

Six Abstract Tortoise Sculptures: A Metaphorical Study in Waste Materials

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Abstract

A technical report of some experiences in the Sculpture studio of the researcher in a studio based PhD titled, Eco-Aesthetics in Sculpture Practice: A Study in Waste Metals, Plastics and Fibres conducted from 2012 to 2019 in Delta state University in Nigeria. One wondered if there were not enough Tortoises and Turtles representations in Nigeria that one would embark on more such creations. This is rather a metaphorical eco study imputing human family life in the Tortoise abstract sculptures. It is an x-ray of the family and different characters one can see in a Nigerian family. The utilization of wastes within the environment is paramount in this study. This could be likened to the literary work of George Orwell in *Animal Farm* where animals are imputed human characters to portray the ills in the society. This study utilized qualitative method of research and assemblage, construction and welding as sculpture studio methods. Indeed the family unit is a complex one in Nigeria where the six characters of the father tortoise, the mother tortoise, the Red Hot, the Lone Ranger the Synchronizer and the Baby Tortoise are metaphorical statements with waste materials that would have been a menace the environment. It is not enough to talk or write about climate change for sculpture works do not only pass on the waste vulnerability of the environment but also pass on this message so vividly even more than a thousand words to a thousand years later as one can attest of the Nok Sculptures in Nigeria hundreds of years after.

Key words: Technical, Sculpture, Abstract, Eco-aesthetics, Conceptual, Metaphor, Waste Materials, Welding, and Tortoise

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study is part of the PhD studio experience of the researcher with the title, Eco-Aesthetics in Sculpture Practice: A Study in Waste Metals, Plastics and Fibres, which has engaged wastes in the sculpture studio to make sculpture metaphors of tortoise with imputed human family life. This could be likened to the literary work of George Orwell (1945) in *Animal Farm*. In this configuration there are six forms representing the family, the father the mother as the nucleus of the family and the four children with distinctive characteristic features that are exhibited in some human families. At this juncture one would like to explain why there are six in number. In Nigeria most contemporary families' ideal of a family is six. Another angle of this study is why should the forms be abstract and not realism. First and foremost the materials of waste metals, plastics and fibre for an experimental artist would explore more in abstracted forms to drive home the metaphoric statements. Again the realistic rendition of forms is better achieved by modelling and not welding, construction and assemblages which are readily yielding in waste materials. In other words the materials available dictate the best option of methods to apply. Then one would also ask why the metaphors. The study is metaphoric in that the tortoise in actual life does not exhibit such human family characteristics.

The story of the Tortoise and its natural tendencies contradict human family living as the tortoise lays her eggs, secures them and moves away from them and continues without waiting for them to hatch or even care for them. These series of six abstract tortoises are recreations of the tortoise by the researcher imputing human family life into the sociology of the Tortoise.

The Sculpture studio is a space for teaching and learning of configurations of forms both in the two dimensions as low, relief, High relief and intaglio which is sunk in relief as well as in the three dimensions even now in the fourth and fifth dimensions.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND CITED WORKS

One can only appreciate this study better with the understanding of conceptual metaphor theory expressed in Lakoff and Johnson (1980) because it is on this theoretical frame that this study stands on. A conceptual metaphor is one that one idea is understood in terms of another (Nordquist, 2019). More also is the

wasthetics theory of Gary Anderson' triple 'R',reduce,reuse and recycle (americanhistory.si.edu, 1970) is aptly appropriated in this in that in this study one attempted to use wastes from different sources to reuse them and reduce wastes that would have been a menace in the environment which were repurposed for sculpture assemblages and constructions. Being that the study is on waste materials of metals, plastics and fibres.

Some sculptors have worked on Tortoises and Turtles both as realistic and abstracted forms and one of such sculptors is amazingly a 91 year old lady, Nancy Schon whose play turtle is called Myrtle(en.m.wikipedia.org)4Ft long, mounted at Myrtle street playground on Beacon Hill .She also made the Tortoises and the Hare in 1994 in casted bronze metal placedat Boston Massachusetts in USA .Lithgow and Wall(2019.) refers to wastes as abject refers to waste artists as agents of disruption as they examined an artist in residence at the Edmonton Waste Centre

Studio Methods employed in the Study

There are three major methods employed in this study:assemblage, construction and welding.Assemblage is an additive process where artists construct work by putting together objects and attaches them in some way. Assemblages Sculpture can include a variety of materials in the same Sculpture, whereas other types of sculpture may only be made out of or perhaps two materials. Construction is a procedure were many components are forged together to make a form .Welding is the major studio method employed in this studio experience and it is basically the joining of metals through heat and the use of electrodes in ace welding ,the joints are reduced to molten liquid and fused together by heat.

