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## Generation and Interpretation of Sculptural Ideas in Large Scale Stone Sculptures Placed in Outdoor Public Spaces: An Analysis of the Stone Sculptures of Gerald Motondi Oroo.

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presupposes that there is no artwork, in this case, large-scale outdoor sculptural work, that is undertaken without a defined ‘intent’; the extent and description of which depends on the individual artist and the visual impact of the work. In examining artwork, such intent is often relegated to the sidelines and yet it should constitute the first line of information as to why the work was created in the first place and can form a good basis for the eventual interrogation and interpretation of the work itself by the audience. This paper seeks to delve into the intent of the artist in order to determine the genesis of his motivation and the source of his inspiration and subsequently, also to determine the extent to which the work itself is effective in propagating this intent. Although there is a reference to the expression and expressiveness of artwork as an avenue of understanding how artwork is generally viewed and visually examined, the core purpose of the study gravitates around the intent of this particular artist, his motivation and inspiration. However, in this regard, questions still abound on whether the artist’s individual intent is ‘all encompassing’ or whether there are, indeed, other factors that spur multiple interpretations from the audience that point to new meanings and, therefore, make the work more interactive and engaging. The work featured in this paper makes these arguments even more significant because firstly, they are executed by the same individual and secondly, the pieces were conceived and executed on-site in different countries raising the prospect of intense contextual and cultural implications. The intriguing question that lingers is whether the artist’s personal creative intent is relevant or he is entangled by communal thematic expectations to which he must conform since the work is in the people’s space. This immediately raises questions about the role of ‘outsider’ artist in some instances, in the generation of subject matter and the role of outdoor sculpture placed in public spaces which are expected, in essence, to be in contextual resonance with the local community. The sculptures are large stone sculptures

placed in outdoor spaces and done in various media such as marble, granite and soapstone. The work is located in different sites in various countries.

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## INTRODUCTION

Public art has been in existence for a long period of time but it is not until the 1960s that the sculptural work of Henry Moore, perhaps, brought about a new sense of energy and purpose to the concept of public art, particularly outdoor sculpture. For instance, according to Akintonde and Rom Kalilu (2013), the outdoor sculpture has been in existence in southwestern Nigeria since 1934. The role of public art has been acknowledged as being largely positive and useful to the audience in a given community where people are able to engage with the work. Jagannath (2015) refers to an interview conducted during a related research that states of public art; "it encourages people to stop and think. It tells a history or speaks to a theme or idea that might be integral to a space." Jagannath further notes that:

*Having a symbolic element where people can think about the art and what it represents suggests that public art is engaging, creating aspects of sociality in the public space where the public's perceptions and thoughts about the artworks create different emotional responses.*

There is, of course, a retinue of questions that accompany the concept of public art. Some

fundamental ones gravitate around the role of the artist and whether his or her creative intent plays a significant role in the generation of meaning or is lost to those who commission the work; the extent to which the community is, or should be, or is even competent to be involved in the creative process (often referred to as community participation); who bears the responsibility of interpretation, whether there should exist a single interpretation or multi-interpretations. Further inquiry focuses on whether the outdoor sculptures, for instance, should bear the artist's expression or should bear their own outward 'expressiveness' that is public-oriented and which draw emotions from this public; the social/cultural role that the art encompasses, as well as its function in enhancing the environments in which they are placed, as aesthetic embellishments.

The artist's intent and the sensitive matter of interpretation of outdoor public sculpture, in this sense, become intertwined in controversy; since, if allowed to espouse his individual artistic intent through individual creativity, the artists then naturally shape the nature of interpretation. This then closes the possibility of multi-interpretations that are seen as belonging to the domain of the audience. This notion comes from the feeling that ideas about artworks or their potential meanings

should not be allowed to be condensed into a singular opinion of an artist since that then limits the work by the artist's own view of it (Barrett, 1994). This, by extension, also limits the scope of interpretations by the viewers upon whom the responsibility of interpretation is seen to significantly rest. If the artist does not, on the other hand, participate by engaging his own creative ideas, then he runs the danger of becoming creatively redundant upon his own sculptures which relegate his fundamental role to the periphery. Since there is no doubt that large scale sculptures placed in outdoor public spaces play a significant multifaceted role in the environment within which they are placed, then the matter of who initiates, facilitates, directs and executes their creation as well as who influences, finances or bears responsibility upon their interpretation becomes a major point of contention. This paper delves into this complex phenomenon by examining the juxtaposition of the roles of the artist, who holds the professional and creative wherewithal; the community audience, who bear a sense of entitlement and feel that the work should be about them and their social/cultural or religious ethos; and the commissioners of the workers who feel obliged to provide the project brief and influence the subsequent interpretative symbolism.

### **THEMATIC APPROACH IN THE GENERATION OF SCULPTURAL IDEAS**

A thematic approach in any work of art implies that the work is based on deliberate themes selected by the artist in line with his or her motivation and guided by consideration for the intended audiences. Although there are what can be referred to as 'universal themes', that is, those that tend to transcend human endeavour, there are often themes whose relevance is confined to certain environments, regions, communities and circumstances. These kinds of themes are explored for the transient audience in specific public places where the audience can be able to interact with the sculpture and decode its thematic message either immediately or in due course. A thematic approach in sculpture is often associated with the notion of 'expressiveness' in sculptural work since it is through this expressiveness that the artist aims to convey a given message. However, when a sculptor, for instance, wishes to express his or her own

feelings and emotions through a sculptural piece where the response or the reaction of the audience is not a fundamental concern, then the thematic approach is relegated to the periphery or becomes irrelevant altogether. This is because emotions and feelings are spontaneous and unique to an individual and are expressed as they manifest; hence they are not bound by thematic tenets.

The ideas that an artist portrays through the power of expressiveness contained in outdoor sculptures are themselves derived from or embedded within compartmentalised themes. Seldom does an artist, in this context, just pop up with a burning idea; his or her motivation and inspirations are always conceived in the context of something, in relation to something, in response to something, or in intervention to something. Therefore, ideas tend to 'coalesce' or 'gravitate' around pertinent themes in the overall functionality of the lives of human beings. Themes, therefore, become a reservoir from which artists draw ideas since they encompass many aspects of human endeavour.

In sculpture, themes are also based on the creative purpose of the proposed sculptural work; whether it is for ceremonial purposes, ritual and worship, expressive or communicative purposes such as ideas, feelings or emotions; whether the sculpture is designed to be a narrative that tells a particular story and underscores a given experience; whether ultimately the sculpture propagates an idea, thought or philosophy and hence embeds an element of persuasiveness. With the anchoring theme in mind, the sculptor then proceeds to identify a suitable subject matter upon which he or she crystallises the idea in mind. Other factors are then put in perspective such as the nature of the material, scale and placement of the work.

### **The Derivation of Subject Matter in Sculpture**

The use of the term 'subject matter' has been controversial in its application to sculpture and other works of art. In the context of this paper, it will refer to the 'representational content' of each sculptural piece. Representational content, however, is based on the 'intent' of the artist; that is, what the artist had in mind in order to creatively assemble and utilise the representational forms. Subject matter in this regard has a connection to the

theme and the essence of the work. Subject matter in sculpture is also closely intertwined with the use of symbols and iconographic references, often in their respective unique contexts. The subject matter is often suggested but not always contained in the title of the sculptural piece and it is usually only truly visible in the way the artist seeks to communicate to the audience. In underscoring the role of the artist in creating a worthy linkage between subject matter and form, Rogers (2020) notes;

*By exploiting the expressive qualities of form, a sculptor is able to create images in which subject matter and expressiveness of form are mutually reinforcing. Such images go beyond the mere presentation of fact and communicate a wide range of subtle and powerful feelings.*

### **The Development and Application of the Artist's Intent in Sculpture**

There is no artwork that harbours no intent; even experimentation with materials and tools or toying with ideas still has its fair measure of expected outcomes that are aligned to a given intent. *Intent*, therefore, refers to an inherent purpose upon which an artist's mind gravitates as a basis for the crystallisation of an idea and the subsequent creation of an artwork. In sculpture as in other art, the notion of intent fundamentally manifests itself in two main perspectives; firstly, the need and desire for the artist to express his or her feelings or the inner state of 'self' (expression), and secondly, the need to communicate something pertinent to the audience through the work itself (expressiveness). The intent in the case of expression is contained in what the artist wishes to express which is unique to his or her individuality, be it in terms of feelings, emotions, or experiences. Intent, in the case of expressiveness, is contained in what the artist endeavours to convey to an audience in order to elicit a response, emotional or otherwise, from that audience.

The intent of the artist is important in understanding what the artwork is meant to portray in the first place; it is important to comprehend the genesis of thought or idea since the artist often infuses his or her own perception and perspective into the work, which is presumed to be always purposeful. In

sculptures whose appearance is prone to multi-interpretations, the original intent of the artist is often lost, complicating the essence of the work, particularly in sculptures that are placed in public spaces. The notion of the artist's intent is also critical because sculptures do not emerge or exist in a vacuum; they are conceived and executed by artists as a consequence of some element of thought, response to given circumstantial occurrences, experiential episodes, societal triumphs, or upheavals and many other situations and influences that culminate in a specific motivation. Since sculptures represent many aspects of life and society in a modern context, they become excellent tools for symbolism; they can be used to reminisce the past, highlight the present and peer into futuristic trajectories.

