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Traditional Wood Carving and Contemporary Wood Sculpture in Ghana

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Abstract

Traditional wood carving and contemporary wood sculpture are amicable in the world of art and have coordinated their working ways in shaping the wood art traditions. The study, comparatively, assesses Ahwiaa traditional wood carving and contemporary wood sculpture in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Ghana based on their materiality, forms and functions. The study adopts descriptive research design using observation, interviews and photography to gather data from twenty (20) purposively sampled experts in the study area. Data collected for the study were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis tool. The outcome of the study shows that Ahwiaa carvers used locally produced tools for carving while KNUST contemporary carvers employ sophisticated equipment in their carving activities. However, both traditional and contemporary wood practices in the study area used wood as the common material to produce carvings that impact Ghanaian cultural heritage, social progress and artistic practices. The study therefore concludes that traditional and contemporary woodcarving practices in the study area are two interconnected forms of wood art that have

Keywords

Ahwiaa, contemporary wood sculpture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), traditional wood carving, wood art.

the potential to inspire, challenge, and complement each other when collaboration and interdependence exist between them. The study calls for collaboration and interdependence between Ahwiaa traditional wood carvers and KNUST contemporary wood sculptors to inspire and open up exciting opportunities for artistic exploration, adventure, innovation, cross-pollination of ideas and expertise for the growth of wood art in the study area.

1. Introduction

Since the inception of traditional African wood carving, its artefacts have not witnessed much difference in terms of their sociocultural symbolisms and functions (G. Nsiah, personal communication, May 13, 2023). Generally, while the traditional African wood carvings relate or tell a story about a particular ethnicity, contemporary wood sculpture delves into new trends of sculptural stylistic artefacts for decorative, functional, economic and other contemporary African needs. The flexibility of contemporary wood sculpture in meeting varied contemporary African needs has seen the gradual fading of the cultural heritage of traditional African wood carving. That notwithstanding, Hasluck (1977) observes that both traditional Ghanaian wood carvers and contemporary wood sculptors produce a wide range of carved objects such as stools, furniture, statues, religious objects, figurines, and decorative carvings to serve the varied social, cultural, political, religious, economic needs of a given ethnic society.

According to Boakye-Yiadom et al. (2022), one of Ghana's most iconic woodcarving traditions is the Asante's stool carvings. These stools are not only functional furniture but also have deep cultural and symbolic meanings. Each wooden stool is carefully hand-carved often using traditional tools such as adzes and carving knives. The carvers skillfully combine intricate designs, symbols and motifs that represent different aspects of Asante's culture and history (Azaglo et al., 2022). Duerden (2000) also notes that another popular form of traditional wood carving in Ghana is the creation of masks. These masks are used in various ceremonies and rituals to represent ancestral spirits or deities. Traditional Ghanaian mask carvers use their expertise to bring these masks to life, using different types of wood and adding intricate details and vibrant colours. Each mask is unique and reflects the specific cultural and spiritual traditions of the community to which it belongs. The wood materials used in traditional Ghanaian carving vary by region and availability. Popular choices include mahogany, ebony and teak and carvers carefully select the hard wood

considering its durability, structure and grain patterns to enhance the aesthetic appeal of the final piece (Adu-Agyem, 2013).

On the other hand, contemporary wood sculpture in Ghana has developed dynamically in recent years combining traditional techniques with contemporary artistic expressions. Ghanaian artists have embraced the versatility of wood as a means of creating innovative and thought-provoking sculptures (Nicklin and Salmon, 2002). Amoako et al. (2022) observe that one notable feature of contemporary Ghanaian woodcarving is the exploration of social and political themes. Artists use their sculptures to comment on issues such as identity, inequality and environmental issues. Potts (2001) corroborates that contemporary Ghanaian wood sculpture art initiates political, environmental and social discussions. Jin (2017) argues that contemporary Ghanaian wood sculptors push the boundaries of wood art beyond traditional woodcarving by combining contradicting forms, scales, abstracts and concepts. The choice of wood in contemporary Ghanaian wood sculpture varies depending on the artist's preference, the desired effect and the subject matter asserted by Adu-Agyem et al. (2013). Some contemporary wood sculptors work with wood offcuts giving them a chance to live in an art space (Potts, 2001). Others select specific types of wood including branches of wood, logs and stems for their installations which is similar to traditional woodcarving (Irvin, 2020). This fusion of traditional and contemporary elements creates a unique visual language that reflects the individual perspectives and experiences of the artists.

