PRESERVING THE AKOGO TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENT OF THE ITESO COMMUNITY THROUGH SCULPTURE

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE TRAINING IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A MASTER OF ART AND INDUSTRIAL DESIGN OF KYAMBOGO UNIVERSITY

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DECLARATION

I, ASEETE Francis declare that this Research Dissertation entitled: "Preserving the *Akogo* Traditional Musical Instrument of the Iteso Community through Sculpture" is my own original work and it has never been presented to any institution of higher learning for an award.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my beloved sister Ms. ACHEEDE Margaret and her husband Mr. EWATU Vincent whose relentless desire and willingness to support my education set the stage for this academic achievement.

Furthermore, I dedicate this study to my father Mr. OPOLOT John Otilio a passionate painter and craftsman whose creativity inspired me at childhood and to my mother Ms. Sarah Amuge, who lives as an encyclopedia of Iteso cultural knowledge.

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LIST OF ABREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

3D	- Three Dimensional
AU	- African Union
DRGT	- Directorate of Research and Graduate Training
EAC	- East African Community
ICU	- Iteso Cultural Union
KDLG	- Kumi District Local Government
SDGs	- Sustainable Development Goals
UBOS	- Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UNESCO	- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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ABSTRACT

"Preserving the *Akogo* Traditional Musical Instrument of the Iteso Community through Sculpture" is a practical research study that produced innovative functional sculptural works for the Iteso traditional marriage ceremonies obtained by reinterpreting and reimagining the *Akogo* traditional musical instrument. Driven by three objectives which included a) to examine the historical relevance of the *Akogo* traditional musical instrument among the Iteso; b) to analyse the existing designs of *Akogo* traditional musical instrument of the Iteso of eastern Uganda; and c) to produce *Akogo*-inspired innovative functional sculptural works to use in traditional marriage ceremonies, the study established that *Akogo* exceeded its primary role of musical production, instead evolving into an identity and a source of pride for the Iteso, besides serving as a tool for community dialogue, nurturing, and entertainment. The study uncovered the dying cultural apprenticeship system and the eroded design signature of the *Akogo*, coupled with dwindling interest among youth as threats to its musical heritage and social placement. Grounded on the Design-Based Research (DBR) methodology and guided by Serrat's culture theory, the study investigated *Akogo's* historical and cultural significance, production process, techniques and media, and its cultural and symbolic meanings. Informed by these insights, extensive studio experimentation was done that involved reinterpreting the elements and symbolism of *Akogo* into creative functional sculptural prototypes that reignite interest and inspire innovation. Conducted in Kumi District, the study included a total of 20 participants the study. Data obtained from interviews, observation, studio experimentation and critiques informed concepts for the sculptural forms such as the entry arch, the walkway, the gazebo, photo booth, bridal throne, guest chairs, tables and flower vases. The study demonstrated, through the prototypes, that sculpture can be a powerful vessel not for merely story telling but for cultural preservation, innovation and community dialogue. The research, thus offers a culturally grounded blueprint for the preservation of *Akogo* and ensuring it inspires innovation for the present and future generations.

Keywords: *Akogo, preservation, functional sculpture, traditional marriage, Iteso, studio experimentation, Design-Based Research.*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

This study set out to produce innovative functional sculptures inspired by the *Akogo* traditional musical instrument of the Iteso, an instrument with significant cultural and historical meaning to the Iteso community (Kumi District). This section provides a detailed trace of the *Akogo*'s origin, the evolution of its role among the Iteso, the threats to its existence and efforts previously taken by other stakeholders to commemorate its legacy. It further states the problem this study aims to address, explains the objectives, purpose, research questions and the vitality of this practical research project.

1.1 Background of the study

Akogo is a traditional musical instrument deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the Iteso people in Uganda and Kenya. As Asiimwe (2008) point out, it is the most important musical instrument in the Teso region. Historically significant in traditional music and ceremonial practices, including marriage rites, twin celebrations, inter-clan competitions, religious worship, and related social conventions, *Akogo* holds a place of reverence in the cultural fabric of the Iteso community. Okiror (2021) describes it as a long-distance instrument due to its rhythmic upbeat sound that accompanied youth treading on long trips to faraway markets or grazing pastures. He notes that the iconic instrument only came to be referred to as *Akogo* in the early 1950s by the Iteso youth working at the Kakira Sugar plantations in Jinja who drew inspiration from the Congolese style of playing it hence developing a new sound now popularly known as *Akogo* music, dance and instrument. The instrument is characterised by its distinctive shape, material composition, and the unique rattling sound effect it produces. Meticulously crafted from specially selected and seasoned traditional materials such as wood, metal, and natural glue, *Akogo* has been passed down through generations, symbolising not only the musical tradition but also the cultural identity of the Iteso.

Traditionally, possession of profound skills in crafting and playing the revered instrument was a coveted attribute of typical Iteso males. The instrument is played solo or as part of a band of about 5-15 or more people. It comes in varied sizes, each producing a different sound. The smallest elicits a high-pitched sound while the biggest gives the rumbling bass. The instrument, as Okiror (2021) notes, basically comprises of a rectangular wooden resonator box, originally carved from well-seasoned light wood; 5-7 metallic tines often made of flattened steel rods arranged at varying lengths placed on each side of the resonator box between a wooden bridge at the base and a metallic one at the top fastened with small flexible wires. Metal wraps cut from tin containers are added on the tines to create a rattle effect as the tines are plucked. The sound is emitted through the small circular or triangular holes placed at the front, back and sometimes side of the resonator box.

Studies indicate that traditional music is vital to the cultural identity of the Iteso, linking them to their history and community customs (Muyonjo, 2024). The *Akogo*, an essential element of this musical heritage, embodies the cultural narratives and values of the Iteso. Indeed, within the songs and performances of the *Akogo* instruments, several messages-audible and visual, are communicated to the audience covering the social, economic, political and religious aspects of their lives. It is a combination of entertainment and education.

Although the *Akogo* instrument has been used by the Iteso for centuries, its origin is shrouded in uncertainty. It is evident that the Iteso, despite giving the instrument a new identity, are not the inventors. The *Akogo* instrument has similarities in both design and function across several Sub-Saharan communities. Such include the Mbira (Zimbabwe and Zambia), Sanza [Sansa] and Likembe (Congo), Kalimba (Kenya) and Kadongo (Buganda-Uganda). Irrespective of the uncertainty of its definitive origin, *Akogo* remains one of the most precious crafts among the Iteso. Its possession, besides the ability to play and dance, demonstrates pride in the Iteso culture and artistic heritage. To the Iteso, *Akogo* is not merely a musical instrument; it is a lifestyle, an identity, and a spirit. Despite limited scholarly documentation, the emerging cultural journalism and oral history recognise *Akogo* as both a unique musical innovation and living cultural emblem among the Iteso (Africanews, 2022; UNESCO, 2018).