The notion of the artist's intent is also ultimately tied up not only to an inherent purpose and motivation but responding to certain specific needs or uses for which sculpture as an artistic discipline comes in particularly handy. Sculptures have been used historically for the propagation of religious beliefs and artists have been tasked with the creation of sculptures deemed suitable for this purpose. The artist's intent is, in this case, specific and confined to suitability for religious symbolism in rituals and ceremonies. Sculptures have also been used for commemorative purposes in respect to the creation of statues and busts that bear the likenesses of prominent or influential individuals and hence the intent of the artist is confined to the creation of these likenesses as a mark of honour.

If the role of sculpture as a genre is to shed new light on human issues in the contemporary world by engaging the audience in reflection, thoughtfulness and feeling in order to associate with or draw empathy and other human reactions to these expressed issues, then it is unlikely that the integral intent of the artist in this process will fail to take centre stage, be recognised or be celebrated. Finally, although each artist deals with a particular intent at a time, for each piece of sculpture, the whole notion of an artist's intent in creating sculptural work is intertwined with the role of artists in society. The individual intent emanates from the wider role of connecting with people's emotions, propagation of truth, empowering communities through social practice, becoming societal opinion leaders,



storytellers and many more. Hence this paper postulates that it is important to understand what the intent of the artist is even though one may draw a different interpretation when interrogating the individual sculpture.

### **Reservation about the Role of the Artist's Intent in the Creation of Outdoor Sculptures**

Although this paper has made an argument for the unique role accorded the artist's intent in the creation of outdoor sculptural work, other equally potent arguments have been advanced about its potential limitations. Other schools of thought have argued that the notion of creative thought processes and the formulation of creativity is not necessarily confined only to the individual artist's 'intent' and that not all artists harbour the specificity of intent. Barrett (1994) observes that 'some artists do not work with specific, conscious intentions to express particular and definite ideas. Some are quite comfortable with their lack of specificity of intent while they are working'. It is argued as well that an artist's singular intent culminates in a singular interpretation based on what the artist has in mind as an individual. On this, Barrett contends "that an artist's interpretation of his or her own work of art, if the artist has one and expresses it, is one interpretation among many and it is not necessarily more accurate or more acceptable just because it is his own interpretation." What then emerges from these arguments is that the artist's individual intent in the creation of a sculptural piece can neither be ignored nor underestimated, but perhaps the final work can open itself to the notion of multi-interpretations. This is much more so in instances where the artist's intent may culminate in the elicitation of other alternative opinions about which the artist bears no impetus or even right to stop or deny.

### **The Role of the Community in the Creative Development of Outdoor Sculpture**

The participative role of the community may be limited to providing the artist with insights into their relevant ethos, be they social/cultural or religious. This is through a participatory approach through interviews or embedding within the community. This is followed by integrating these ideas into the creative process of the sculpture in order to

construct symbolism. It is unlikely that this participation will proceed beyond this point since the community as an entity is not equipped with the skills to grapple with sculptural elements that are used for the creative construction of the sculpture itself. Indeed, questions have been raised about the community's competence in unravelling certain sculptural meanings if these meanings require the elemental tools necessary to do so; very much in the same way as the artist, on the flip side, uses certain fundamental elements in the creative formulation of his sculptural work. In his research on public art, Jagannath (2015) notes:

*Whether the public should be involved in the decision-making processes about the public art has been highly debated. Interview respondents generally agreed that the decision-making process should be left to the skilled professionals of the field rather than the general public who might not have the required knowledge about public art to be a part of the decisions.*

The community as a public cannot, however, be completely shut out of interpretation; they may not be able to interpret a sculptural piece through formal analysis by dissecting it through to its core, but may be able to draw meaning through cluster interactions and the manner through which their emotions are elicited. They may also be able to identify symbolism highlighted in the sculptural pieces and be able to decipher certain meanings leading to multi-interpretations. Ultimately the community plays an important role in the whole concept of public art, in this case, large-scale outdoor sculptural work, since this work requires their unreserved acceptance. In helping to understand how this happens, Rogers (2020) notes that:

*All human beings, intimately involved from birth with the world of three-dimensional form, learn something of its structural and expressive properties and develop emotional responses to them. This combination of understanding and sensitive response, often called a sense of form, can be cultivated and refined. It is to this sense of form that the art of sculpture primarily appeals.*

## EXPRESSION AND EXPRESSIVENESS IN ART

### Expression

The notion of the word ‘expression’ in art is often associated with what emanates from the individual artist’s emotions and, therefore, is derived almost entirely from *subjectivity*. Subsequently, what the artist wishes to deliberately portray in a work of art becomes an epitome of his or her artistic self-relief. In embarking on any work of art be it in drawing, painting or sculpture, or any other genre, it is presumed that the artist has an ‘intent’ that has an emotional emanation that is also almost certainly experiential, or heartfelt meaning the appeal and application of the compassionate *heart*.

In the case of matters that appeal to the heart rather than just the mind, therefore, the artist deals with his or her emotions and feelings that emanate from the ‘self’ and hence the level of emotional engagement is very high. These emotive episodes, which can reach levels of upheaval are very personal and are emanative from one’s emotional state, triggered by experiential circumstances in real life. Since these are experienced in ordinary life, the artist feels the need and pressure to find an outlet for expression which is artistic. In either case, it is from this perspective that what the artist ultimately draws, paints, or sculpts is seen to be his or her own ‘expression’. This expression, by virtue of emanating from the artist’s individuality or emotional state, can therefore be demarcated as ‘artist oriented’. In this regard, it is therefore subject to interrogation, celebration, rejection, or even ridicule.

The ‘expression’ is hence the artwork rendered and the ‘expresser’ is the artist or his or her agent. Robinson (2007) suggests that “expression should be thought of as a relation between an artwork (the expression) and an expresser, who is either the author or an imagined agent such as the implied author, a narrator or a character in the work.” She concludes by aptly stating that “Whether something is or is not an expression depends on whether it is a product of a person or agent who is expressing his or her emotions.” In explaining how expression occurs, it is important to bear in mind that when an artist’s intent is to express something artistically, he

or she uses representation which means that the creation of a work of art that features an agent designed to carry out that expression on behalf of the artist, since the artwork itself is immobile. Robinson notes, “representational paintings and sculptures, though usually immobile, can express emotions by depicting people who are expressing their emotions in facial expression, posture, gestures, and action tendencies.”

### Expressiveness

When a work of art has a connection or relation to the audience to whom it communicates, that work of art is said to bear expressiveness. This means that when an artist creates a piece of artwork, he or she may desire as an integral intent to communicate a message to the audience which means the artwork must become a useful conduit to express this message. When the audience interacts with the artwork, they derive a given emotion. The artwork, hence, succeeds in evoking the desired response from the audience that resonates with the desire of the artist to express a certain experiential phenomenon. According to Robinson (2007):

*An artwork that expresses an emotion in an expressive way is one that reveals something of what it is like to be in such an emotional state. In art as in life, this often means that the artwork succeeds in evoking a responsive emotion in audiences.*

Expressiveness is important and necessary because there is always an inherent need for an artist to communicate a pertinent message to other people through art in a way that art becomes an effective avenue for human communication and interaction. Robinson (2007) notes, “But expressions are not just outpourings by expressers of emotion; they are also a means of communicating emotions to others. In ordinary life, interpersonal communication via the expression of emotion is essential to the smooth functioning of human social life”. Therefore, in this case, there is a distinction, yet perhaps also, a relationship between ‘expression’ as denoting the emotions that emanate from the artist and which are ultimately expressed through art as a visual outlet and culminate in a specific work of art (author or artist centred); and the effectiveness of a work of art in communicating a given message (as may perhaps

be based on an emotion experienced by the artist) to the audience in order to elicit the desired emotion (Audience centred). Robinson observes that expressiveness “depends on how effectively the artwork reveals to a (suitable) audience what that emotion is like. I have suggested that among the most effective ways of doing this is to evoke that emotion.”

In addition, this paper also postulates an additional dimension to this notion of expressiveness which emphasises the *objectivity* of applying the mind in the creation of artworks. When an artist also bears a motivation, is driven by an underlying inspiration, wishes to respond to a certain occurrence, or is persuaded, compelled, angered, or provoked to address given circumstances, this too can be considered to be an integral part of expressiveness that is unique to ‘self’. This almost certainly culminates in the urge to visually render a message or point of view’ which is triggered by the need to respond to certain aggravated occurrences. The resultant artistic outcome is then attributable to the individual artist and is further interpretable as a personal opinion, standpoint, or intervention. For an intent to reach this level of attention, it must emanate from a uniquely considered thought, meaning the appeal and application of thoughtfulness of the *mind*. Although the expression that emanates from the mind and that which emanates from the heart are intertwined, they can be distinguished for the sake of artistic clarity.