Ghanaian wood carving practices, whether traditional or contemporary, continue to receive scholarly attention as a measure of documenting, preserving and promoting wood carving traditions to the current and future generations of Ghanaians. A study conducted by Adu-Agyem et al. (2014) delved into the socio-economic growth and prospects of the Ahwiaa traditional wood carving industry in Ghana. In that study, it was brought to light how the wood carving business has led to the improvement in the economic and social conditions of the wood carvers at Ahwiaa. Also, Amoah (2014) examined the progress of growth and development of Ahwiaa's traditional wood carving shedding light on the impact of Ahwiaa's traditional wood carving on socioeconomic development processes and projects in the Ahwiaa community. Edusei and Amoah (2014) delved into the kente weaving and wood carving industries in the Kwabre East District and Ahwiaa. The study highlighted on the prospects of tourism and employment in wood carving in Ahwiaa. Hudson (2011) discussed the operations of Foase traditional wood carvers and its implication to Art

Education. Since the scope of Adu-Agyem et al. (2014), Amoah (2014), Edusei and Adusei (2014) and Hudson (2011) studies were geographically delimited to Ahwiaa's and Foase's wood carving business in Ghana within the context of its socioeconomic impact on wood carvers, general development, prospects of the Ahwiaa community and traditional wood carvers in Foase operations and its implication to Art Education, the materiality, forms and function of Ahwia's wood carving traditions seemingly appear unresearched, and therefore, require further scholarly attention.

In contemporary wood sculpture, Azaglo's et al. (2022) biographical study of the iconography of the contemporary Ghanaian sculptor, Isaac Opoku Mensah, revealed various forms and materials the sculptor employs in his woodcarvings. Another study on contemporary wood sculpture conducted by Nicklin and Salmon (2002) places emphasis on wood materiality used in the making of contemporary sword pommels and linguist staff. Although both Azaglo et al. (2022), and Nicklin and Salmon's (2002) studies have shed some light on contemporary Ghanaian wood sculpture, a comparative study of traditional and contemporary Ghanaian wood carving practices appears unaddressed and therefore presents a knowledge gap. To fill the knowledge gap, the current study adopts a comparative approach to critically assess the materiality, forms and functions of both traditional wood carving and contemporary wood sculpture with specific reference to traditional wood carving practices at Ahwiaa and contemporary wood sculpture artistic practices at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology both in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. This brings to light the synergy between traditional wood carving practices and contemporary wood sculpture art in Ghana.

For clarity purpose, traditional wood carving, in this study, relates to the inherited indigenous Ghanaian wood carving practices perpetuated across generations. It strictly involves the use of local technology and ingenuity to produce wood artefacts that reflect typical Ghanaian social, political and cultural heritage as corroborated by Tohid et al. (2015), and Ozokeraha (2010). On the other hand, contemporary wood sculpture, as used in this study, entails the advanced Ghanaian wood artistic practices that incorporate sophisticated technology; new trends involving diverse wood materials and installations; innovative concepts and themes that are consistent with the present day Ghanaian pertinent societal needs as concurred by studies (Ezekwe & Nwanna, 2020; Ozokeraha, 2010).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Cannatella's (2001) art practices assessment theory which provides clear criteria for evaluating different aspects of an artwork such as; creativity, technical skill, and concept development. The aforementioned assessment criteria theorised by Cannatella (2001) guided the study's comparative assessment of the traditional and contemporary wood woodcarving practices at Ahwiaa and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) respectively in Kumasi in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. In specific terms, the materiality; tools and equipment; carving processes, artistry and technical skills, forms and sociocultural functions of Ahwiaa traditional wood carvings and KNUST contemporary wood sculpture Art were comparatively assessed in relation to Cannatella's (2001) art assessment blueprint which considers creativity, technical skills, and concept development as key to the assessment of artefacts.

2.2 Concept of Traditional Wood Carving

Hasluck (1977) believes that traditional wood carving is an incredible art form found in many cultures around the world. Coleman (2016) supports the idea that wood is skillfully worked to create beautiful forms, masks and other decorative objects. Traditional wood carving has a long history and deep roots in cultural traditions. Woodcarvings often depict stories, symbols and cultural motifs, making them not only visually stunning but also meaningful (Liang and Qi, 2021). Asmah et al. (2016) emphasize that woodcarving is a labour-intensive process that requires special tools and techniques. This is a testament to the craftsmanship and creativity of the craftsmen who bring a piece of wood to life. Mujir et al. (2018) argue that whether it is the intricate details of the figure or the bold lines of relief carving, traditional wood carving is a true testament to the beauty and versatility of this natural wood material. According to Tohid et al. (2015), traditional wood carvings are often passed down from generation to generation, preserving traditional techniques and styles. The contextual importance of traditional woodcarving is related to heritage, storytelling and the preservation of cultural identity. It represents craftsmanship, appreciation of natural materials and respect for culture and tradition. Intricate designs and detailed wood carvings bring beauty and cultural significance to life. Traditional wood carving is, therefore, a timeless art form that connects and continues to inspire audiences around the world.

