

Conservatory Methods of Contemporary Stone Sculpture: The Case of Two Galleries in Zimbabwe

By

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Abstract

Zimbabwe stone sculpture, has developed as a distinct and unique tradition in the last half of the 20th century. Several authors that include Winter-Irving (1993; 2003), Sultan (1994) and Mor (1987) have written about its nature, peculiarity, development, challenges, artists and marketing (Kennedy, 1992). The published material has largely promoted the production of more and better sculptures, many of which have become of world acclaim, but has ignored the aspect of preservation and conservation of the heritage. This article discusses the several aspects that have been published about Zimbabwe stone sculpture¹ and how the issue of conservation has been continuously missed out. A qualitative methodology was used. It involved interviewing artists, curators, analysing stone sculptures and documentation as well as making an assessment of the state of sculpture on display at two galleries. Research findings indicate that artists and curators are generally informed about types of stone used for sculpture. However, they had limited knowledge about their chemical composition that subsequently determine conservatory approaches applicable to individual stone types. Conservation was limited to polishing to retain stone luster and proper packaging to avoid breakages. The study recommends introduction of deliberate programmes on care of stone sculptures that are a valuable heritage to Zimbabwe.

Keywords: *Contemporary stone sculpture, conservation of sculpture, Zimbabwe stone sculpture, sculpture stones.*

¹ Zimbabwe stone sculpture was originally known as Shona sculpture. This notion was later dismissed after the realisation that not all sculptors were Shona (See Roberts, 1979). Some were of different ethnic groups while others came from other countries in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region such as Angola, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. This means there was a diverse repertoire of African cosmological and mythological orientations among the artists particularly among the Tengenenge Sculpture Community.