In recent decades, the *Akogo* has faced considerable challenges threatening its survival. Historical disruptions- including the insurgencies of the 1980s and 1990s notably the

Karamojong raids, UPA rebellion (1987-1992), and eventually the LRA war of the early 2000s-led to widespread displacement, encampment and loss of cultural regalia (Henriques, 2002). Instruments and materials essential for both production and performance were destroyed, and traditional apprenticeship systems were disrupted, preventing the transmission of knowledge to younger Iteso (Uganda Radio Network, 2018).

In the post war era, modernisation accelerated this decline, as imported guitars, keyboards, and radios became symbols of progress, displacing local instruments from popular use (de Berry, 2000). The recent laxity of Ministry of Education and Sports' organisation of Annual Performing Arts school competitions, a platform that previously ensured acquisition of music production and instrument craftsmanship skills for *Akogo* as well as other traditional instruments such as *Adungu* and *Adeudeu* (both bow harps), *Ababairen* (xylophone), *Atenus* (drum), *Alamaru* (flute), *Arigirigi* (fiddle) among others, has denied many Iteso youth the opportunity to learn and discover the cultural and career value of this iconic instruments. Yet, the internationalisation of music enabled by modern information streaming platforms such as Spotify, the constantly improving digital music production technologies, and the rapidly evolving trends in music only seem to fuel the younger generation's shift towards contemporary music and instruments contributing to the growing disconnect with the traditional music practices that once sustained the *Akogo* instrument, music and dance.

Today, many young Iteso view the *Akogo* as a relic of the past, with its role in producing culturally rich melodies replaced by digital tools and Western instruments (Africanews, 2024; IOL, 2003). Its melodies, often accompanied with several moral lessons and benevolent humour, mean little to the current youth who idolise the content on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, X and YouTube. Existing literature reveals that whereas digital technologies can provide platforms for wider dissemination and appreciation of traditional music, they also risk diluting cultural practices (Mbabazi, 2010). This duality is particularly relevant in the context of *Akogo*, where modern influences have overshadowed traditional methods of music – making and instrument crafting. Currently, a significant section of the contemporary Iteso musicians are devoid of the ability and interest to use the instrument in their music production. It is shocking that a section of the Iteso youth today have barely seen a physical *Akogo* instrument, besides having an interaction with it.

Additionally, the craftsmanship skills required in the production of *Akogo* are greatly eroded. Only a few existing artisans, many of advanced age, still exist. The apprenticeship practices through which the artisans passed down such valuable skills to younger generations have become unsustainable with a disinterested and continuously misinformed generation today. This trend diminishes the plethora of opportunities such skills grant society. These opportunities come in the form of preservation of craftsmanship and techniques associated with traditional instruments that foster deeper appreciation of musical traditions (Foley, 2017); enhancement of creativity and problem-solving skills i.e. improvement of cognitive flexibility and innovation (Runco, 2012); enrichment of educational experiences through the integration of art, engineering and music enabling interdisciplinary learning approaches (Baker, 2014); use of sustainable practices and materials that foster environmental responsibility in craftsmanship (Kocurek, 2019); promotion of community engagement and cultural identity (Cohen, 2008); and development of careers in instrument design, restoration, and education (Throsby, 2001).

However, despite the diminishing interest in the instrument among the current Iteso youth, it is also fair to note that unlike other musical instruments, such as guitars, pianos, drums, *Akogo* has generally not benefitted from promotional efforts that can immortalise it in society. Efforts to preserve traditional instruments like the *Akogo* often struggle due to a lack of resources, recognition, and innovation. As a result, the risk of losing *Akogo*, along with its associated cultural knowledge, has become a pressing concern.

As Orhon (2022) points out, in the face of modernity and Western led development, there is possibility of losing African heritage and traditional knowledge if it is not well preserved. Without deliberate innovative efforts, *Akogo* may soon join a long list of forgotten instruments that have suffered in the harsh wheel of time. Hardik (n.d) lists the *Mbira*, a variant of the *Akogo*, as is commonly known in the Zimbabwean communities in the long list of instruments that are getting extinct. He argues that as much as music is timeless, our instruments are always changing, and due to these changes, many are constantly getting extinct requiring an imminent need for preservation and revival.

Hardik (2017) further lists other instruments at the brink of extinction such as *The Chitata* (one of the most ancient and unique musical instrument used to play traditional songs consisting of a board upon which 8 pieces of small metals are stuck and the whole board is suspended to a gourd

in order to produce an amplifying effect); *The Bangwe* (an ancient and now almost extinct musical instrument which comprises of a board on which a number of strings are attached. Under each one of them are placed rocks at varying distances in order to obtain a variety of notes); T*he Alimba* (a simple yet indigenous instrument where a wooden rod is kept suspended on a gourd as a result of which the sound gets amplified); *The Santur* (a complex yet beautiful string instrument dating back to around 1000 A.D. with its Persian variant generally comprising of 72 strings and played with the help of small hammers); *The Nychelharpa*(invented in Sweden about 600 years ago) and *The Qanun* (wooden board on which nearly 75 to 81 strings are attached occurring among the Middle Eastern musicians around 950 A.D.) These are eside the already extinct musical instruments such as the Lyre (Greek), *Sambuca* (created by the ancient Syrians and Phoenicians), *Asor, Nebel/Nabla* (whose name translates to *harp* in Hebrew), *The Lituus* (an ancient Roman trumpet), *The Gue* (a two-stringed bowed zither from the Shetland Isles) and the Mayan trumpets among others. For many of these forgotten instruments, musicians and artisans left little to no instructions on how to build or play them, with the bible and other literary works being the only remaining source of information about their existence.