2.3 Traditional Ghanaian Wood Carving

According to Azaglo et al. (2022), the intricate designs and attention to detail in traditional wood carvings in Ghana are simply awe-inspiring. Adu-Agyem (2013) asserts that it is incredible how skilled artisans can transform a simple piece of wood into a symbolic beautiful work of art. The traditional wood carvers at Ahwiaa incorporate tools such as locally made scrappers known 'weree', wooden files and machete in their carvings. Okrah (2002) asserts that each Ghanaian carving tells a unique story, reflecting the rich heritage and traditions of the Ghanaian people. The symbolism and storytelling incorporated into traditional Ghanaian wood carvings make them even more captivating. Within the Traditional Ghanaian setting, before a piece of wood is cut to be carved, it is believed that certain rituals have to be performed or libation is to be poured before a part of the tree is cut for carving (Amoah, 2014). The wood ready for carving could be transformed into many different cultural artefacts in Ghana. Figure 1 presents a typical traditional Ashanti wood carving (stool). Traditional wood carving in Ghana is not only a means of artistic expression but also a source of livelihood for many talented rural artisans. Boakye Yiadom et al. (2022) opine that the demand for Ghanaian traditional wood carvings both locally and internationally speaks to the exceptional craftsmanship and creativity of the artists. Traditional wood carving in Ghana is a true testament to the country's rich cultural heritage and the talent of its artisans (Amoah, 2014).



Figure 1: Traditional wooden Stools carved at Ahwiaa.
(Source: Wagner, 2023).

2.4 Nuances of Contemporary Wood Sculpture

Contemporary wood sculpture explores the meaning of art using wood as a medium (Daud et al., 2012). Kõiva (2018) opines that contemporary wood sculpture is an exciting art form that combines the natural beauty of wood with contemporary artistic expressions. Contemporary wood sculptures can range from abstract and minimalist designs to intricate and detailed shapes. Contemporary wood artists often explore the unique characteristics of different types of wood, such as grain, texture, and colour, to create magnificent sculptures (Ljaljević-Grbić et al., 2013). Rodlach (2010) supports the view that some contemporary wood sculptors even perforate wood and use other materials such as metal or glass and light to add contrast and depth to their wooden sculptural creations. Al-abass (2012) in concurrence with the view of Rodlach (2010) opines that it is amazing how artists can transform a solid wooden beam into a dynamic and visually interesting sculpture.

Frag (2020) shares the view that when it comes to contemporary sculpting, artists are pushing the boundaries of traditional techniques and looking for new possibilities. They use innovative tools, machines and different methods such as installation, assemblage and construction to create unique and thought-provoking wooden sculptural forms (Nicklin and Salmon, 2002). Some contemporary wood sculptors focus on the natural beauty of the tree itself, while others include abstraction, symbolism, or social commentary (Wells, 2017). The use of different types of wood, such as locally collected or exotic, brings another depth and meaning to the wood sculpture. It is truly amazing to see how artists can transform a simple piece of wood into a piece of art that evokes emotion and sparks conversation (Hung and Magilaro, 2007). In a nutshell, contemporary wood sculpture is a vibrant and dynamic field that continues to attract audiences from around the world.

With specific reference to Ghana, contemporary wood sculpture showcases the country's rich artistic heritage and thriving art scene. Ghanaian artisans are known for their wood sculpture skills and ability to create intricate and expressive sculptures. They can use various parts of the tree to assemble or construct sculptures to raise arguments (A. Samuel, personal communication, September 13, 2023). One of Ghana's most prominent contemporary wood sculptors is El Anatsui. His iconic wood sculpture, titled *Akuas's Surviving Children* (Figure 2), has received international acclaim. His forms explore themes of African history, culture and social issues (Anatsui, 1993).



Figure 2: Akuas's Surviving Children by El Anatsui.

Source: El Anastui (1993).

Another famous contemporary wood sculptor is Kwame Akoto-Bamfo, known for his powerful and emotional sculptures depicting historical and social stories. One of his popular forms titled African Maiden (Figure 3) carved from Mahogany wood. His work often focuses on issues of slavery, African identity, and the resilience of the human spirit (Chesser, 2019). Many other talented contemporary artists in Ghana specialize in wood sculpture. These artists are often inspired by pertinent contemporary political and socio-economic issues in Ghana. They use a variety of techniques to create their unique and fascinating sculptures from traditional hand carving to the use of power tools (Bobrov, 2021).



Figure 3: African Maiden by Kwame Akoto-Bamfo

Source: Chesser (2019).

In summary, contemporary wood sculpture in Ghana not only serves as a form of artistic expression but also plays an important role by bringing out questions and sociopolitical issues for discussion.