In the case of uniquely considered thought, the artist brings his or her individual mind to bear upon the occurrences or events that manifest in the theatre of life. These may involve, for instance, political events, social/cultural peculiarities, social injustices, societal upheavals, or any observable phenomenon that draws his or her personal attention. The artist then interprets that particular matter from an individual perspective that culminates in a personal opinion that is attributable to the artist. When the artist turns that personal opinion into a work of art, like a sculptural piece, then that develops into an expression that is unique to the individuality of the artist irrespective of the nature of the occurrence itself. These occurrences, therefore, can be perceived to appeal differently to the minds of individual artists who, like other luminaries or opinion shapers, interpret them quite

differently but express a point of view nonetheless. The basic distinction here is that one may develop a notable personal opinion on a matter that emanates from his or her own interpretation of its pertinence without accompanying emotional attachment. In the resultant need for artistic rendition, the artist will seek to depict what he or she ‘views’ as the core of the matter and which may not necessarily include an attached personal emotion. In this case, the artist becomes an interested party who forms a personal opinion on the issue but is not an active participant; his work though when viewed by the audience, can precipitate an emotional response since the audience may have a direct resonance with its expressiveness.

### **Confluence Between Expression and Expressiveness**

It is unlikely that a confluence between ‘expression’ and ‘expressiveness’ will not be found to exist in works of art that denote each of the two notions. If expression emanates from the emotions and desire to express these emotions from an artist (artist-centred) and expressiveness denotes the extent to which a work of art is effective in communicating a message to an audience through eliciting emotional responses (audience centred) then there exist a common denominator. This common denominator lies in the ‘*intent*’, purpose, motivation, or desire of the artist; that on the one hand, he or she is preoccupied with an expression that is confined to his or her individuality, be it in the form of feelings or emotions; and on the other hand, he or she focuses on ensuring that a work of art bears the kind of ‘expressiveness threshold’ necessary to communicate a given pertinent visual message. In sculpture, this is done through formal arrangements and compositional acumen, use of facial expression and symbolism that enhance expressiveness. The notion of expressiveness, however, cannot self-generate; a sculpture cannot bear expressiveness on its own because it is just a static form; it must be made to carry that expressiveness as emanating from a source that bears an ‘inherent’ intent. This paper posits that this source is ultimately the artist, either as a creative individual or in collaboration or consultation with the community.

## The Distinction between Expression and Expressiveness

The major distinction between expression and expressiveness is contained in the end result or the form. ‘Expression’ is not concerned with the elicitation of response or emotion from the audience. It is less concerned with the audience as an empathic body entity that bears solidarity or associates in activism. Expression in this context is an outlet, a valve of emotive/creative gases that must be released from the artist’s inner self. What the artist desires is not necessarily empathy, but understanding, a kind of emotional comradeship where his emotions and feelings are comprehended and, therefore, humanised. In this case, the execution of his or her sculpture is more oriented towards the manifestation of these feelings and emotions as they simmer on the inside. In regard to the role of sculptures in expressing emotions, Rogers (2020) observes that:

*A sculpture may draw upon what already exists in the endless variety of natural and man-made form, or it may be an art of pure invention. It has been used to express a vast range of human emotions and feelings from the most tender and delicate to the most violent and ecstatic.*

In the case of expressiveness, the artist addresses pertinent issues that affect society in whatever endeavour and, hence, the idea is to elicit a reaction from the audience. In this case, the sculpture will be executed in a manner that best manifests that expressiveness, with the audience in mind. These two sculptures, though rendered by the same person may, subsequently, attract very different perspectives of visual opinions and fall in completely different realms of interpretation. This distinctiveness is captured in the observation that art is explained in different ways based on objective and subjective approaches. In the objective approach, art is created with social influences, while in the subjective approach it is created with a pure individualism” (Düzenli, Alpak & Eren, 2017, p. 145).

### Expression in Sculpture

In the context of this paper, the expression in the sculptures featured is in reference to the artistic

objective of the artist, Gerald Motondi Oroo. As has been already observed, the motivation for creating such sculptures may be varied; they can be derived from a given experienced emotion perhaps, or emanate from a given societal or philosophical phenomenon that the artist wishes to address and from which he or she formulates a point of view. This generation of opinion is not classified as emanating from feelings and emotions but from a specified application of thought and observation. It is presumed, then, that in creating these sculptures, the artist has a potent motivation for their individual creation, which culminates into each piece ultimately becoming his ‘creative opinion’. A sculpture that emanates from or depicts a ‘creative opinion’ is different from that which emanates from or depicts an ‘experiential emotion’, and both are sculpturally rendered differently. In this context, a majority of the sculptures do not depict his personal or emotional expression as such, but a desire to respond to a particular matter of societal interest that strikes his imagination.

### Expressiveness in Sculpture

It is also presumed that the artist, apart from wanting to depict his personal perspective or points of view as an individual, therefore, also wanted his sculptures to be interactive and communicate certain pertinent messages to the audience. This is fundamentally why they are placed in outdoor public spaces for transient audiences to view. Since public art like outdoor sculptures placed in public spaces is all about engaging the audience rather than massaging the emotions of the artist, the need for the artist to develop expressiveness in his work is understood in the context that art is a phenomenon that humanises life. Art could develop within an effort to achieve inquisitive, creative, multi-dimensional, and universal individuals (Düzenli et al., 2017 referring to Baxandall and Morawski, 1975). Motondi’s sculptures can hence be said to contain a level of expressiveness that enables him to articulate certain ideas to the audience.

### STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

Apart from a thematic approach to outdoor sculptural work where an artist endeavours to pursue a desired subject matter derived from an inspirational theme, whether religious, cultural,



social/economic and many others, or derived from his or her own feelings and emotions, the artist has to pay close attention to style and technique in the rendition of his or her creation. Often the artist, because of his or her prior interaction with various types of media, determines the style and technique most suitable to the project at hand. Writing about the emergence and development of sculpture in southwestern Nigeria, Akintonde and Rom Kalilu (2013) observe that “it is the artist who determines the form, style and medium of expression. Patron seldom has input beyond a brief description of what he wants the theme, the size (usually large) and location.”

In the creation of a sculpture, and in particular an outdoor sculpture, an artist grapples with a number of elements and other factors that help in the understanding and appreciation of the final form. Each of them is singularly important, but it is their holistic interlock that makes the entire sculptural composition come to life. Subsequently, they all play a part in the way the sculpture is viewed and experienced by the audience. Some of these are: - *mass and space* are two principal elements in sculpture and are what the sculptor carefully calibrates and balances in order to articulate the core essence of the work. Mass refers to the solid parts that are contained in the sculptural surface and space refers to the air (or the voids) around the solid sculpture. *Material*, as has been observed, is critical in helping the artist determine and decide the nature of the sculpture itself; the artist and the material ‘interact’ in a special way in order to produce the best possible sculptural outcome in terms of manoeuvrability, physical qualities, ease of engagement with tools, durability and maintenance. *Place* is important because of the placement of the finished work; the sculpture should have adequate space to fulfil ‘the fully in the round’ concept and to aid visual interaction and hence the overall appreciation of the work. The idea of placing the work in spatial compatibility is central to the meaning of sculpture in outdoor spaces. Dudkiewicz *et al.* (2016) note that “emphasis should be placed on the size of sculptures and the space that is available. It would be a mistake to place a large sculpture on a small patch of green” (p 246).

The tangible *texture* is of vital importance to large-scale sculpture since it can be touched and felt and

helps to highlight or differentiate pertinent aspects of the sculpture that underscore the subject matter. *Centre of gravity* denotes the feeling of stability in sculptural production and how the work rests on the ground. Although outdoor sculptures are often huge and static, they can exude *movement* through *visual rhythm*, particularly seen against the environment. This is achieved through the use of defined edges, contours and planes, colour, grain of material as well as embedded symbols and other shapes which all help direct the way the eyes move from one aspect of the sculpture to another. The physical nature of sculptural *surfaces* becomes an important indicator of the direction the sculpture will take and how the solid sculpture will be handled. Sculptors are also aware of the effectiveness of natural *light* falling upon the sculptural piece and how it affects the subsequent visual impact. *Scale* is seen to be particularly important in outdoor sculpture since it guides the sculptor in creating work that visually resonates in size with its surroundings or environment within which it is placed.

### **Large Scale Sculpture as Public Art in Outdoor Public Spaces**

The matter of placement of sculptures as public art in public spaces has been as celebrated as it has been controversial. The term public art refers to “works of art in any media that have been designed and performed with the specific intention of being sited or staged in the physical public domain, usually external and accessible to all” (Januchta-Szostak, 2010, p. 80). Public art has been part of public spaces in America and elsewhere in the world since the 1960s. Prior to this, public art was confined to specifically designated places like museums or elite gallery art. In a modern context, the idea is to create interactive public spaces through public art such as sculptures and fountains around which the transient audience clusters. The interactivity is hence between the artist and the audience as well as contained in the debate generated within the audience or intra-audience participation. It has been observed that in order to minimise conflict of symbolism, perception, or interpretation between the artist and the community within which public art is placed, it is critical that the artist checks certain perceptions, meanings and stereotypes with the community. This ensures that the community is not

offended by the public art and minimises the possibility of rejection.