Rawson (1997) refers to sculpture as any method of transforming a mass of material by giving it significance through creating meaningful shapes and arrangement in contrast to leaving it in its plain and undefined form. He points out that all such processes involve reaching final surfaces in space, either by building out toward them in modeling or cutting back to them in carving. Robert Vance, as quoted by Koed (2005), emphasises that what accounts for sculpture is the real occupancy of space. The use of sculpture in the preservation of *Akogo* is effective on several dimensions. First, as Appiah (1992) notes, sculpture allows for a seamless integration of modern design elements with traditional forms. With its culturally significant carvings and elements, *Akogo* can be reimagined through sculptural innovation that respects its historical and symbolic aspects while introducing contemporary aesthetics. This ensures maintenance of its cultural continuity while addressing modern tastes and functionalities relevant for the contemporary audience. Secondly, sculpture enables modification of shape and structure of the *Akogo* to improve ergonomics, durability, and ease for use. Such adjustments will address issues such as weight distribution of the instrument and the comfort of the player which are crucial for both performance and longevity (Small, 1998). Similarly, in discussing the evolution of artistic practices and the potential for sculpture to push the boundaries of traditional craftsmanship,

Malraux (1953) emphasises that, while traditional craftsmanship involves practical modifications, it was devoid of the experimental approach that modern sculpture can provide. Sculpture therefore, incorporates both artistic vision and technical precision allowing for more dynamic and experimental enhancements that are not often feasible with traditional crafting techniques. This therefore, affirms the suitability of sculpture as a medium for preserving and reinterpreting the *Akogo* traditional musical instrument of the Iteso and laying a foundation for innovation.

Whereas Orhon (2022) creates elegant paintings that commemorate the role of *Akogo* among the Iteso people, the paintings focus more on the players rather than the instrument. Subsequently, the paintings fall short in three dimensional representations of *Akogo* because the instrument is confined to a 2D surface. Sculpture alternatively provides the tactile interaction enabling the viewers to touch or walk around the artwork. This facilitates appreciation of texture and proportions. This is difficult to achieve in painting. Unlike painting, sculpture can provide symbolic immortality because it possesses a permanence and durability which best represents a lasting legacy. Sculpture, additionally often involves use of materials similar or related to those of the instrument being preserved. This creates a connection between the medium and the material giving the viewer a sensory connection with materials. This is hard or even impossible to achieve in painting.

According to Tilley (2006), unlike sound recordings or written documentation, sculpture communicates through form, scale and materiality, offering a multisensory engagement that invites public interaction and interpretation. Therefore, the researcher's choice of sculpture as a medium for preserving the *Akogo* instrument is empirically justified. UNESCO (2018) emphasises that, safeguarding intangible heritage requires creative, community-based strategies. Sculpture is a powerful and enduring approach to achieve this.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The *Akogo*, a revered traditional musical instrument of the Iteso, rich with history and cultural meaning, was seemingly losing significance among younger Iteso generations. This was due to the effects of insurgency that disrupted social systems, emerging modern technology and fast spreading global music trends. Like several traditional instruments around the world, the original *Akogo* has been substituted by computer generated sounds, beats and notes. The recent production of music using Artificial Intelligence modules only increases the threat. Currently, few young people can play or make the instrument, yet the traditional apprenticeship systems are already non-existent. The vast majority of Iteso youth consider the instrument a relic of the past that is irrelevant in modern life. This increases *Akogo's* vulnerabilities to fading from the Iteso cultural fabric. Without a deliberate practical intervention, the consequences will be numerous. Not only will essential craftsmanship skills be lost, but future generations will miss the insightful wisdom and humour that accompany the beautiful melody produced by the instrument. This will culminate in loss of cultural identity, erosion of traditional knowledge and skills, reduction in social cohesion, diminished cultural diversity, reduced economic opportunities and create significant educational gaps in heritage based learning. In such a social space where modernity is at conflict rather than harmonious coexistence with tradition, it was essential to find a creative approach to revitalise and integrate *Akogo* into the modern context, rather than just preserve its cultural legacy, relevance and appeal among the youth, but also inspire new forms of creative expression that resonate with contemporary values, tastes and applications.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The study sought to creatively preserve *Akogo* traditional musical instrument by using it as an inspiration for creating functional sculptures that can reignite interest and inspire innovation among the younger and future generations of the Iteso people.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to;

1. Examine the historical and cultural relevance of the *Akogo* traditional musical instrument among the Iteso in Uganda.
2. Analyse the existing designs of *Akogo* traditional musical instrument of the Iteso in Uganda.
3. Produce *Akogo*-inspired functional sculptural works that can renew interest and inspire innovation among younger Iteso generations.

1.5 Studio guiding questions

a) What is the historical and cultural relevance of *Akogo* among the Iteso people?
b) What characterises the existing designs of *Akogo* musical instrument?
c) How can the features of *Akogo* be translated into innovative functional sculptural works?

1.6 Scope of the study

1.6.1 Geographical scope

The study was carried out in Kumi District. The choice was justified by the centrality of its location in the Teso sub-region besides being home to many prominent *Akogo* craftsmen and traditional musical artistes.

1.6.2 Content Scope

Guided by its explicit objectives which included: examining the historical and cultural significance of the *Akogo* traditional instrument among the Iteso; analysing the existing designs of *Akogo*; and producing innovative *Akogo*-inspired functional sculptures that renew interest and inspire innovation among younger Iteso generations, the study explored the symbolic meanings associated with the instrument in both ritual and cultural contexts focusing on its role in cultural preservation, the materials, tools and techniques that have been culturally used in production of *Akogo*.

The study also examined the structure and form of the instrument, experimenting how the different features such as the tines, bridges and resonator box and the sound outlet holes can be reinterpreted and transformed into functional sculptural components. The study equally explored

the use of different sculpture production techniques and technologies. The use of additive techniques such as modeling and assemblage and the negative techniques such as carving were used ensuring the creation of both the positive and negative spaces within the sculptures.

To ensure creation of suitable and relevant sculptures, the study put into consideration the requirements of contemporary and futuristic functional artworks such as cultural relevance (meaning), narrative and symbolism (clear story/message), innovation (incorporation of sound/light or interactive elements), sustainability and relevance to the future (eco-consciousness, adaptive use and durability), utility, ergonomics and accessibility, durability and maintenance, material suitability (lightweight), design flexibility and modularity. Foam board, because of its similarity in both structure and form to wood, the basic material used in *Akogo* production, was used to create the sculptures. Superglue, glass and acrylic paints are the other materials that were used in the production of the sculptures.