Materials,Tools and Gadgets employed in the Study

These are the material used for this study:Discarded metals, plugs, bells, chains, wheels, motor cycle fenders, tyres, ceiling fan, coil casing, joint pipe, bicycle and chain casing Discarded motor cycle and bicycle parts, chains bicycle chain carriers bolts, Spark plugs, Motorcycle fenders and wheels Discarded metal, Motor cycle seat casing and wheel, Ceiling fan, Head light casing of motor cycle bicycle chain case, motor wheel, motor cycle fender, generator exhaust and ceiling fan coil casing, , Discarded metal fan coil casing and bicycle parts.Demie,C.(2015) also engage in the study of students usingwastes in the workshop to create sensitivity of wastes the environment.

Tool and Gadgets

There are many tools and gadgets used in this study but the major basic ones are presented photographically bellow: the metal scissors, which is used for cutting light metal panes, the Vice that is used to clamp down the materials for easy cutting and forging, the welding machine that is the major gadget for joining metals through fusion,and the angle grinder that brushes off rough surfaces and slags and also used in cutting metals.Safety and caution must be maintained in the studio to avoid fatal accidents as well proper care of the tools to prolong their usefulness in the studio.



Figure: 1.Metal Scissors

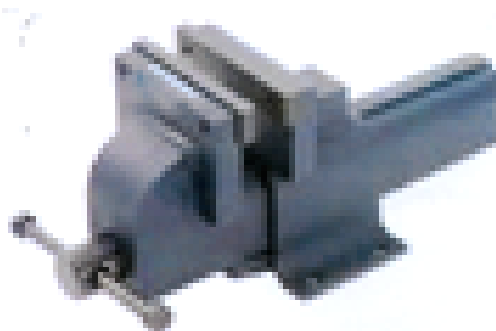


Figure:2 Vice



Figure :3 .Ace Welding Machine



Figure: 4. Angle Grinder.

The Six Tortoise Series.

One first started from the known which is a real Tortoise and understudied the forms on the carapace before embarking on the experimental abstraction of six forms without any of them looking alike. The abstract forms produced concentrated on the carapace and imputation of forms to evoke each unique characteristics were forged. These you can easily see in the masculinity of father Tortoise and the curves and adornment in mother tortoise.



Figure: 5. Tortoise, Natural . Courtesy: Natural Geographic.com



Figure:6. TortoiseProcession, 2013, Photograph: Okogwu Antonia



Figure: 7. Antonia Okogwu welding in the Studio, Photograph: Leonard West. 2013

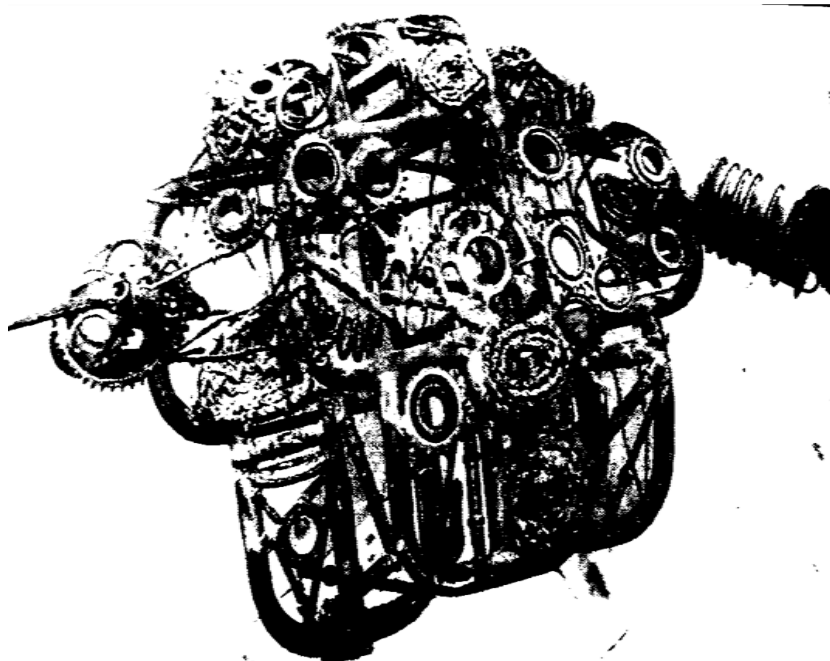


Figure : 8. Father Tortoise, Discarded motor cycle and bicycle parts, chains bicycle chain carriers bolts, Spark plugs, Motorcycle fenders and wheels, (4ft. x 2ft.9ins) 121.92cm x 83.82cm., 2011, Photograph: Okogwu Antonia, 2013

Motor cycle fenders have always held some kind of attention in the refuse Dump, first because of the chrome, sparkling catchy nature, secondly its building block in this composition. Three of the fenders are gotten and laid on the floor and studied and rearranged before they were welded to form the base of the Father Tortoise. In this composition the gaps created are filled in with the available scraps with an ideology of the nature of father in a family set up.