According to a report by Marquette University (Jagannath, 2016), interactive work produced in a public space is usually based on “implicitly or explicitly shared meanings between the artists and the community, and consist of actions or works executed on behalf of the community as a whole.” In highlighting a positive element in the execution of public art, with particular reference to public sculpture, Jagannath (2016) cites the Marquette University study which notes that “in at least some of its manifestations, public sculpture offers a bridge between cultural particulars and the universal, which can be appreciated by all persons irrespective of their cultural origin.” It can be said that outside the gallery, large-scale sculptural work seen in complement to architecture has become influential and expressive in urban outdoor spaces as well as landscape design in the modern world. These outdoor spaces provide the artists with the opportunity and freedom to execute large-scale creations that incorporate the natural environment. In underscoring the essence of such work, Januchta-Szostak refers to Christian Norberg-Schultz (1999) who posits that:

*The purpose of a piece of art is to retain and convey existential meanings while a human, through perception and understanding the symbol, exposes themselves to an act of identification which consequently gives some meaning to their individual existence. He also emphasises that the meaning revealed by art in a particular place also determines the character of the place (Januchta-Szostak, 2010, p. 82).*

Large-scale outdoor sculptures should aim to interact and be in harmony with the respective *genius loci* to ensure that their expressiveness is aligned with historical continuity as well as underpinning cultural and spatial synchrony. In the context of this paper, this can further aid social integration in terms of interactivity of artworks and their specific spatial arrangement and community engagement in culturally related projects. Januchta-Szostak notes that “according to the research and British and American specialists, public art can be a significant factor of social integration and activation consequently facilitating the way of perceiving

urban space by its inhabitants as their own one, anchored on their mental maps.” (Januchta-Szostak, p. 98).

## ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Responding to the visual essence of sculptural work can be complex. It is, however, best approached as a juxtaposition of a number of variables used in the examination of any work of art such as description, the analysis itself, interpretation and judgment of the quality of work. Barrett (1994) identifies these variables as “acts of describing (telling what one sees), interpreting (telling what one thinks it means), judging the work of art (telling how good one thinks it is), and theorising about the work (telling what counts as art, for example).” He emphasises that all are, however, interrelated and none is seen in isolation. He notes, “Describing, analysing, interpreting, judging, and theorising about works of art are interrelated and interdependent and should not be separated too simplistically.” Bearing this in mind within the context of this paper, other related perspectives of the visual examination of the sculptures featured are considered as follows;

### Artist’s Intent

The artist’s intent is embedded in the interpretation of the message as one of the avenues of the derivation of meaning. Art theorists have tended to differ on the role the artist’s intent really plays in the interpretation of sculptural work with one school of thought underscoring the essence of singular meaning and the other propagating for multi-interpretations. However, as a basic principle of expression and executing any work of art, it would be perhaps artistically unsavoury not to consider or even attempt to dismiss the artist’s intent even though there are other variables to consider in the construction of meaning in public art. This paper postulates that the artist’s intent still remains a critical factor in the inspiration and motivation that culminates in the creation of outdoor sculptures and must be given its due attention. The genesis of an idea, whether or not in tandem with communal beliefs or in collaboration with the community itself, gives credence to the notion of independent creativity and freedom of artistic thought.

## The Emerging Message

If artworks are always about something (Barrett, 1994), then one major factor in interpretation must be whether there is an emergent message or whether the sculpture bears expressiveness. This is because it is presumed that the artist's aim is to communicate something' to the audience.

## What the Audience Sees

A major tenet of outdoor sculptural work is its expressiveness. As already observed, the intent of the artist, often in tandem with the community, is important in determining the overall message of the sculpture. It is presumed that the message embedded in the sculpture, being public art, should resonate with the social/cultural or religious inclinations of the audience since it attracts and makes them pause and interact with it. The extent to which the sculpture is able to elicit reactions either in the form of feelings or emotions from the audience reflects its overall effectiveness as public art. The emotions of the audience are important in this regard. Barrett (2003) referring to the work of Israel Scheffler, highlights this pertinent issue, "The role of the emotions in reading the world applies to interpreting works of art: "Reading our feelings and reading the work are, in general, virtually inseparable processes."

## Multiple Interpretations

Outdoor sculptural pieces are often susceptible to multiple interpretations, particularly those that are stylistic and bear symbols that are not readily relatable to aspects of the social/cultural environment. Artists ordinarily may not wish that their pieces become open to interpretive ambiguity but also leave the audience to come up with these interpretations. It is not a contradiction that artists have an original intent in executing an outdoor sculpture, at times entirely generated of their own accord or in collaboration with the community. Some theorists have advocated for the notion of a singular meaning in a piece of artwork that aligns with what an artist intended to portray. Others have argued that a multi-interpretational approach is a healthy way for the derivation of meaning. Barret (1994) holds that; -

*There can be more than one admissible interpretation and that it is desirable to have different interpretations. Differing interpretations of the same work of art stand alongside each other and can attract our attention to different features of the same work. One interpretation shows us this aspect of the work of art, while another shows us that aspect. If we only had one interpretation, we would miss the insights that other interpretations provide.*

Further, these theorists posit that there is merit in leaving work open to multiple interpretations since it opens avenues for alternative opinions. Barrett (1994) notes that; -

*The meaning of an artwork should not be limited to what was intended by the artist. Its meaning might be much broader than even the artist knows.*

## Use of Material and Tools

The selection and use of the different types of materials and tools used to construct the sculpture are critical to its outcome. Often, the type and natural appearance of the material dictates the limitation of the sculptor in articulating a particular message. Hence, the initial choice of material is critical in achieving the final objective. In other instances, the sculptor is able to manipulate the material to his or her advantage in the articulation of a given artistic goal.

## Style and Technique

The formal analysis of the sculptural work is tied to the effectiveness of the use of style and technique applied by the artist in rendering the work

## Environmental Embellishment

It has been acknowledged that outdoor sculptures placed in outdoor spaces can serve as environmental embellishments over and above their social/artistic significance. In their creation and placement, artists should be aware of this aesthetic value and be mindful that outdoor sculptures must not only be used to draw meaning but must be beautiful and elegant in the environment within which they are placed.

## Exploration of Materials

The artist, Gerald Motondi Oroo's insight into working with the different types of stones as well as using different tools in the creation of his sculptures is understood as follows; -

### Working with Stone

The artist has chosen to produce his work using different types of large-scale stones, which he places in the selected environmental setting. In selecting to work in stone, he observes; -

*Stone is a natural material that is locally available in many environments. There are different types of stones ranging from granite, marble, basalt, sandstone, quartz, limestone and soapstone. The stones exist naturally in different colours and shades making them ideal for sculptural work. Since they are natural materials, they fit well within all environments without disrupting the environmental dispensations (Artist).*

The artist goes further to carefully select the stone that best helps to accomplish his idea and describes how he arrives at this decision in the execution of every piece, in what he terms as his 'dialogue with stone.'

*Stone sculpting encompasses the notion of 'mutual dialogue' between the stone and the sculptor; it is akin to a dialogue between two people. During the selection time, I approach the stone with my conceived idea, go around it to determine if and how it is compatible with my 'intent'. At times the stone may not be readily compatible with my idea prompting me to change the design or cut off sections in order to suit my design. At other times, the stone's natural form and grain structure may resonate with my idea enabling me to plot the details of the approach; hence, my assertion that stones 'talk'*

*or 'communicate'. It can, therefore, be concluded that stones in their natural state often dictate the eventual sculptural design outcome, particularly in reference to abstract or semi-abstract forms (Artist).*

### Use of tools:

*The use of tools in working with stone is usually dictated by the type and size of the stone (Artist)*

### Working with soapstone

*"A very interesting material that I was used to from my early days of learning sculpture comes in a variety of colours and grains. Very unique that one block can have different natural shades of colours" (Artist).*

### Working with granite

*"Korean Black granite has very fine grains that are easily cut using wet cutting with a diamond saw. The granite takes smooth finish and creates contrasts with the different grinding levels" (Artist).*

### Working with marble

#### Green serpentine

*"Green serpentine is a type of marble with very fine grains which gives smooth finish when polished. It was an abandoned stone in one of the quarries. I decided to use it as it was symbolic in two aspects. One, being green, it expressed the aura of vegetation that germinates and, two, having been abandoned it can be changed and hence be made to 'evolve' to a new creation" (Artist).*

#### Pink Marble

*The stone is good for outside placement because it is hard and durable. Tools used were mainly power-driven for cutting, chiselling and polishing (Artist).*



## ANALYSIS OF WORK



Plate 1a '*Love for the Nation*' (2013)  
Dimensions 210 cm x 200 cm 480 cm  
Material – Ndaliani Black granite  
Location – Uhuru Gardens –Nairobi, Kenya



Plate 1b '*Love for the Nation*' (2013)  
Dimensions – 210 cm x 200 cm 480 cm  
Material - Ndaliani Black granite  
Location - Uhuru Gardens –Nairobi, Kenya

In the '*Love for the Nation*' (Plate 1a & 1b), the artist uses the sculpture in an analogical manner, suggesting that the love of a mother for her children and her sacrifice therein is akin to the love and sacrifice for the Nation. At times, sculptures bear this kind of intertwined or tethered meaning where the intended meaning is not necessarily found in the physical rendition of the sculpture itself but is suggested in 'retrospective thought' where the meaning is redirected towards its original intent. The sculpture shows the mother fondly embracing and caring for her two children, one at the front and another at the back. It thus suggests that people, just like heroes and freedom fighters as well as the heroism displayed in the virtue of the mother's sacrifice, should love and sacrifice for their country

unconditionally. Whether the context of the analogy can be replicated or applied to the wider notion of love for a country is a matter of debate. The stylised sculpture uses flowing sculptural contour lines, planes and edges to define the forms and show their emotional interaction. As will be observed in subsequent work, such sculptures, although carrying a salient meaning in their formal rendition, which in this case is the mother caring for her two burdensome children, may not be able to carry the covert meaning and hence need to be accompanied by a caption that clarifies the fundamental intent. Viewing this sculpture at any given time, the transient audience will not be able to fathom the notion of euphoric heroism of love and sacrifice for the country.