1.6.3 Time scope

This study focused on the historical and cultural evolution of the *Akogo* instrument. It included the evolution of its production mechanisms and technologies, its use as an inspiration for artistic interpretation, its survival in a largely digital space and its adaptability to modern aesthetics. The study spanned two semesters, a period supplemented by the recess period of Kyambogo University. During this period, the researcher undertook field trips engaging participants in data collection, and later interpreting and analysing data, conducted studio experiments, critiques and report writing.

1.7 Significance of the study

The study aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework. More precisely, it is consistent with SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) Target 11.4 which requires member states to protect and safeguard the world's cultural heritage. Through documentation, display and reinterpretation in sculpture, this study contributes to safeguarding intangible and tangible cultural heritage.

This study similarly aligns with the African Union (AU) - Agenda 2063 which foregrounds an "African cultural renaissance" and explicitly promotes cultural heritage, creative arts and cultural industries as drivers of identity and economic opportunity. Reinterpretation of Akogo into functional sculptures strengthens the pan-African cultural identity by documenting an Iteso musical tradition and making it visible in public art. It also supports youth through inspiration and through participation in cultural entrepreneurship (sculpture production, creative enterprises).

The East African Community (EAC) Vision 2050 includes social and cultural integration, value-added cultural production, and enhanced competitiveness through regional industries. Cultural goods, such as the *Akogo*-inspired functional sculptures, are framed as part of value-added production chains for inclusive development. The outcome of the study can promote cross-border cultural exchange through exhibitions in partner states while also creating templates for regional cultural tourism circuits linking musical heritage to visitor experiences.

The Uganda- Fourth National Development Plan (NDP IV, 2025/26- 2029/30) emphasises sustainable industrialisation, inclusive growth, employment, and investment in cultural infrastructure in which it highlights cultural centre redevelopment and cultural and tourism projects. By using sculpture to reimagine *Akogo*, a cultural heritage, this study complements national priorities for creative industries, cultural infrastructure development, and tourism and youth employment.

This study also holds a significant value and meaning to several stakeholders including policy makers, the scholarly community, the artists and craftsmen, the general public, the students, and the researcher.

The study offers policy makers with compelling evidence on the need to integrate creative cultural preservation into national development strategies. By demonstrating how sculpture can effectively communicate and promote endangered intangible heritage such as *Akogo*, the study has potential to cause policy changes that support heritage education, community-based art initiatives and public art funding.

For scholars in fields such as art, ethnomusicology, anthropology and heritage studies, this study expands discussions around interdisciplinary preservation methods. By applying Serrat's Culture theory Design-Based Research, this study becomes a prototype for studio-based methodologies for documentation, re-imagination and reintegration of traditional knowledge into contemporary society and spaces.

The study provides an invaluable source of inspiration to artists and craftsmen to rethink cultural and traditional art forms and apply them to contemporary functional contexts such as festivals and architecture. This study affirms that traditional aesthetics, such as *Akogo*, can evolve while maintaining their cultural authenticity. Sculpture, in this case becomes a design thinking mechanism that inspires artistic innovation that is grounded in cultural identity.

For the general public, especially the Iteso community, this study reawakens cultural pride reinforcing the importance of preserving indigenous knowledge systems. Through the transformation of a fading musical tradition into public, everyday products through sculpture, this study makes the Iteso cultural heritage visible, tangible, dynamic and interactive. This encourages insightful communal engagement and appreciation of traditional values.

This study has further provided an invaluable opportunity for the students to merge academic inquiry with artistic practice, enabling cultivation of skills in studio experimentation, community engagement and cultural research. Through this project, the researcher has made a practical contribution to cultural sustainability while advancing personal academic growth and creative capacity. This positions the researcher as both an innovator and custodian of indigenous knowledge systems.

1.8 Definition of operational terms

***Akogo*:** Also known as a thumb piano is a portable and versatile traditional African musical instrument, popular among the Iteso in Uganda, consisting of a wooden board to which metal tines are attached. The player plucks the tines with the thumbs to produce different notes. In this study it symbolises the intangible cultural identity and serves as the primary inspiration for sculptural reinterpretation.

Ateker: A generic term referring to a group of closely related ethnic groups and their languages, including the Iteso, Karamojong, Jie, Turkana, Toposa, Nyangatom, and Lango peoples, who live across Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan, and Ethiopia.

Critique: A detailed analysis and evaluation of something, such as a work of art, a theory, a performance or piece of writing to assess its strengths and weaknesses, offering an informed opinion, and often suggesting ways for improvement or further consideration.

Emorimor: The official title of the paramount cultural leader of the Iteso people, who are base in Uganda and Kenya. The word comes from the traditional role of a neutral mediator in inter-clan disputes. The current Emorimor is Papa Paul Sande Emolot Etomeileng. He is also the leader of the Iteso Cultural Union (ICU).

Functional sculpture: These are sculptural works designed and produced not only for visual enjoyment/ aesthetic appreciation but also for practical use. In this study the gazebos, tables, entry arch serve both the decorative and utilitarian roles in traditional marriage ceremonies.

Preservation: This refers to the act safeguarding something to ensure that it is passed down to future generations. In this study it involves safeguarding the *Akogo* instrument with its meaning and significance in the Iteso community.

Reimagination: This refers to a creative process of transforming traditional forms or symbols into new expressions while retaining their original essence. *Akogo* was, in this research study, reimagined into contemporary sculptural forms with ceremonial relevance.

Reinterpretation: The process of creating a new artwork by re-examining, re-evaluating, and re-contextualising an existing or historical work of art, often used as a strategy to keep older artworks relevant in modern society by connecting them to current issues and preventing cultural stagnation. It is considered the most radical form of preservation. The functional artworks constitute *Akogo's* reinterpretation.

Sculpture: This is a three-dimensional art form that is created through processes such as carving, modeling, or assembling. In this study, it refers to the artistic creations that are

functional (e.g. gazebo, photo booth) and draw symbolic and visual elements from the *Akogo* instrument.

Studio: A studio in reference to art refers to a space dedicated to the creation, experimentation and exhibition of art. It serves as an artist's workplace where they can engage in making art, refining techniques, and developing their ideas.

Studio experimentation: This is a practice-based research method that involves hand-on design, prototyping and artistic exploration. It is used in this study to transform *Akogo*-inspired concepts into functional sculptures used in marriage ceremonies.