A father is a male first and foremost, this role as a father naturally assumes masculine characterization in its making, from here then he is the head of the family. Therefore, the leadership trails must be portrayed in the characterization with the metal scraps. The masculine rigidity and boldness exhibited in Father Tortoise commends easily with the choice of material which is metal. The rolled chains, spring, serrated rings, rods, that are welded at the back of Father Tortoise portrays solidity associated with masculinity. The gait exhibited in the tilt of the head and the crown marked it out as the head. Not just the head but the tilt backwards exposes care of the followers behind it. In an attempt to make this piece rugged and solid, it almost became too busy. The tail is made of bicycle chain carrier and has this appeal of touch.

It is a mobile Sculpture that uses human energy for movement and not automated like the Merry-Go-Round. The form rests on four rolling wheels and as pressure is applied by pushing, it moves, thereby achieving the fourth dimension in Sculpture which is in this case a movement.

The Head is a metal cylinder, inserted in a spring. Then the crown is slightly open and this gives a gaping gap that adds to its aesthetic enhancement through dynamism of forms. The surface quality of a

Sculpture could mar or enhance the composition, therefore the color that is used in finishing this piece is deep blue and not black; it is purposeful to douse the many competing components of the back of the carapace of the tortoise.

Abstract representation of the tortoise does recognize the philosophy of Dadaism which is evident in the too many imputations of metal design element on the carapace exhibiting rigidity which also could be seen in *The Mechanical Man*. **Willette J, (2019)**.



Figure : 9. Mother Tortoise, Discarded metals, plugs, bells, chains, wheels, motor cycle fenders, tyres, ceiling fan, coil casing, joint pipe, bicycle and chain casing (4.2ft.3ft x 2ft) 128.016cm x 91.44cm x 60.96cm, 2011. Photograph: Okogwu Antonia, 2011

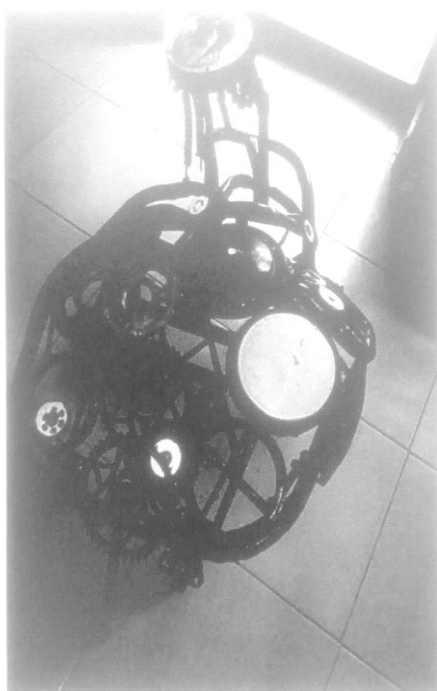


Figure: 10.Mother Tortoise, Arial view, 2011, Photograph: Okogwu Antonia



Figure:11. Mother tortoise, side view, 2011, Photograph: Okogwu Antonia

Mother Tortoise is made of various components of waste metal that are listed above exhibiting a crown on her head which is also adorned with plugs chains and bells. The neck is joined and allows swing movement that rattles the bells, thus making this section of the tortoise not just a stable but also a second sculpture. The down part attached with the four small tyres move at any direction, thereby making the entire piece a mobile work.

The femininity is accentuated by the multiplicity of curves and cycles as against the rigidity of the father Tortoise. The symbolic white green symbolizes the Nigerian woman and the pink colour is traditionally associated with the female gender. The tail is raised and given a coiled metal to encourage touch.



Figure: 12, Tortoise Series, RedHot, Discarded metal, Motor cycle seat casing and wheel, Ceiling fan, Head light casing of motor cycle, (2.3ft x 1ft) 70.104cm x 30.48cm, 2015. Photograph: Okogwu Antonia, 2015

The red hot tortoise is a symbol of the warrior in the family with its head, which is the light casing of the head lamp of a motor cycle rose to look out for the rest of the family. It therefore exhibits the spirit of non-conformist which is the Dada spirit. This tortoise is not within the norm of the family in terms of colour and form. A symbol of the dada spirit that goes away from the traditional norm. It is a saying in Oghara area of Delta State of Nigerian that if you have not given birth to a thief in the family then you have not started. One who is hot and aggressive is needed in a family towards warding off insults and aggression from outside. They could be regarded as the militia of the family.