Plate 2a '*Heroes Move*' (2013)  
Dimensions 210 cm x 200 cm 480 cm  
Material – Ndalani Black granite  
Location – Uhuru Gardens –Nairobi, Kenya

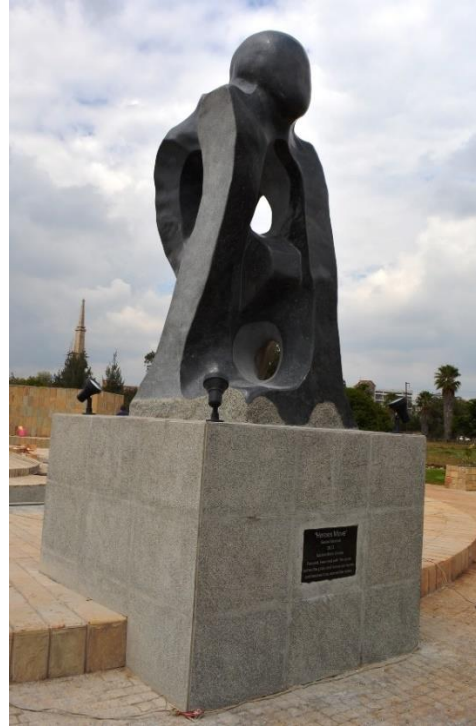


Plate 2b '*Heroes Move*' (2013)  
Dimensions – 210 cm x 200 cm 480 cm  
Material - Ndalani Black granite  
Location - Uhuru Gardens –Nairobi, Kenya

In '*Heroes Move*' (Plate 2a & 2b), the artist depicts what he perceives to be the posture of a hero, with the head held high, long hands holding down and the body crouching. The entire body posture denotes stability and strong anchorage. The gist of the message is that in order for one to succeed in any endeavour, he or she must be well anchored in

purpose. This sculpture, in its formal features, is open to multiple interpretations and raises the question of whether the sculptor's intent is actually manifested or captured in the sculpture as it stands, though the sculpture itself may be well-executed and beautiful to view in terms of salient sculptural features.



Plate 3 'Interlude' (2012)  
Dimensions – 510 cm x 300 cm x 300 cm  
Material – Black granite  
Location – Mombasa, Kenya

Plate 3: *“Life is full of drama and every stage in life is a scene in the drama. It is in the interlude that we require something to occupy ourselves. African culture is consistently full of traditional teachings, stories, and songs that give us our identity”* (Artist).

The ‘interlude’ (Plate 3) is an expression of African culture, ‘past, present and the future’ as the artist alludes; and depicts the head of an old man with the rest of the body adorned in traditional regalia, or the traditional skin cloth. This is shown through the use of the natural texture of the stone. Other items such as gourds and pots that symbolise African traditional culture are also engraved on the stone itself. According to the artist, it is a sculpture that underscores the essence of African traditional culture but acknowledges that certain changes are inevitable in the light of the modern social/cultural dispensation.

Plate 4: *“When indeed one is peaceful then the people around him or her will have peace. We*



Plate 4 ‘Souls of peace’ (2010)  
Dimensions – 240 cm x 140 cm x 130 cm  
Material - Granite  
Location - Brookline NH - USA

*always give what we have. If a soul has no peace, then don’t expect the same from it. We all embrace our inner peace”* (Artist).

‘Souls of peace’ (Plate 4) depicts two figures locked in an embrace, with one figure appearing more dominant and towering upon the other as if shielding or offering refuge. The lesser figure is depicted looking up to the other in awe and expectation and leaning towards the left side, which denotes the location of the heart. The forms in the semi-stylised sculpture can be made out quite well because of the contrasting textures and the gestural pose created by the suggested parts of the body such as the two heads, the merged hands and robe-like attire. The dominant figure leans forward at a slight angle to reach down to the smaller figure suggesting that this is the ‘giving soul’ that represents a peaceful person from whom the spirit of peace cascades down to the other. This is a profound statement by the artist since it is fundamentally taken as a philosophical truth; that you cannot give unto others virtues that you are not endowed with,



in this case, the virtue of tranquillity and peacefulness.

Sculptures are, of course, not able to depict subtle phenomena like peace or tranquillity because they are not visible; they are preserved within the human spirit; you cannot view a sculpture and determine that peace is being permeated from one entity to another. But through the nature of composition and the use of certain gestural poses, sculptures can ‘suggest’ the occurrence of such phenomena. For example, in this sculpture, ‘*Souls of peace*’, the

‘human embrace’ is in itself already suggestive of the spirit of mutual goodwill among human beings. This means that the sculptor intended the two depicted forms to represent this concept and, by their gesture, further suggest or infer the permeation of peace from one endowed entity (who possesses it) to another (who desires it). In this context, the sculpture is effective but could also be open to other interpretations and has often been interpreted, in some instances, to bear the ‘Madonna and child’ symbolism.



Plate 5 ‘*Owning up*’ (2016)  
 Dimensions 700 cm x 150 cm x 130 cm  
 Material - Grey granite  
 Location - Boryeong, South Korea

Plate 5: “*Choices have consequences. We, therefore, need to own up our actions regardless of the outcome. Often people avoid owning up when something has gone wrong even though they clearly know they are the villains. This work*



Plate 6 “*Germination of spirit*’ (2019)  
 Dimensions – 50 cm x 130 cm x 150 cm  
 Material - Green Serpentine  
 Location - Nashua City, NH- USA

*is an encouragement that we should learn to accept the consequences of our actions” (Artist).*

The gestural pose in ‘*Owning up*’ (Plate 5) depicts the spirit of owning up; the raised hand, huge thumb and clenched fingers holding a bag, all raised above



the bowed head, are symbolic of remorse. The artist depicts a female figure suggesting that women are much more prone to owning up suggesting, in retrospect, that they are often culprits. The sculpture itself may be open to multiple interpretations and is not, however, readily suggestive of the notion of owning up.

Plate 6: *“We always conceive ideas on every aspect of our life and daily encounters. These internal desires and ideas come out and are realised for others to see. It is the spirit inside that evolves into our daily ventures. As the idea develops progressively, we achieve greater aspects of what we desire in various spheres of life”* (Artist).

The artist’s intent:

*“The theme for the workshop that led to the creation of this piece was “Evolve”, which was decided by the client. My thought was, hence,*

*based on the interpretation of the theme; the word ‘evolve’ means to come out, change or develop. My thought process gravitated around the African inspired concept of farming, hence the coining of the word ‘germination’ in the title ‘germination of spirit’. I wondered where the human spirit emanates from, whether it is indeed planted or whether it changes a person. I drew the conclusion that whatever we do, is from our inner desires, which are borne and developed with time. Therefore, I wanted to give an illustrated account of our daily endeavours”* (Artist).

In ‘Germination’ (Plate 6), the artists allude to the notion of the inner human drive or spirit which germinates into growth and eventual achievement. The concept of germination is heavy at the foundation that supports all subsequent growth and blossoming. The green serpentine stone is symbolic of green vegetation, which in turn symbolises growth and nourishment.



Plate 7a ‘Manifestation of achievement’ (2011)  
 Dimensions 190 cm x 90 cm 60 cm  
 Material - Black granite  
 Location - Baroda, India



Plate 7b ‘Manifestation of achievement’ (2011)  
 Dimensions – 190 cm x 90 cm x 60 cm  
 Material – Black granite  
 Location – Baroda, India

Plate 7a & 7b: *“There is always unseen power hidden in us that is expressed and manifested once one attains an achievement. Passing an exam or an interview or even winning a game or a footballer scoring a goal; there are certain expressions that are a manifestation of the achievement”* (Artist).

The sculpture depicts an abstract human form in a kneeling gestural pose with uplifted hands in



Plate 8. ‘*Surprise move*’ (2009)  
Dimensions 400 cm x 200 cm 180 cm  
Material - Black Korean granite  
Location - Boryeong, South Korea

Plate 8: *“Anxiety is always created in surprises. It is why we cover presents and gifts. Surprise move is a theory used in war to ambush a target and gain advantage”* (Artist).

Artist’s intent: *“In this sculpture, I intended to depict the scenario of surprise; a situation that occurs without prior notice or warning. In the unfolding circumstances, both parties are filled with anxiety at different points in time”* (Artist).

In ‘*Surprise Move*’ (Plate 8), the artist depicts a lone figure stealthily walking as if creeping behind an

celebration of achievement; it denotes triumphant power from within. The artist achieves this by using solids and voids as well as creating planes and sharp edges by neatly slicing out marked-out parts of the stone. These planes contrast with the black smooth textured surface of the granite. The form also shows the creation of the head and the shoulders that stretch out into an elongated arm that curves back towards the head.