3. Methods

The study assessed the traditional woodcarving at Ahwiaa and contemporary wood sculpture art at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) both in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The study employed case study design under qualitative research approach. Creswell (2014) posits that single or multiple cases could be drawn from a general worldview for thorough assessment. Since traditional wood carving activities and contemporary wood sculpture art are perpetrated across Ghana, the selective study of Ahwiaa traditional wood carving traditions and contemporary wood sculpture art at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology justifies the choice of qualitative case (multiple) study design as canvassed by Creswell (2014). With sampling-related matters, the study employed expert purposive sampling technique to sample wood carvers and sculpture students at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. A total of twenty (20) carvers were sampled for the study comprising ten (10) traditional wood carvers at Ahwiaa with not less than fifteen years of wood carving experience, whereas ten (10) practising contemporary wood sculpture students of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) were sampled based on their rich contemporary wood carving expertise. The research instruments used for data collection included field observation, interviews and photography. During interview sessions, the study adopted the one-on-one interview also known as the personal interview which took an unstructured format. Participatory observations of the working processes in both the traditional wood carving and contemporary sculpture saw the researchers as active participants in both the traditional wood carving and contemporary wood sculpture activities in the study area. Ahwiaa and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology were chosen for the study based on preluded investigations by researchers that showed a close working relationship between Ahwiaa traditional wood carvers and contemporary wood sculpture artists at KNUST. Various photographs of woodcarving processes at Ahwiaa and KNUST were taken for assessment to give an interpretation and comparative description of the traditional wood carving and contemporary wood sculpture practices of the study area. Participants' identities were not revealed. However, in instances where photographic data have been incorporated, the express consent of the respondents was further

sought. The study adopted Creswell's (2014) thematic analysis procedure of organizing, transcribing, reading and familiarisation, generating themes, coding and short quotations for data analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

This section makes an analytical discussion of the findings of the study. The discussion, comparatively, focuses on the materiality, forms and functions of traditional wood carving and contemporary wood sculpture in the study area. The strengths and weaknesses of traditional wood carving and contemporary wood sculpture and how interdependency and collaboration can be appropriated between Ahwiaa traditional wood carvers and the contemporary wood carvers of the KNUST take a central stage in this section of the study.

4.1 Tools, Materials and Equipment

The study found the various tools, materials and equipment used in traditional wood carving and Contemporary wood sculpture some of which are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Traditional Wood Carving Tools and Materials at Ahwiaa

Tools and Materials	Uses
Locally-made Chisels	The chisels are used to shave wood surfaces, mortise and chop out surfaces and corners in wood.
Locally-manufactured Gouges	Gouges are used to make grooves or indentations in wood during carving.
Locally-made Wooden Mallet	A tool used to impart force on the heads of chisels or drive chisels into wood during carving.
Traditional Adze	A tool used for cutting or shaping large pieces of wood. The saw is used for cutting wood.
Saws (Cross-cut and dovetail)	
Wood (log)	The chief material used for the carving process.
Stakes/Wood Chips	Alternative material used in wood sculpture.
Locally prepared dyes	Embellishing or finishing materials often applied on carved artefacts.
Lacquer, Paint and Stain Finish	
Carving knives	A tool used for detailing and modelling in carving.

(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).

Table 2: Contemporary Wood Sculpture Tools, Materials and Equipment at KNUST

Tools and Materials	Uses
Chisels	The chisels are used to shave wood surfaces, mortise and chop out surfaces and corners in wood.
Gouges	They are used to make grooves or indentations in wood.
Wooden Mallet	A tool used to impart force on the heads of chisels or drive chisels into wood during carving.
Adze	A tool used for cutting or shaping large pieces of wood.
Saws (Chainsaw)	The saw is used for cutting wood.
Wood (log), leaves and branches	A material used for the carving process.
Stakes/Wood Chips	Alternative material used in wood sculpture.
CNC laser cutting machine	A machine used to engrave remarkable and precise details on wood.
Carving knives	A tool used for detailing and modelling in wood carving.
Drilling Machine	An equipment used for drilling holes in wood during carving.
Resin	Substances from wood used in wood sculpture.
Lacquer, Paint and Stain Finish	Embellishing or finishing materials often applied on carved artefact.

(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).

The study showed that 10 traditional wood carvers used locally fabricated tools such as; chisels, gouges, mallets, and adze with wood as the chief material carving practices in Ahwiaa as observed in Figure 4(A, C, B & D). The aforementioned Ahwiaa traditional wood carving tools are often made by hand and have been used in woodworking traditions for years as revealed by the Ahwiaa carvers. They are designed for various engraving techniques with a focus on detail and intricate work. Ahwiaa Traditional woodcarving tools as observed in Figure 4 A and B have specific shapes and bevels that are characteristic of the woodworking style or culture to which they belong.

