-economic purposes including the proliferation of businesses. Despite its functions, however, the garden faces some administrative, inventorial, social, and financial challenges. It also observed that many of the sculptures are dilapidating due to weathering and other uncoordinated human activities and therefore, demand restorative interventions.

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Oral Interviews

Focused Group Discussion with the lecturers of the Department of Fine Art at A.B.U, 7th September, 2022.

Interview with Abdulkareem Abdulkareem, Sculpture Garden, 1st July, 2023.

Interview with Ade Lanke Peter, Sculpture Garden, 2nd September, 2022.

Interview with Lasisi Lamidi, Sculpture Garden, 8th January, 2023.

Interview with Misses Sarah Ade Peter, Sculpture Garden, 9th July, 2023.

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