Plate 9 ‘*Freedom of thought*’ (2014)  
Dimensions – 300 cm x 200 cm x 100 cm  
Material - Pink marble  
Location – Changsha, Hunan, China

unseen and unsuspecting person, giving the eerie feeling that the outcome of the looming encounter will surprise the unsuspecting victim, causing great anxiety and distress. The sculpture is created in a crouching down posture with the upright head, folded knees and supporting arms, consistent with sneaky intent. The sculpture depicts sharp edges where the stone is sliced out creating the stylised legs and elongated arms. The body is cut out in smoothed planes with slightly contrasting tones of the stone colour. The artist also uses voids to create contrasting spaces that bring out parts of the form.



The element of the possibility of surprise and ambush is evident in the demeanour and posture of the sculpture itself.

Plate 9: *“People in a city come from different cultures and backgrounds. They coexist peacefully and in unity by respecting the freedom of thought of each other, thus creating a harmonious community”* (Artist).

Artist’s intent: *“My intention right from the design stage was that the sculpture would propagate the message that regardless of our various cultural backgrounds, there are many other factors that bring us together; and that even with the freedom of thought (that is inherent in such conversations), we should all harbour mutual respect”* (Artist).

In *‘Freedom of thought’* (Plate 9), the artist depicts three heads placed in unity and togetherness; the crossed figure-eight design denotes their mutual

inter-activeness and dialogue or mutual interlock, even though they come from different backgrounds. The artist uses the concept of solids and voids and uses contrasting sharp-edged planes; he also exploits the natural colour and texture of the pink marble stone. It is meant to be a sculpture of peace and coexistence as well as mutual respect. Such abstract sculptures are, however, difficult to decipher without prior explanatory cues since covert messages, in this case, ‘freedom of thought and mutual respect that ostensibly exist among diverse peoples, cannot be expressed or manifested in the physical sculpture. The sculpture itself, therefore, may also be subject to multiple interpretations. It is, hence, unclear whether the artist’s noble thought is ultimately captured in the essence of this sculpture or whether, instead, the sculpture bears other interpretations. It has, for instance, been interpreted as a clenched fist, denoting power, which is more symbolic of defiance than the spirit of peaceful coexistence.



Plate 10 *‘Family at Prayer’* (2015)  
Dimensions 350 cm x 200 cm 200 cm  
Material - Black granite  
Location - Gigiri - Nairobi, Kenya



Plate 11 *‘Desire to be’* (2009)  
Dimensions – 220 cm x 200 cm x 180 cm  
Material - Marble and Sandstone  
Location – Alberta, Canada

Plate 10: “*United we stand and divided we fall as a family*” (Artist).

Artist’s intent: To express family values of togetherness bound by prayer as a way of maintaining unity.

In ‘*Family at Prayer*’ (Plate 10), the sculptor depicts a family of five huddled together and locked in a gesture of unity in a moment of prayer. The notion of family unity of purpose is depicted by interlocked arms in a standing posture that suggests the strength of grounding since interlocked unity is best achieved when figures are standing. The notion of prayer denotes divine superiority as well as human subservience and submission to divine power. This is a universal concept celebrated the world over. The artist’s idea of unity, be it family or communal, is well conceptualised and rendered in black granite. This concept is also well expressed through the sculpture itself such that any viewer can derive the visual message without the need for guided interpretation. This is because the sculpture, in its simplicity, is figurative and representational of recognisable human references, which are presented in an obvious gestural pose that underscores the desire for the oneness of purpose. In adopting a semi-stylised approach, the artist leaves out anatomical details but highlights only what is necessary to describe the human forms, such as the heads, shoulders that merge into the interlocked arms, hip area and buttocks. The sculpture also

suggests movement, giving an indication of a circular motion, which shows interlocked unity in all angles. The sculpture, therefore, bears an aspect of narrative since it tells a story of the essence of family unity. The granite is given a smooth textural finish. In this sculpture, the intent of the artist in tandem with what the sculpture portrays.

Plate 11: “*All humans of whatever status have a desire to be. Thus, successful people from the top look down on the common man’s life and desire simplicity in it. Meanwhile, the common man looks up and desires a life filled with material wealth and fame*” artist.

In ‘*Desire to be*’ (Plate 11), the artist depicts two human forms interlocked in a mutual gaze, each wanting to be in the place of the other. In trying to address the paradox of human nature, the artist explains the rather strange phenomenon of the wealthy desiring some element of simplicity while the ordinary persons yearn for wealth and glory. The stylised sculpture itself depicts this by featuring two human forms with heads placed at two levels representing the two distinct classes in society; one who looks down upon the other and the other that looks up to the other. The extent to which the artist achieves his intent in this work is highly contestable mainly because the context in which the notion of desire is conceptualised in this work is not sculpturally tenable.





Plate 12a '*Fair play: spirit of sportsmanship*' (2014)

Dimensions - 240 cm x 110 cm x 100 cm

Material- Granite

Location – Nairobi, Kenya



Plate 12b '*Fair play: spirit of sportsmanship*' (2014)

Material – Granite

Location – Nairobi, Kenya

In '*Fair play: spirit of sportsmanship*' (Plate 12a & 12b), the sculpture depicts two figures in competition, tussling for the high ball. The sculptor uses interlocking stylised forms to bring out his message. In plate 12a, one figure leans forward with hands stretched backwards in an almost awkward reach for the ball. In plate 12b, the artist uses the texture of the stone to define a form, also reaching

out for the same ball. The artist uses the three surface characters of the stone to define the various planes of the sculpture; the textured surface of the original stone, the sliced grey plane and the smoothed surface that reveals the natural black colour of the stone when continuously smoothed. The artist contends that in life as in sports, there should be the spirit of fair play.



Plate 13a 'On the marks' (2007)  
Dimensions – 240 cm x 100 cm x 70 cm  
Material – Marble  
Location - Guangdong, China



Plate 13b 'On the marks' (2007)  
Dimensions – 240 cm x 100 cm x 70 cm  
Material - Marble  
Location - Guangdong, China

Plate 13: “Whatever we are in life has a starting point. It is that starting point that determines the finishing point. Like an athlete in a marathon, a false start will lead to disqualification. Focus and determination are elements applied in the starting point that always propel us to win” (Artist).

In ‘On the marks’ (Plate 13a & 13b), the artist depicts a human form on the ‘on your marks’ pose, underscoring the content of the title. Heavily stylised, the sculpture denotes a person at the ‘starting point’ of life. Just like an athlete, the head faces down, with the upper body or spine propped up, with hands and shoulders held down, ready to take off. The sculpture is not rounded but bears lines that specify the various sculptural edges and narrow planes. These edges are important in defining the sculptural body mass and help to determine the falling of light and shadows upon the sculpture,

thereby emphasising its solidity. The edges are also used to direct the eye upon parts of the form that help to define body posture. For example, the slight body twist that characterises the pose would not have been clearly visible without the well-defined edges.

To secure the sculpture on the ground, the artist uses the concept of bottom-heavy balancing by deliberately placing weight at the bottom. The artist succeeds in depicting his desired subject matter and renders it in such a manner that although it is stylised, the viewer grasps the overt message. However, in such sculptures, the covert message or its ‘philosophy of life’ connotation has often to be explained to audiences because it is not readily aligned to or easily inferred from the sculpture itself. In this case, the sculpture as a work of art is only quasi-expressive since it is constructed as an analogy and, therefore, carries only the outer



physical message, that is, the depiction of a human form about to take off from its 'starting point'. It does not, however, carry the interpretative analogical 'value' as envisioned by the artist since, by its nature, it bears no such impetus; it cannot communicate to the audience that the real underlying meaning is, indeed, the 'starting point of any useful endeavour in life. It cannot reiterate that the focus is not just confined to the focus of an amorphous athlete, but it is the focus and



Plate 14 'New life' (2008)  
Dimensions – 200 cm x 90 cm x 80 cm  
Material – Marble  
Location - Mersin metro-City –Turkey

In 'New Life' (Plate 14), the artist shows the concept of new life by depicting two parents holding an infant. The father's head is placed slightly behind that of the mother with his hands embracing both the wife and child. The woman is depicted wearing a traditional necklace. The semi-stylistic sculpture with enlarged hands and elongated fingers is well smoothed, showing the stone's natural texture and colour patterns. According to the artist, the sculpture propagates the wider concept of the essence of the birth or beginning of any new endeavour that bears profound implications but

determination of everyone to mitigate against failure in whatever endeavour in life. Such sculptures, therefore, may be effective only at 'face value interpretation' but may require a more thoughtful audience to determine that the 'on your marks' gestural pose is not really that of the unnamed athlete but refers, in retrospect, to the 'on your marks of life' that also denotes the essence of time and urgency since life itself is like a race.



Plate 15 'Target' (2008)  
Dimensions - 210 cm x 80 cm x 60 cm  
Material - Oman Marble  
Location - Dubai

which is ultimately mutually beneficial and rewarding.