Symbolism: Refers to the use of imagery, form, or design to represent deeper cultural or spiritual meanings. In this study, sculptural designs are derived from the structure and function of *Akogo*.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Overview

This chapter reviews literature to do with the possibilities of preservation the *Akogo* musical instrument through sculpture. The theoretical foundation of the study is presented first, and then the origins of *Akogo*, the production process and techniques, the materials and tools used in production, and discusses the existing sculptures globally that are inspired by a musical instrument. The chapter proceeds with the identification of the gaps in literature that serves as the foundation for the study and aids in formulating its approach. Academic research theses, journal articles, and internet blogs make up the reviewed literature.

2.1 Theoretical framework of the study

This study was guided by Serrat (2008)'s Culture Theory, which emphasised that culture was a system of shared values, beliefs, norms, and symbols which shape the identity and behavior of a community. Within the Iteso community, the *Akogo* is not merely a musical instrument, it is a cultural emblem deeply interwoven with traditional ceremonies (such as marriage rites, funeral rites, initiation ceremonies, twin celebrations, courtship sessions, harvest festivals etc.), storytelling, and social identity. Olivier Serrat's framework is particularly ideal as it highlights the adaptive and communicative role of cultural symbols such as *Akogo.* This makes it essential in preserving them in ways that reflect their embedded meanings. The theory positions sculpture as not merely an art form, but as a cultural preservation act that embodies shared meanings and collective identity. Other scholars such as Hofstede (2010) emphasise the importance of symbolic representation in sustaining cultural continuity, while Tilley (2006) argues that material sculpture is central in preserving and communicating cultural identity. Through this lens, the reinterpretation and reimagination of *Akogo* aims not just to commemorate but also visually embody Iteso cultural values. This makes preservation both participatory and contextually grounded.

2.2 The Iteso people: Origins and Settlement

The Iteso, belong to a large group of people referred to as *Ateker*, a generic term for a related group of Eastern Nilotic peoples. In the Teso region, it means "clan". ICU (2017), describes

Iteso as descendants of Ham, a son of the biblical figure, Noah, who survived the great flood described in the book of Genesis 9:1-19 of the Holy Bible. Ham gave birth to Cush who, with his sons, later settled in a land called Ethiopia or Abyssinia. A segment of these people, who were crop farmers and pastoralists, for several factors including conflicts, the search for water, fertile land and water, later in about 1300AD left Abyssinia and moved southwards. They came to be known as *Itunga*, a term that translates to "people" in Ateso, the language spoken by the Iteso. After a series of movements and separation, the group of *Itunga* that settled in Magoro, a place located in the present day Katakwi district, Teso sub-region, Uganda came to be known as Iteso.

At the time of settling in the current Teso land, the Iteso were grouped into six clans, described as the 'main clans' as per the Iteso Cultural Union directory. These clans include the *Ikaribwok* (warriors), *Irarak* (gatherers), *Ikatekok* (mediators), *Ikomolo* (child of Omolo), *Igoria* (builders) and *Inomu* (healers). These clans form the basic cultural administrative unit and building block of the Iteso and the Iteso Cultural Union (ICU), a cultural institution constitutionally recognised by the Uganda Government as the culturally binding union of the Iteso under the stewardship of their paramount leader, the *Emorimor* (ICU, 2017).

Today, the Iteso are settled in two major blocks; Eastern Uganda where they occupy the districts of Amuria, Bukedea, Kaberamaido, Kalaki, Kapelebyong, Katakwi, Kumi, Ngora, Pallisa, Serere, Soroti, and Tororo with others spread across in the Bukedi and Busoga regions; and Western Kenya, mostly in Busia county after the 1902 transfer of part of eastern Uganda to Kenya (Zaragoza, n.d). As Okiror (2021) notes, by the time of Ugandan independence in 1962, Iteso formed the second largest ethnic group after the Baganda. Recent estimates place the Iteso as the fifth largest tribe with an estimated population of about three million (3,000,000) people (UBOS, 2024). The Iteso speak a language called *Ateso.* Iteso is plural (meaning two or more people from Teso). *Etesot* (male) and *Atesot* (female) are singular pronouns (Zaragoza, n.d).

2.3 Origin of *Akogo* traditional musical instrument

While it was hard to ascertain the origins of the *Akogo*, an instrument known in several other Central and East African communities by different names, what is certain is that the instrument has impacted the lives of the Iteso for a long time. According to Olupot (2022), the Iteso adopted this instrument in the later centuries of their trek from the Bantu tribes, who had previously had

contact with the Congolese- the assumed inventors of the instrument. This account emphasises that on their return, the *Akogo* played a huge role in their long walks hence the adoption. He affirms that the name *'Akogo'* originated from the pronunciation the trekkers gave of 'Congo' when asked the name of the new instrument in their possession by the locals.

Okiror (2021) describes *Akogo* (Figure 1) as a long distance instrument that accompanied youth treading on long trips to faraway markets or grazing pastures. Although it is unclear what name the Iteso used to call the instrument, Okiror (2021) validates Orhon (2022)'s claim about the likely origins of *Akogo* by noting how the name *"Akogo"* surfaced and gained popularity in the early 1950s among the Iteso youth working at the Kakira Sugar Plantation in Jinja. According to his account, the name was given to the instrument as a tribute to the Congolese style of playing it, the band style. From this style came an inspiration for a completely new sound now known as *Akogo* music.



Figure 1: *Akogo* Traditional musical instruments of different sizes.
Source: Researcher2024

Irrespective of the definitive origin of the instrument, *Akogo* remains one of the most precious crafts among the Iteso. Its possession, besides the ability to play and dance was considered a demonstration of pride in the Iteso culture. Its melodies, usually accompanied by a lot of wise expressions and moral lessons, are a source of great entertainment to the Iteso community.

2.4 Tree species used for the making of *Akogo* musical instrument

The generic word for a carved work of art such as sculpture is *Ikeosit* (singular) or *Ikeosio* (plural). The choice of trees to be carved was therefore very particular. Attention was paid to

specific qualities such as durability, maturity, and workability. The common tree species used in the making of *Akogo* (Figure 2) include: *Epuuton* also known as Dry-zone cedar/ West African cedar/Akan cedar (Pseudocedrella kotschyi), generally used for almost all carved artifacts such as traditional stools, mortars and pestles; *Engosorot,* also known as Abyssinian Coral tree/Red Hot Poker tree/Lucky bean or Flame tree (Erythrina abyssinica), a deciduous coral tree that has upright to spreading growth to about 30 feet with mature branches and trunk having beautiful light brown corky bark (Fern, 2023); *Ejoroi,_Epopong* (Euphorbia calycina), a currently rare tree found in savanna grasslands with light wood that is very resistant to cracking because of its usually slow seasoning process, *Elira* (Melia Azedarach), one of the most used woods especially for small and medium sized *Akogo* musical instruments. Its wood is light and brown yet very resistant to boring insects and rotting, and *Eligoi*- Yellow Oleander (Cascabela thevetia), a highly poisonous plant cultivated in most Iteso homes as an ornamental plant often for its resistance to drought and the beautiful yellow flowers (Quattrocchi, 1999). The wood used for making *Akogo* is ideally light but durable. Today, partly due to the scarcity of the preferred tree species, Mvule (hardwood) and others are also used especially for the big (bass) *Akogo* instrument.