On the other hand, the study observed that all 10 KNUST sculpture students used sophisticated contemporary tools and equipment such as; drilling machine, CNC laser cutting machine, chain and hacksaws, chisels and gouges among others as shown in Figure 4 (I, J, K & L) as well as similar traditional tools used by the Ahwiaa carvers (Figures 4 A, B, C & D). Since the contemporary wood carvers at KNUST make use of traditional caving tools, it shows interconnection between

the two facets of woodcarving artistes. That notwithstanding, contemporary wood sculpture materials, tools and equipment used at KNUST have evolved with the advancement of technology and the changing needs of sculptors. KNUST contemporary wood sculptors often use modern materials, such as high-quality steel alloys or carbon fibre handles for their chisels and gouges which improve durability and ease of use. Contemporary tools can also offer innovative features such as user-friendly designs that increase comfort during long carving sessions or special blade profiles for certain carving techniques. Another important difference is the availability and selection of tool options. Traditional woodcarving tools can include a wide variety of chisels, gouges, and carving knives illustrated in Figures 4(A, B, C and D) specific to different carving styles or cultural practices whereas contemporary wood sculpture tools which continue to be versatile may also include specialized tools tailored for specific carving applications or artistic preferences.



A: Carving knife
(Source: Awuni, 2023).



B: Adze
(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).



C: Wooden Mallet
(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).



D: Gouges
(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).



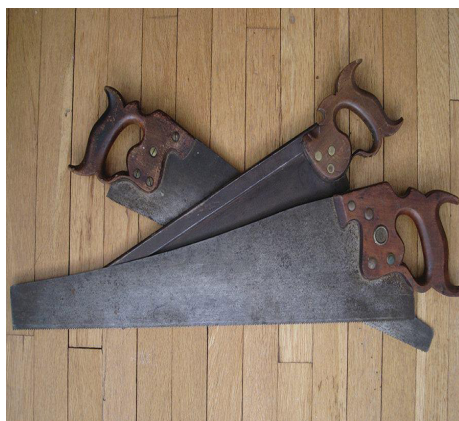
E: Wood
(Source: Dogbevi, 2023).



F: Wood Chips/ Stakes
(Source: Dogbevi, 2023).



G: Locally-made Chisel
(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).



H: Saws (Cross-cut and dovetail)
(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).



I: Chainsaw
(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).



J: CNC laser cutting machine
(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).



K: Drilling Machine

Source: Fieldwork, (2023).



L: Lacquer, Wood Stain and Paint

(Source: Fieldwork, (2023).

Figure 4 (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K & L): Tools, materials and equipment in traditional wood carving and contemporary wood sculpture.

4.2 Types and Characteristics of Wood Used by Ahwiaa Traditional Wood Carvers and KNUST Contemporary Wood Sculptors

Wood, as a medium, offers a unique set of qualities that make it ideal for carving and creating intricate and detailed artefacts by traditional and contemporary carvers. Choosing wood for carving comes with some considerations as different types of wood possess varying characteristics, such as grain pattern, density, colour, and durability. One of the key attributes of wood used in traditional wood carving at Ahwiaa is its hardness. The hardness and density of the wood are also important considerations in traditional wood carving (Farang, 2020). Hardwoods, such as oak, mahogany, and teak, are favoured for their durability and ability to hold intricate details in stools carved with adinkra symbols (Adu-Agyem, 2013). The dense nature of these woods allows for precise carving and contributes to the longevity of the finished artwork as argued by the Ahwiaa carvers.

Different types of wood offer a range of colours, from light and pale tones to rich and dark shades. Carvers often select wood species that best suit the desired visual effect and complement the subject matter of the carving. For example, lighter woods like pine may be used for delicate and intricate carvings, while darker woods like ebony can create a more dramatic and contrasting effect. The carvers explained that the colour and tone of the wood contribute to the

aesthetic appeal of traditional wood carvings used in royal stool production. Also, the choice of colour for royal stool production may be requested by chiefs of various traditional areas because some woods have totemic associations. The Akyem Abuakwa traditional area, for example, uses the leopard as its totem and prefers to use light-coloured woods such as Wawa and Sapele for the production of royal stools (Figure 5). This becomes a taboo for the palace to go in for darker stools (Figure 6) based on their symbolism (Agyei, S., personal communication, November 16 2023).



Figure 5: Light-coloured royal stool

(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).

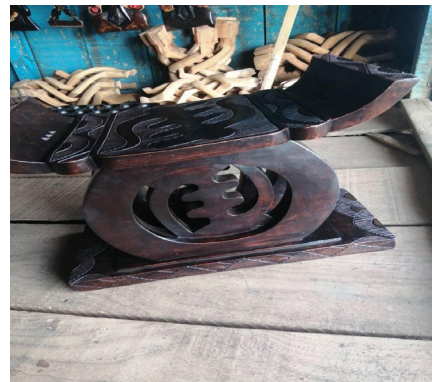


Figure 6: Dark-coloured royal stool

(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).

With contemporary wood sculpture art at KNUST, the materiality of the artwork plays a crucial role in shaping its aesthetic, conceptual, and sensory qualities. Wood, as a medium, offers a unique set of properties and characteristics that contemporary wood sculptors at KNUST explore and manipulate to create captivating and thought-provoking sculptures.