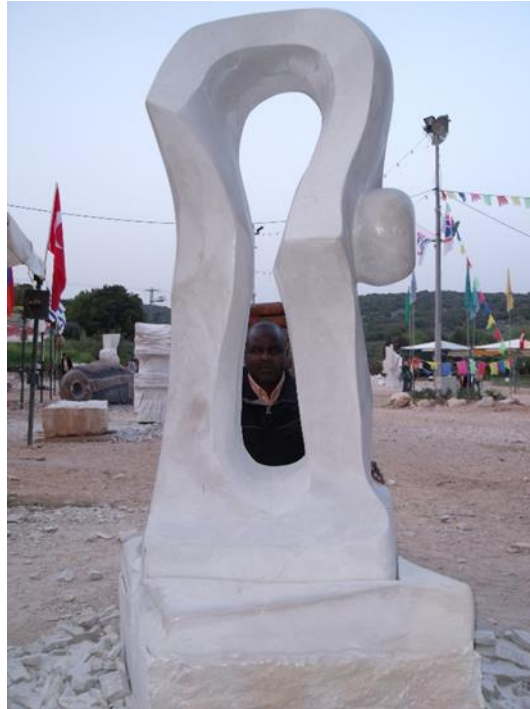
Sculptures, though semi-stylised, often simultaneously bear gestural poses that are salient enough to suggest the intended meaning. In 'Target' (Plate 15), the importance of the upward shooting gestural action pose clearly alludes to the subject matter, that is, the concept of winning. The artist asserts that one only wins if he or she actually hits the target; and that this target is significant because it is coveted and sought after by many others. One, therefore, has to stretch a little further; go the extra

mile. The sculpture itself depicts two female athletes in competition for the ball and shows clearly defined edges and planes that are even more

defined by the direction of light and shadows falling upon the sculpture.



Plate 16a ‘Down to earth’ (2009)  
Dimensions 240 cm x 110 cm x 100 cm  
Material- Marble  
Location – Maalot Tarshia, Israel



16b “Down to earth’ (2009)  
Dimensions - 240 cm x 110 cm x 100 cm  
Material – Marble  
Location – Maalot Tarshia, Israel

*Down to earth (Plate 16a & 16b)* refers to the notion of the life cycle; that there is the birth or beginning, the pinnacle of growth and the inevitable decline and return to the earth. Similar in stylistic approach, perhaps, to *Plate 16b*, the artist uses the bending forward gestural pose to suggest this notion.

This is not a new assertion; Barrett (1994) in one of his principles for interpreting art, observes that “No single interpretation is exhaustive of the meaning of an artwork and there can be different, competing and contradictory interpretations of the same artwork.” It can be said that all the sculptural work featured in this paper can be subject to multiple interpretations. This approach is actually encouraged as a healthy thing; Barrett’s principle “encourages a diversity of interpretation from a number of viewers and from a number of points of view.” He further contends that these varied interpretations “enrich our understanding of a work of art. They also enrich our appreciation of the responsiveness of human beings.”

## OVERVIEW AND GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

From examining the sculptural forms featured in this paper, it is observed that;-

- *Sculptures can carry multiple interpretations.*

The notion that sculptures are capable of carrying multiple interpretations has been a controversial and contentious subject over many years. What is observable in this paper is that depending on the execution of each individual sculpture and particularly its degree of stylisation, sculptures are indeed capable of attracting multiple interpretations.

- *The artist relies to a significant extent on a ‘gestural approach’ to sculpture*

Since the sculptures are generally semi-abstract or bear different degrees of stylisation, the artist uses gestures and suggestions of rhythm and movement



to direct the flow of the viewer's eyes towards the pertinent aspects of the message. In *'Family at Prayer'* (Plate 10), the gesture of solidarity depicted by the semi-abstract human forms with interlocked hands underscores 'unity of purpose' in prayer and togetherness. In *'Fair play: spirit of sportsmanship'* (Plate 12), the upward stretch of the hands and body is an infinite gesture of competitiveness which signifies the drive to 'score' and ultimately translates to the quest for 'triumph'. The artist carefully crafts this gestural pose as his main sculptural focus that carries the fundamental essence of the work. In *'On the marks'* (Plate 13), the 'on the marks' gesture is the core of the sculpture itself and signifies the notion of the 'take-off point' towards any endeavour. Without this gestural pose, the sculpture would lose its potential to emanate this suggested meaning

- *Stylistic highlights: The artist tends to use different degrees of stylisation in the stylisation continuum.*

In his stylistic approach, the artist adopts a stylised tendency with the sculptures rendered to different degrees in the stylisation continuum. He describes his work, therefore, as mainly semi-abstract. His stylistic approach is aided by the incorporation of gestures in his sculptures which direct the eye to the pertinent meaning. In *'Family at prayer'* (Plate 10), the viewer can easily make out the family locked in a 'gestural pose of unity', which then implies the purpose of that unity, which is coming together in prayer. Although the sculpture is not realistic, it bears a low degree of stylisation since the human forms can be made out clearly and their common action brought out quite clearly. In *Souls of Peace* (Plate 4), the sculpture depicts the 'embrace' and, therefore, the concept of the sanctity of the human bond. In *'New Life'* (Plate 13), the gesture of mother and child is very clear and bears a low degree of stylisation. In *Freedom of Thought* (Plate 9), however, the sculpture bears a higher degree of stylisation that shows only the three heads locked in the form of infinite unity. The viewer would have to observe deeper to be able to decipher the meaning of the sculpture according to the sculptor's intent.

- *Textural application: the artist uses textural effects to distinguish and emphasise parts of his sculptures.*

It is observable that the artist uses different textures in rendering his sculptures. The alternating use of smooth and rough textures on various planes helps to differentiate the parts of the sculptures that give meaning to the overall form. Different textures also outline the sculptural edges that help define contours that guide the flow of the viewer's eyes upon the sculpture. They also outline how the sculptor himself approaches his work. A good example of the application of textural variation is *'Fair play: spirit of sportsmanship'* (Plate 12b).

- *That sculptures can depict overt messages but not necessarily have the ability to carry the intended covert message unless the sculpture is accompanied by an explanatory synopsis*

This is observed to be an intriguing phenomenon which, although interrelated with the notion of multi-interpretations, also implies, however, that sculptures may not always readily depict the message intended by the artist. In *'On the marks'* (Plate 13), the gestural pose depicts a human form about to take off, very much in the same physical way that an athlete takes off from the ramps. If the concept of a starting point also refers, by extension, to any other endeavour in life, then the analogy does not necessarily manifest in the sculpture. The sculpture itself cannot be able to depict this analogy and is, therefore, visually redundant in this regard. This implies then that for this covert message to permeate, the sculpture must always be accompanied by an explanatory synopsis. In the *'Desire to be'* (Plate 11), the explanation given by the artist on his 'intent' does not manifest in the sculpture itself leaving the work open to multi-interpretations, often turning out to be a complete antithesis of the original idea. The sculpture's gestural pose suggests other interpretations, including some with sexual connotations, which is far removed from the overall idea that the artist intended.

- *Sculptures can carry a message that is interpreted as very distinctly different from that intended by the artist*

It is observed that it is possible for a sculpture that is open to multi-interpretations to seem to carry a message that is 'distinctively' different from that intended by the artist. Barret (1994) in one of his

principles of artistic interpretation, cautions about the notion that the artist's interpretation is all-encompassing and observes that an interpretation of an artwork 'need not' match the artist's intent for the artwork. However, what is perplexing, even in view of this assertion, is the extent to which the discrepancy in such an interpretation can extend; to derive a completely different message from that intended by the artist. This discrepancy elicits a completely different response from the audience, such as in the 'Desire to be' (Plate 11). This is interesting because it implies that sculptures have the ability to exude their own meaning outside that of the artist, making the creative and mental role of the artist effectively redundant. The intriguing question here is how is it indeed possible for the artist to create an entity (sculptural work) that bears its own visual impetus to 'counter create' its own meaning completely independent of the artist even though it has been created by the artist in the first place?

- *That sculptures also bear value as aesthetic embellishments in the environment*

It is observed that even without delving much into their expressiveness or the essence of their content, the large-scale stone sculptures become embellishments to an otherwise artistically desolate environment. People often tend to read too much into the meaning of a sculpture, but outdoor sculptures are open to a myriad of interpretations since the artist is not there to explain his original intent. But audiences who may not have the time, artistic expertise, or even the inherent artistic interest to 'read' the sculpture are often quite content to see the pieces simply as useful aesthetic embellishments that make the environment beautiful and worthy of visual interaction. The placement of large-scale stone sculptures in public spaces and other environmentally compatible locations can add colour, liveliness and interactiveness to those spaces even without too much intellectual interrogation. Hence, if the sculptures bear no offensive symbolism or are not construed to carry any harmful visual message in multiple interpretations, then the transient audience is quite happy to see them as aesthetic embellishments in their space since they add sparkle to the environment.