Epopong, (Euphorbia calycina), a currently rare tree found in savanna grasslands with light wood that is very resistant to cracking because of its usually slow seasoning process.



Engosorot, (Erythrina abyssinica) also known as Abyssinian Coral tree/Red Hot Poker tree/Lucky bean or Flame tree. Best for producing big Akogo instruments. Resistant to boring pests and rotting.



Elira, (Melia Azedarach), one of the most used woods especially for small and medium sized Akogo musical instruments.



Eligoi, (Cascabela thevetia), also known as Yellow Oleander, a highly poisonous plant cultivated in most Iteso homes as an ornamental. Used for small and medium instruments.

Figure 2: Some of the tree species commonly used by Iteso in *Akogo* production.
Source: Google Images 2025

2.5 Other musical instruments of the Iteso

According to Okiror (2021), oral literature, which comprises of songs and stories, were central to the social life of the Iteso. He further emphasises that the Iteso oral traditions of music and dance, the knowledge of which was transferred by word of mouth, and through the musical instruments, bore great significance to both the performer and the audience. He notes that the aesthetic power of this music and literature was enabled by the tools used, which besides the clapping of hands, whistling, chants, ululation, and speech, included precise musical instruments.

Hence, besides *Akogo* also known as *Adongo* or *Akembe,* the writer records that music production in Teso involved other instruments such as *Adeudeu* (harp), *Adungu* (modern version of the bow harp- most likely adopted from the Luo tribes), *Amagarait/ Aleejat* (re-invented Lyre/ bow harp*), Ebilo, Aluti or Alamaru* (Flute), *Arigirigi* (Tube Fiddle), *Aiyeket* (Shaker) and *Atenus* (Drum). Sometimes these instruments were played in unison while others were played solo.

2.6 Sculptures as Cultural Expression.

Functional sculpture, objects that combine utility and artistic meaning, is widely recognised as a powerful means of expressing and sustaining cultural identity. Scholars argue that functional art can encode collective memory, indigenous philosophies, and symbolic systems in ways that enable everyday objects to remain in constant interaction with their communities (Dissanayake, 2001). Therefore, functional sculptures allow cultural narratives and artifacts to be appreciated through a lived experience of interaction rather than simply viewed. Reinterpretation of the *Akogo* as functional sculptures hence operationalises culture into public space, enabling the instruments symbolism to become part of everyday life.

This aligns with studies that show that functional sculptures in public spaces enhance cultural awareness, foster community identity, and preserve heritage through daily encounters (Hall & Robertson, 2001). Morphy (2009), for example notes that functional sculpture is particularly powerful owing to its ability to transform tradition into interactive environments. Moreover, as Phillips (1998) argues, rather than remaining museum-bound or ceremonial, cultural symbols interpreted through functional sculpture gain renewed social relevance and intergenerational engagement.

Indeed, scholarly literature agrees that when cultural artifacts, such as *Akogo,* are reinterpreted into functional sculptures, they gain new forms of preservation- embodied preservation, that keeps culture socially relevant (Silverman, 2011). They can: amplify visibility of intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003); enhance public understanding of cultural instruments through form translation (Seeger, 2004); and provide permanence and durability that musical instruments themselves may lack (Kurin, 2004). Thus embedding *Akogo* inspired functional sculptures into physical spaces ensures the instrument's philosophy, aesthetics, and cultural

narrative remains active elements of community engagement. This becomes a contemporary inspiration and guide for heritage conservation through artistic innovation.

Ultimately, the idea of creating sculptures, i.e. public monuments inspired by, or depicting a musical instrument is not a new phenomenon. Different instruments have inspired and influenced the social life of different societies in profound ways. To celebrate such impact, some of them have been granted a permanent presence by erecting gigantic monuments. The sculptures not only celebrate the beauty and significance of those musical instruments but also make an impeccable cultural identity of their respective locations. There are several ways that musical instruments have been celebrated and integrated into modern social spaces allover the world. Some of them are highlighted below:

2.6.1 The Big Guitar in Gore, NZ

As described by (Gorenz, 2025), The "Big Guitar" (Figure 3) forms a prominent feature of the Gore monument located in Gore, New Zealand. Standing at over 7 metres, the monument consisting of a large guitar serves as a tribute to country music legend Tex Morton, who was born in Gore in 1916. The guitar essentially represents Morton's contribution to NZ's music scene while also celebrating his influence on country music. The monument bears the inscription "Gore: NZ's Capital of Country Music" Erected in 2004 by the Gore Country Music Club, the guitar is accompanied by the "Hands of Fame" plaques, which basically feature handprints of renowned musicians who have contributed to the local music scene (Ara, 2015) & (Scott-Flemming, 2025). As a form of monumental iconography, The Big Guitar reinforces music's role in community cohesion and identity, turning an everyday musical instrument into a towering expression of local pride and cultural continuity. This representation inspires the creation of *Akogo* inspired sculptural innovations that will not only celebrate the treasured instrument but also ensure its continuity in the massively fluid contemporary artistic environment.