One aspect of wood's materiality is its natural texture and grain pattern. Wood grains can vary widely depending on the type of wood used, and contemporary wood sculptors at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology often take advantage of these natural patterns to enhance the visual appeal of their sculptures. Many a time, KNUST sculptors could choose to highlight the intricate lines and swirls in the grain or use the grain as a compositional element, integrating it into the overall design of the artwork. The organic nature of wood also lends itself well to expressing a sense of warmth, depth, and natural beauty in contemporary wood sculpture at KNUST, as established by the study. Contemporary wood sculptors can choose different types of wood with varying colours, tones, and textures to evoke specific moods or convey

particular themes in their artworks. Awuni typifies that light-coloured woods like Wawa or Sapele may create a sense of softness and delicacy, while darker woods like Odum or mahogany can evoke a more dramatic and rich aesthetic appeal in contemporary carvings (Awuni, S., personal communication, November 15 2023).

4.3 Forms of Ahwiaa Traditional Wood Carving and KNUST Contemporary Wood Sculpture Art

Traditional wood carving is a form of art that has been practised by many cultures in Ghana. It involves the skillful manipulation of wood to create decorative and functional objects (stools and furniture). In Ghana, traditional wood carving has a rich history and plays a significant role in the country's cultural heritage using forms in carving. The forms of carving in traditional wood carving can vary depending on the specific culture or region. One common form used in Ahwiaa in Ghana includes figurative carving. In this form, woodcarvers create statues, masks, and stools depicting human figures, animals, mythical creatures and Adinkra symbols. In terms of the mode of execution, the Ahwiaa traditional woodcarvers, carved images or symbols or forms out of a wooden block or logs which are first shaped to the required size using an adze and chisel (Figure 7) and (Figure 8). The carved artefact (stool) is shaped and detailed with the carving knife (Figure 9) to attain the desired form needed by the traditional wood carver (Figure 10).



Figure 7: Shaping logs using an adze
(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).



Figure 8: Carving of stools using mallet and Chisel (Source: Fieldwork, 2023).



Figure 9: Shaping of stool with a carving Knife (Source: Fieldwork, 2023).



Figure 10: A Carved form (Source: Fieldwork, 2023).

These carvings often have symbolic meanings and are also used for religious rituals, storytelling, and decorative purposes. One popular form of Ahwiaa woodcarvings is the royal stool with adinkra symbols (Figures 11 and 12). The design of a royal stool often features intricate relief symbols, geometric patterns, and other cultural motifs. These carvings may tell a story or convey specific meanings related to the royal lineage or the community's history. Artisans pay attention to every detail, ensuring that the stool reflects the status and heritage it represents.



Figure 11: Symbols on royal stool (Source: Fieldwork, 2023)



Figure 12: Adinkra symbol on royal stool (Source: Fieldwork, 2023).

Contemporary wood sculpture is a dynamic and evolving art form that encompasses a wide range of styles, techniques, and artistic expressions. It offers artists the opportunity to experiment with various materials, concepts, and approaches to create unique and thought-provoking artworks. One form of contemporary wood sculpture is abstract sculpture. It explores nonrepresentational forms, often using organic shapes, textures, and patterns found in nature. Artists may carve, shape, and manipulate wood to create abstract sculptures that evoke emotions, challenge traditional notions of form, and invite viewers to interpret and engage with the artwork in their own way.

Installation art is another form that incorporates wood sculpture in contemporary practice. Artists in this genre often use wood as a material to create large-scale, site-specific installations as observed in KNUST. These installations may involve the arrangement of multiple wooden components (Figure 13) creating immersive environments that interact with architectural spaces and engage viewers on a sensory and experiential level.

Some KNUST contemporary wood sculptors explored the concept of assemblage, where they combined multiple found or reclaimed wood pieces to create sculptures (Figure 14). By repurposing and recontextualising wood fragments, KNUST carvers combined their sculptures with layers of meaning, symbolism, and narrative. The contemporary form of woodcarving observed at KNUST allowed for experimentation with texture, colour, and composition, as well as provided opportunities for environmental and sustainable artistic practices.



Figure 13: Arranging multiple wood types
(Source: Fieldwork, 2023).



Figure 14: Installation of Wood sculpture
into an artefact (Source: Fieldwork, 2023).

4.4 Functions of Ahwiaa Traditional Wood Carvings and KNUST Contemporary Wood Sculpture Art

One of the primary functions of traditional wood carving in Ahwiaa is storytelling and cultural preservation. Wood carvings often depict mythological or historical narratives, symbolising significant events, legends, or religious beliefs. These intricate carvings serve as visual narratives, passing down cultural knowledge and traditions from one generation to the next. They act as a medium through which stories are preserved and shared, keeping cultural identities alive. Traditional wood carving in Ahwiaa also serves ceremonial and ritual functions. These carvings often represent deities, ancestors, or revered figures, and are used in religious rites or ceremonies to invoke blessings, offer protection, or commemorate important milestones. The intricate details and symbolism of the carvings (Figures 11 and 12) add depth and meaning to these rituals, reinforcing cultural values and beliefs. Another function of traditional wood carving at Ahwiaa is to beautify and adorn spaces. Elaborate carvings can be seen in the architectural details of temples, palaces, and other important structures, adding a touch of grandeur and beauty to the environment as revealed by Ahwiaa carvers. Ahwiaa carvers further added that intricately carved wooden screens, panels, and decorative elements can also be found in homes, emphasizing the aesthetic value of their wood carving. The exquisite craftsmanship and attention to detail in Ahwiaa traditional woodcarvings create visually stunning pieces that enhance the overall ambience of spaces.