- *The thematic interpretation of large-scale stone sculptures can override and replace the original intention of the artist*

It is observable that there can exist an interpretational disparity between the artist's intended message and what the sculpture itself suggests, leading to instances of *conflicting* meaning. The interpretation of large-scale sculptures, as has been observed before, has been argued to be the interpretative responsibility of the audience. However, these varied interpretations at times lead to a conflict of emotions, particularly where some audiences feel that the sculpture depicts something completely different from what the artist intended and perhaps the 'new meaning' is perceived as offensive. In 'Desire to be' (Plate 10), the nature of the sculpture features two forms that seem locked in a suggestive romantic or sexual pose. The interpretation is viewed to be radically different from the innocent depiction of the rather mundane subject of how class disparity, according to the artist, affects the psychology of people on either side of the divide. This tendency to admire an aspect in the other ostensibly culminates in one group strangely envying the perch of the other leading to an enigmatic and impracticable wish to exchange roles. The artist's idea is, however, lost in the process because its thematic anchorage is difficult to be rendered sculpturally. In the 'freedom of thought' (Plate 9), the sculpture can be interpreted as a clenched fist, denoting power, while the artist intended it to be three heads denoting unity in diversity.

- *The artist uses a variety of materials and tools to obtain the desired effects*

The artist has articulated the tools he uses and the sculptural purpose of each in achieving his objective. It has been observed that the tools help in the shaping of the sculpture in accordance with its natural contours, thereby synchronising subject matter with the dictates of the medium. Other tools help to slice the stone to create planes and edges which underscore the pertinent points of the expressive form. Other tools are used to ensure that the finishing is fine and detailed yet utilising and harmonising with the natural texture of the selected medium. The artist demonstrates sensitivity to the nature of the medium at hand that ensures that the

work is in tandem with its natural grains and does not create structural conflict.

- *The artist is very aware of spatial arrangement and placement of work in appropriate environments*

The artist displays awareness of the need to place the sculptures in their appropriate environments. This gives the sculptures adequate breathing space as well as creating an opportunity for them to be viewed fully in the round. The placement of sculptures in the environment has existed for a long time, but Henry Moore probably drew the most attention to its artistic value. The curators in his Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP) of which he helped create in 1977, maintain that “the environment in which the sculpture sits is as important to the experience as the work itself; the quality of light, the effects of weather and the atmosphere of the location all coming to bear on the viewer’s enjoyment of the work” (Cartright, 2015).

- *The sculptures are generally placed on low plinths*

Some of the sculptures featured in this paper are notably placed on low plinths and some almost on ground level. This may be explained by the fact that outdoor sculptures of this nature require proximity of interrogation and unlike statues, it would be defeating the purpose if the audience does not have access to eye-level view and reasonable proximity to the sculptures in order to carefully conduct in-depth visual analysis. Visual analysis is important here because audiences have the responsibility to extract the message, unlike in the case of statues where the likeness *is* the message and does not require concerted interrogation other than to ascertain that it manifests. The low-level plinths also provided the opportunity for viewers to fully encircle the sculptures in order to view them from all angles, which is in keeping with the ‘fully in the round’ principle of three-dimensional work. The use of low plinths in outdoor sculpture also ensures a certain level of neutrality, meaning that the plinths do not overly dominate or interfere with the viewers’ ability or discretion to focus on the essence of the sculpture itself. Although outdoor sculptures are protected to a large extent, the nature of the material dictates the level of proximity allowed

around the sculpture. Stone sculptures are extremely resilient to the ravages of the wear and tear of the infinite touch of ‘public hands. Subsequently, the idea remains the balance between allowing reasonable proximity without necessarily allowing complete physical access to the sculpture itself. Low plinths are also related to the need to create a low centre of gravity for heavy sculptures rather than suspend them in needlessly high plinths that will interfere with the audience’s ability to interact with the sculpture.

- *Sculptures can carry salient gestural poses, including action poses, that suggest meaning even though the sculpture itself is semi-stylised*

In naturalistic sculptures, gestural poses are obvious to make out because the forms are very representational. Salient gestural poses are also identifiable in semi or fully abstracted sculptures; sculptors are able to ingeniously apply them to suggest or enhance meaning. Gestural poses are often intertwined with symbolism, although they can be quite distinct in execution and derivation of meaning. A good example is *Target (Plate 15)*.

- *Sculptures can carry certain symbolism that makes it easier for the audience to derive meaning or construct the message.*

In ‘*Souls of peace*’ (Plate 4), the human embrace is symbolic of mutual human affection, which denotes a peaceful coexistence; In ‘*Family at Prayer*’ (Plate 10), the interlocking of arms is symbolic of ‘Unity of purpose’ and hence, in observing the sculpture, the audience’s eyes start with that visual notion as a cue towards interpreting the sculpture. In ‘*New life*’ (Plate 14), the baby is symbolic of ‘new life’ irrespective of the rest of the sculptural details.

## CONCLUSION

In examining the content, context and rendition of the large-scale outdoor sculptures featured in this paper, it can be concluded that: -

Public art remains important for a number of reasons. The most obvious reason is accessibility; unlike museums and art galleries, people have direct access to public art because it exists in the outdoor public domain. It enhances physical environments and forms a significant forum for building social

capital as well as acting as a catalyst for social discourse. Culturally, public art strengthens cultural, aesthetic and economic tenets of a community that underscore its pride and constitutes its larger social fabric. Jagannath (2015) observes that “it has a range of roles, part of it is about creating that interest in a space. Part of it is about representing perhaps history or a human element in that space. Part of it is about challenging the views or the thinking of the people who might be viewing or experiencing that space.” To emphasise the role of sculptures, Dudkiewicz et al. (2016) observe that “Sculptures located in urban green spaces can function as didactic, educational and decorative objects. Sometimes they have a particular religious or artistic significance” (p. 248).

Sculptures can carry multi-interpretations separate from that of the artist’s intent and that the audience hence becomes the generators of meaning. This has attracted controversy since others have queried how it is possible for audiences to generate their own separate meaning from a piece of creation whose idea and inspiration, they had no role in formulating. Yet others are of the opinion that the essence of creativity is letting other people decipher whatever they can from the sculpture such that the meaning is not confined or restricted only to the artist’s intent. “People will interpret the same artwork in different ways as they will symbolise different things depending on the person who is viewing them.” (Jagannath, 2015). Also, it has been observed that the artist’s intended meaning is not always perceived as the *only* meaning emanating from the sculptural work and that the audience may find their own interpretation according to how they view and comprehend the symbolism.

Some sculptures can bear significant gestural features, which can be used as an effective tool for communicating a message through gestural symbolism and, therefore, become an integral part of the sculpture’s expressiveness. The insertion of gestural poses is generally compatible with the stylistic approach in many sculptures, particularly those that are semi or heavily stylised. This is because gestural poses are helpful in drawing certain meanings with which they are naturally associated and these gestural poses are easily depicted even in stylised work making it easier for the audience to decipher meaning.

The nature of the material is often the main contributing factor in the determination of the nature of the sculpture, including the execution of subject matter.

Large-scale sculptures when viewed as artistic embellishments are useful to the environment in which they are placed even if their inherent message or meaning is not readily internalised by the transient audience.

The artist’s analogical message is not always readily visible in outdoor sculptural work and that for the covert meaning to be understood, the sculpture must be accompanied by an explanatory caption.

Artists seldom intentionally create sculptural work with multiple meanings; this would be ‘loading’ the sculpture and most likely leading to compositional complexities. What can be concluded from these sculptures is that sculptures can carry two faces; a physical outer face that is contained in the formal nature of the sculpture itself and an analogical face that is not visibly obvious but contains the covert message. This does not imply that the sculpture or the artist bear the intent of dual meanings; only that the sculptor uses a familiar idea that is more physically recognisable to denote or ‘tether’ an analogy as the covert message that is, perhaps, a narrative of life’s many experiences.

Sculptures may bear in their stylistic approach different degrees of stylisation depending on the intent of the artist and often, the nature of the material.

The participative role of the community in the formulation and development of sculptural ideas remains controversial. While some schools of thought are emphatic that the community’s contribution remains essential because they are the consumers of the end result and, therefore, they should be engaged in prior consultation, others have argued that their role is limited to providing insights into their relevant social/cultural or religious ethos. The creative element should, therefore, be left to the professional sculptor.

Symbolism can be used as a critical tool in the interpretation of sculptures by acting as visual cues in the search for meaning. Symbolism is usually embedded in the sculptural forms in terms of



specific gestural poses, expressions, aspects of material culture that carry certain meanings or signs and specific symbols that represent certain phenomena. If a sculpture embodies a religious or cultural theme, it is bound to carry significant religious or cultural symbolism within its form.

Sculptors are sometimes not able to render the ideas of imageries that play out in their minds. They, therefore, use or feature other 'proxy' forms as subject matter to stand in for what they are not able to render sculpturally. These proxy forms are, however, themselves not able to carry the covert message and are rendered visually redundant in terms of interpretation; and are only useful when they are subject to verbal explanation. In 'On the marks' (Plate 13), the sculptor uses the heavily stylised form as a proxy form, but it too does not deliver the covert message. Since outdoor sculptures have no stand-by guides to deliver verbal explanations in regard to the intent of the sculptor and since sculptures may not always be accompanied by an explanatory caption, it implies then that the covert message is not articulated in any way and is, therefore, often lost.

Sculptures often have a potent thematic foundation, whether or not the eventual interpretation unveils those themes as envisaged by the artist. In this paper, therefore, it is evident that the sculptures featured have involved pertinent aspects of the creation of art such as thematic foundations, style, subject matter, content, contextual perspectives as well as the artist's own intent; all of which have holistically created a worthy sculptural experience.

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