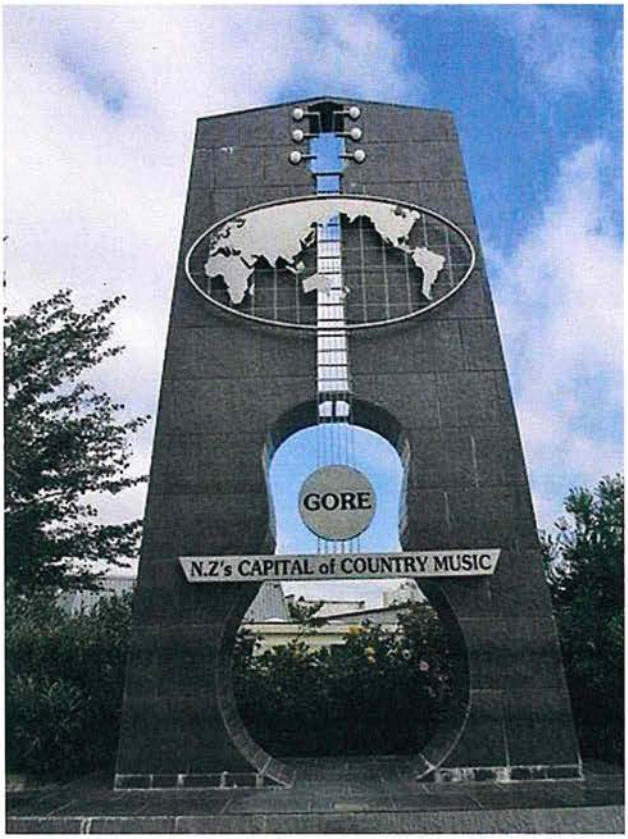


Figure 3: The Big Guitar in Gore, New Zealand.

Source: Wikimedia 2025

2.6.2 The musical "Phoenix", USA.

Located at the Musical Instruments Museum in Arizona, USA, The Musical Phoenix (Figure 4) by Belgian sculptor, Louis Halleux (FM, 2021) is a stylised bronze sculpture which combines organic, mythological and instrumental forms into a single, symbolic composition. Featuring the Phoenix, a universal emblem of rebirth, the sculpture reflects the enduring legacy and regeneration of global musical traditions. Featuring dynamic contours and elements inspired by several global instruments, the sculpture exudes the MIM's mission of commemorating the universality of music (Gallery, 2018) The Musical Phoenix serves more than just an aesthetic centerpiece but rather as well as a sculptural evidence for the preservation and celebration of the intangible cultural expressions, a feat the functional sculptures inspired by *Akogo* aspires to achieve.



Figure 4: The Musical "Phoenix" Sculpture, Musical Instruments Museum, Arizona, USA.

Source: MIM

2.6.3 French horn sand sculpture, Britain.

In 2015, on their 6th attendance, Artists Jamie and Claire carved a magnificent version of the French horn instrument in the sand (Figure 5) to celebrate John Luther Adams commissioned work for 32 French horn players at the East Neuk Festival, Britain's most enigmatic chamber music festival. Spending days of tedious work, they carved all the complex tubes, bell and keys (Sand in Your Eye, 2015).



Figure 5: French Horn sand sculpture, Britain

Source: Wikimedia

2.6.4 Giant virtuoso cellist, Houston, USA.

A notable precedent in the sculptural celebration of musical heritage (Figure 6) is the Virtuoso (1983), a monumental public artwork by the American artist David Adickes located in the Houston's Theatre District. Towering at a whopping 36 feet, the giant steel and concrete sculpture features an abstracted cellist represented by only the head, hands and the instrument, and accompanied by three life-size figures of musicians. Although previously controversial for its unconventional aesthetics, the iconic monument has gradually evolved into a cultural landmark demonstrating how public sculpture can transform from provocation to pride (Contributors, n.d).

The artwork integrates a sound system that continuously plays a classical music, creating an interactive and dynamic tribute to the performing arts (Obscura, n.d) This sculpture is testament of the ability of functional sculpture to not only commemorate musical traditions but also reinforce cultural memory in contemporary spaces (Adickes, 1983) Its success is a demonstration that sculptural reinterpretation of cultural instruments such as *Akogo* can play a significant role in both preserving and reinvigorating cultural heritage through community engagement and artistic innovation and reinvention.



Figure 6: The Giant Virtuoso Cellist sculpture by David Adickes, Houston, USA.
Source: Alamy images

The sculptures above are just a few examples where musical instruments have been celebrated for their impact on the lives of the audience in different parts of the world. Such installations gave inspiration and provide practical evidence of the relevance and practicality of sculpture as a medium for reinterpreting *Akogo* into functional artworks.

2.7 Literature gaps

The production and use of the *Akogo*, like all the other musical and utilitarian crafts among the Iteso has spanned generations. Such skills have been informally passed on from the elderly skilled artisans to the interested young ones that accept to be apprenticed. However, limited literature was available for reference with regard to the techniques of production, the materials and tools, procedures, or working drawings. This means that many people today can only obtain the required knowledge from those that are still actively engaged or that participated in the production of the said artifacts. It can be seen that the artistry with which the instruments were made some decades ago is significantly lost with the current instruments simply retaining form and function. Such gaps lay the foundation for this studio research with the hope of uncovering these -soon to be lost- secrets of high artistic and cultural value.

Although public monuments and commemorative sculptures are often discussed in art history and heritage preservation studies, the integration of symbolic and functional sculptural works such as walkways, gazebos, photo booths, or entry arches into traditional ceremonial contexts is greatly under-researched. Yet, the potential for everyday objects to serve as embodiments of deeper cultural meanings were visibly evident calling for a start of exploration along that direction.

Most existing cultural preservation research in Uganda is focused on theoretical or ethnographic approaches. They overlook the potential and value of practice-based, design led inquiry. This study has responded to this gap by using studio experimentation to create culturally meaningful and community engaging sculptural works.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overviews

Stemming from the description of the problem statement and the available literature discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter shows how and where the study was conducted. It details the research design, the study area, population, sample size, sampling technique, methods and instruments used for collecting data, data collection procedure, trust worthiness and credibility, data analysis, ethical considerations, and the limitations and delimitations of this research study.

3.1 Research design

Design-Based Research (DBR) is a research design that blends the process of designing and testing real-world solutions with the goal of generating insights about both the design itself and the broader phenomena under study (Collective, 2003). DBR provides a practical and culturally responsive framework for creating *Akogo* inspired sculptures which guide towards preservation of the Iteso heritage. Its iterative nature allows for continuous refinement of the sculptural designs based on the feedback of the concerned community, ensuring cultural relevance and symbolic accuracy (Anderson, 2012). DBR supports collaboration with Iteso elders, artists, craftsmen and youth, which aligns with Schon (1983)'s model of reflective practice where designers learn and adapt through real-world engagement. Apart from just solving design challenges, DBR contributes to theory through demonstration of how functional sculpture can preserve intangible cultural elements such as music and identity (Barab, 2004; Tilley 2006). Through this approach, *Akogo* has got transformed from a fading musical traditional instrument into a visible, interactive, modern and enduring form of cultural memory (Hall, 1997). As Casey (2000) puts it, this approach ensures that the *Akogo*'s symbolic essence is not only preserved as a sound but also as form, space, as well as community experience.