Contemporary wood sculpture artefacts produced at KNUST serve a variety of functions combining artistic expression with practical applications. In recent years, KNUST wood sculptors have pushed the boundaries of traditional woodcarving techniques to create pieces that not only showcase their creativity but also serve a purpose beyond aesthetics. One of the functions of contemporary wood sculpture art at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology is to communicate ideas and tell stories. KNUST wood sculptors use wood as a medium to convey various themes, emotions, and narratives. Through the manipulation of form, texture, and composition, KNUST wood sculptors evoke and provoke different feelings and thoughts as well as serve as visual metaphors or representations of complex concepts, allowing the public to engage with the artwork on a deeper level. Contemporary wood sculptures produced at KNUST also serve as decorative objects, enhancing the aesthetics of both interior and outdoor spaces. The combination of the contemporary wood sculptor's vision and the inherent warmth and richness of wood can create striking focal points in any setting. Whether it is a large-scale installation or a smaller, intricately carved

piece, KNUST wood sculptures could elevate the overall ambience of a space and add a touch of elegance and sophistication. KNUST contemporary wood sculptures also contribute to environmental sustainability as the study found some of the artists focused on repurposing and recycling wood, transforming discarded materials into unique and captivating sculptures. By giving new life to discarded wood materials, KNUST wood sculptors promote sustainability and raise awareness about the importance of responsible consumption and waste management.

4.5 Strengths and Weaknesses of Traditional Wood Carving and Contemporary Wood Sculpture Art in the Study Area

4.5.1 Strengths

Traditional Ghanaian wood carving has numerous strengths that make it a unique and valuable art form. It allows artists to express their creativity through their artefacts and cultural heritage through intricate designs and patterns as observed in Ahwiaa. Ahwiaa traditional wood carving provides a sense of connection to nature, as artists work with natural materials and showcase the beauty of wood grains. The craftsmanship in Ahwiaa and attention to detail in traditional wood carving are truly remarkable, making it a cherished art form in many cultures.

On the other hand, contemporary wood sculpture art in KNUST has unique strengths that set it apart from traditional Ghanaian (Ahwiaa) wood carving. One of the main strengths of KNUST's contemporary wood carving is its ability to push the boundaries of impossibilities with wood as the forming medium. Contemporary wood sculptors in KNUST often experiment with unconventional techniques and wood materials, resulting in innovative and thought-provoking artworks. The strength of contemporary wood sculpture at KNUST is its versatility. KNUST artists could manipulate wood in various ways through the construction and assemblage of objects, such as carving, shaping, bending, and even combining it with other materials like metal or glass. This allows for a wide range of artistic expressions and the creation of sculptures that are dynamic, interactive, abstract or realistic for addressing pertinent social issues in Ghana. Contemporary wood carvers in KNUST also embrace the concept of storytelling and conceptual exploration (Figures 10 and 11) to convey their ideas, emotions, and other narratives. They incorporated symbolism, metaphors, or social commentary into their sculptures, creating pieces that engage viewers on a deeper intellectual or emotional level. Lastly, contemporary wood sculpture art in KNUST has the power to create a dialogue between the past and the present.

4.5.2 Weaknesses

Traditional wood carving, like any art form, has its own set of challenges and weaknesses. One weakness of Ahwiaa traditional wood carving is that it can be a time-consuming process. Creating intricate designs and detailed carvings using local tools required a significant amount of time and patience. As a result, Ahwiaa carvers have limited opportunity to meet production deadlines, particularly with high demands as consensually revealed by Ahwiaa carvers. Another weakness of Ahwiaa traditional wood carving observed by the study was the potential for physical strain or injury. Woodcarving often involves using sharp tools and repetitive motions, which lead to strain on the hands and wrists and pains on the neck due to the laboriousness of the carving process. Artists need to take proper precautions and resting breaks to avoid injuries and ensure their long-term health. Ahwiaa traditional wood carving also relies heavily on the availability of suitable wood materials. Certain types of wood may be scarce or expensive, making it challenging for artists to source the desired materials for their projects. Another weakness is the limited scope for experimentation and innovation associated with Ahwiaa traditional wood carving. While there is a rich history and established techniques, some of the Ahwiaa wood carvers felt restricted by the conventions and expectations associated with traditional wood carving. This can hinder the exploration of new styles, concepts, and materials.