Figure:13.tortoise series the beautiful loner, bicycle chain case, motor wheel, motor cycle fender, generator exhaust and ceiling fan coil casing, (1.6ft). 48.768cm, 2014, Photograph: Okogwu Antonia

Wheel is the base and upon the wheel is laid the motor cycle seat casing, a generator exhaust is attached as the head, while the carapace is the ceiling fan coil casing and the configuration is finished with a tail of bicycle chain casing. A mixture of white and a tint of black car paint is used to finish the form. This configuration is all metal and is not mobile. The ceiling fan carapace is a circular smooth-edged form that agrees also with the circular tail through the edge is serrated and the entire piece is perforated as against the solid nature of the carapace. Even though the tail and the carapace are circular there are contrasting nomenclature in the bold sizes of perforations in the tail as against the tiny perforations in the carapace and this makes it more of a solid form. The rectangular head stands out and the linear formation of the metal pipes also contracts with solid forms and the spaces within the sculpture also heighten the contracts in the forms.

Synchronizer,

Attaching the configuration on Tyre to a
Motion, 2015, Photograph: Okogwu Antonia

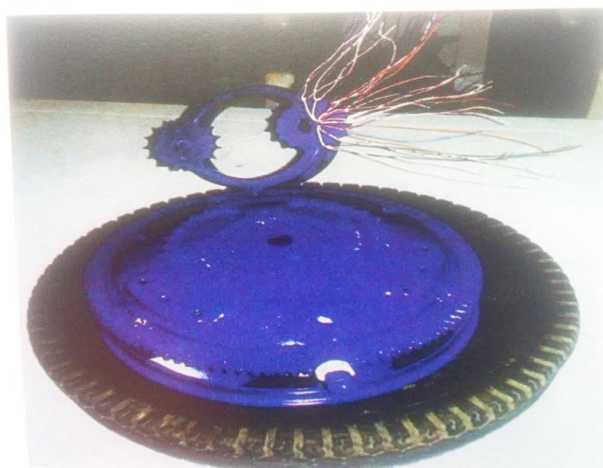


Figure:14. Attaching fibre as hair, 2015, Photograph: Okogwu Antonia



Figure: 15. Tortoise series, Synchronizer, Discarded metal fan coil casing, bicycle part (1ft.5ins x 1ft 3ins) 43.18cm x 38.10cm, 2015, Photograph: Okogwu Antonia

The family synchronizer is made of metal, plastics and Coptic fibres in a circular form. Its base is a small tyre wheel, a ring metal slightly tilted and two pieces of flat circular disc with spiky edges welded on the ring as eyes. The body is a motor fan that utilizes radial movement. Therefore, the form is not static rather it is a stabile. The fibres are attached to one of the eyes and more fibres rolled and attached to the fixed fibres as hair and to create more point of the fibre, the tail is attached with tied white fibre, copiously contrasting with the blue body of the creation. Apart from the fibres, a creation resembling a meatbarbecue very popular in Nigeria as 'suya' was created by wrapping the metal crowns round a metal wire and alternated with diced slippers. Symbolically too, it represents that individual in the family that can synchronize and easily mobilize the rest of the family. This is contrary to the Loner who ranges in solitary.

Baby Tortoise

Step 1. Conceptual Stage

This particular Tortoise is conceived as the last in the series. Size in this case plays a major role in creating a baby Tortoise, therefore the small casing of ceiling fan comes in handy.

Step 2. Acquisition Stage

The dump-site have many waste, ceiling fans machine parts and bicycle parts. The small size of the ceiling fan coil casing was purchased for this purpose. Welding electrodes, sand papers fillers, car paint and a litre of thinner for reducing the thickness of the oil paint.

Step 3. Studio Work

Materials and acquired metals were brought into the studio and assembled .The last of the series of the tortoise metaphoric sculpture statements is the simplified baby tortoise that is a configuration all metal form comprising the ceiling fan coil casing as the carapace, the bicycle chain casing as the tail and the machine part as the turned head that has the illusion of movement. The choice of colour as a finishing agent is subdued white with pinch of black.



Figure: 16. Baby tortoise, discarded metal, fan coil casing, bicycle part, 43.18cm x 38.10cm (1ft 5ins x 1ft 3ins) 2015, Photograph: Okogwu Antonia

III. CONCLUSION

The tortoise series is a metaphoric statement in metal sculptures just as George Orwell's *Animal farm* (1945), where animals were presented but x-rayed the characters of the human beings as they interface with one another. On the other hand, the tortoise series portray the family and the different characteristic features found in the individuals that make up the family unit: the father tortoise, the mother tortoise, the red hot, the beautiful loner, the synchronizer and the baby tortoise. The parents are both mobile forms, the siblings are all static except the synchronizer that has radial movement perhaps to aid interactions within the family.

This study documented history of waste materials in the twenty first century Nigeria. More also it conscientizes the global pandemic of wastes in the environment as well as embellishes the same environment.

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