Also, contemporary wood sculpture practices at KNUST have their own set of challenges and weaknesses. One weakness of the contemporary wood sculpture art in KNUST is the potential fragility of the wood medium. Wood, especially when used in intricate or delicate designs, can be susceptible to damage, such as cracking or warping in installations over time due to weather conditions over time. This poses challenges for the preservation and longevity of some of the contemporary wood sculptures produced in KNUST. Another weakness is the limited availability of certain types of wood. Contemporary wood sculptors in KNUST have a specific vision for their products that require rare or exotic wood species. However, the sourcing and acquisition of these woods can be difficult and costly, which limits the artist's ability to bring their vision to life. Contemporary wood sculptors at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology also face challenges in terms of the cost involved in transporting wood from rural parts of Ghana to the University as well as the expensive cost incurred in some wood installations.

4.6 Interdependency, Collaboration and Appropriation as the Way Forward

Traditional wood carving at Ahwiaa is rooted in cultural heritage and craftsmanship, while contemporary wood sculpture in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology pushes the boundaries of artistic expression and experimentation to the creative world of adventure.

The interdependence of these two art forms lies in the common basis of wood as a means of communication. Traditional wood carving techniques and skills can provide contemporary wood sculptors with a strong technical foundation. Knowledge of carving techniques, understanding of wood properties and mastery of tools gained through traditional wood carving can be applied and adapted to create unique and innovative contemporary wood sculptures.

Similarly, contemporary wood sculpture can influence and inspire traditional woodcarving techniques. The exploration of new forms and abstract concepts of ideas can breathe new life into traditional woodcarving, invigorating it and making it more relevant to both traditional and contemporary needs for massive economic gains and livelihood empowerment of wood carvers in the study area. Traditional woodcarving and contemporary wood sculpture can be interdependent, mutually inspiring each other's techniques, materials and concepts. This symbiotic relationship takes into account the preservation of cultural heritage by promoting innovation and creativity in wood art. Traditional woodcarving and contemporary wood sculpture can work together in many different ways, fostering a dynamic and enriching partnership. By combining their unique approaches, techniques and perspectives, these two art forms can create exciting and innovative works that transcend traditional boundaries. Under interdependency, collaboration and appropriation are key factors for the progressive development of traditional wood carving and contemporary wood sculpture art in the study area. Lastly, there should be interdependency, collaboration and appropriation of materiality, forms and function between traditional wood carvers at Ahwiaa and the contemporary wood sculptors at KNUST to push Ghanaian wood artistic discourse to a higher height of global envy.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The primary focus of this study was to assess Ahwiaa traditional wood carving and KNUST contemporary wood sculpture art in terms of their materiality, forms and functions of their art practice. For both Ahwiaa traditional wood carving and KNUST contemporary wood sculpture, wood is the key common material and its choice is crucial, as different types of wood possess varying characteristics, such

as grain pattern, density, colour, and durability. The hardness of the wood are also important considerations in traditional wood carving where hardwoods such as oak, mahogany, and teak, are favoured for their durability for carving royal stools in Ahwiaa. These woods can withstand moisture by drying faster when seasoning these woods for carving and also withstand any weather conditions. The forms of traditional and contemporary wood carvings in the study area involve the skillful manipulation of wood to create decorative and functional objects. Also, the study established that the functions of Ahwiaa traditional and KNUST contemporary wood carvings showed historical narratives, cultural symbolising significant ceremonial, ritual, religious beliefs and social commentaries. While Ahwiaa traditional wood carving carries the weight of cultural heritage and craftsmanship, KNUST contemporary wood sculpture art pushes the boundaries of artistic expression, social commentary and experimentation.

In conclusion, the relationship between traditional Ahwiaa wood carving and contemporary wood sculpture at KNUST is a symbiotic one where they express themselves in diverse ways. By embracing the past while exploring new possibilities, both traditional and contemporary wood carvers in the study area created captivating and meaningful artworks that showcased indigenous and contemporary trends. The study therefore concludes that traditional wood carving and contemporary wood sculpture in the study area are two interconnected forms of wood art that have the potential to inspire, challenge, and complement each other when interdependence, collaboration and appropriation exist between them. Whether it is through the incorporation of traditional techniques into contemporary pieces or the infusion of contemporary forms into traditional designs, the dialogue between these art forms allows for a dynamic exchange of ideas, techniques, and cultural influences. This ongoing conversation contributes to the evolution and growth of wood art as a whole, ensuring its continued relevance and impact in the field and the ever-changing art world. The study recommends interdependence, collaboration and appropriation between Ahwiaa traditional wood carvers and KNUST contemporary wood sculptors in the study area to inspire and open up exciting opportunities for artistic exploration, adventure, innovation, cross-pollination of ideas and expertise for the growth of wood art in the study area. Since wood was established as the chief carving material, further studies could be conducted on the environmental impact and sustenance of the wood carving practices in the study area.

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