3.2 Study area

The study was conducted in Kumi district. Besides its centrality within Teso sub region, it is home to some of the most prominent *Akogo* music groups, several cultural leaders and some of

the few surviving *Akogo* craftsmen. Leveraging on their experience as primary users and beneficiaries of the instrument enriched the study.

3.3 Study Population

The study purposively selected participants from within the Iteso community. These included elders, cultural custodians, local artists, knowledgeable community members and selected youth due to their lived experience with the Iteso cultural practices. This population was ideal because such individuals possess deep insights into the symbolic, historical and functional significance of the *Akogo* instrument, knowledge that is embedded in daily cultural expression (Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2005). Elders particularly are custodians of intangible heritage and remain critical sources of oral history and memory (UNESCO, 2018). Similarly, local artists and craftsmen were essential for understanding how *Akogo* can be interpreted and reimagined through sculptural form. This purposeful selection aligns with qualitative research principles which prioritises depth of understanding over depth, especially when exploring culturally embedded phenomena (Creswell, 2018)

3.4 Sample Size

Braun and Clarke (2013) emphasise the importance of quality over quantity in qualitative research. They suggest that researchers should focus on collecting rich, detailed data from a sample size that allows for in-depth exploration of the research questions. The study included 20 participants. The study required not only individuals with relevant knowledge and skills related to the instrument but also necessitated that such individuals possess knowledge on the contemporary musical, technological and social trends.

3.5 Sampling Technique

The researcher used purposive sampling (non-probability) to select the participants for the study. This is a type of non-probability sampling where researchers choose individuals from the population to take part in their judgment (Nikolopoulou, 2022). The participants comprised of the Iteso cultural union leaders, cultural musicians, cultural instrument makers, opinion leaders and selected youth. Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study because it intentionally targeted participants who posses specialised, experience-based or culturally rooted knowledge of *Akogo* and its artistic, historical and functional significance aligning with the study's qualitative

design, which sought deep insights rather than statistical representation. Because the study uses triangulation, combining perspectives from artists, culture bearers, instrument makers, and community members, the technique ensures that each of these key stakeholder categories is appropriately represented, enabling methodological and data triangulation as recommended in qualitative research. (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.6 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

In this study, the researcher used a combination of in-depth interviews, observation, studio experimentation and critiques to ensure a comprehensive understanding and creative interpretation of *Akogo* for cultural preservation through innovative sculptural ideas.

3.6.1 In-depth Interviews

This is a qualitative research method that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation (RMS, 2020). The researcher organised a comprehensive interview guide that was used in this process. The participants included three veteran *Akogo* instrumentalists and three cultural leaders and *Akogo* music enthusiasts. All the interviews were conducted face to face. This enabled the researcher to gain data from responses, feelings, emotions and attitudes the participants conveyed at the time of interaction with them. To ensure the accuracy of the findings the researcher used a camera and voice recorder to records the proceedings of the interview. The data was later transcribed, analysed and interpreted to guide the studio experiments.

3.6.2 Observation

Observation is a way of gathering data by watching behavior or events or noting physical characteristics of participants in their natural setting. This method was employed to document how *Akogo* is made, the materials and technologies used in construction, its usage in natural settings such as performances, ceremonies or informal gatherings, providing insight into its role within the socio-cultural fabric of the Iteso community. DeWalt et al (2011) note that as a qualitative method, observation enables the researcher to capture behaviors, spatial arrangements, gestures and interactions, which often cannot effectively be articulated in interviews yet remain essential for the understanding cultural practices.

3.6.3 Studio Experiments

This is a method of data collection commonly used in creative fields such as art and design. It involves the researcher engaging in hands-on creative processes within a controlled environment, usually their own studio or a designated experimental space. The use of this method was informed by the third objective which involved production of *Akogo*-inspired functional sculptural works that can renew interest and inspire innovation among younger Iteso generations. Studio experiments were used to test and explore artistic translations of *Akogo* features into functional sculptural forms. This included the creation of functional sculptures that function as the gazebo, photo booth, an entry arch, a bridal chair, a marriage certificate frame, guest chairs, tables and flower vases. To effectively undertake this method the researcher created working sketches and captured images and short videos detailing the production process of each of the components.

3.6.4 Critiques

This study was hinged on a design based research approach which involves continuous design, production and testing of the sculptures. In this case, feedback was essential for improvement and understanding. Critiques served as a reflective and evaluative method for assessing the effectiveness and cultural appropriateness of the sculptures developed during the study. Through both informal and formal feedback with peers, lecturers, art experts and community members, the insights enabled the researcher to refine design choices ensuring sculptures resonate with the Iteso cultural context. As the cornerstone of art and design education and research, critiques provide an interactive space for meaning making, constructive challenge and cultural validation (Elkins, 2012). In community-based art practice, critiques besides supporting participatory validation, also enhance credibility and relevance of the final work, in this case, the *Akogo*-inspired functional sculptures.

3.7 Procedure of Data Collection

The researcher obtained a letter of introduction from the Directorate of Research and Graduate Training, Kyambogo University to introduce him to participants. This was addressed to the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of Kumi District Local Government (KDLG) because the study was to take place in his area of jurisdiction. The participants in the study included the *Akogo*

craftsmen, *Akogo* musicians, cultural opinion leaders and youth. The researcher identified potential participants, created a work plan and agreed a suitable time schedule for the interviews, observation and studio experiments. The transcription of the responses was done thoroughly followed by analysis and studio experimentation of the data obtained to enable compilation of the research report.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

Validity of this study was guaranteed by aligning the research tools with the objectives; seeking expert reviews and validation from cultural custodians, academic supervisors and practicing artists to ensure that the tools captured relevant and culturally accurate data; and by applying triangulation of the findings obtained through interviews, observation, studio experimentation and critiques. This ensured that data collected reflected the significance of the *Akogo* musical instrument as well as its potential for cultural adaptation.

Reliability was achieved by maintaining a systematic research process including consistency in the interview and observation templates, documentation of the design process, prototype development, feedback and refinement. Critiques from peers and experts ensured that interpretations and resulting sculptural works reflect both the study objectives and *Akogo* cultural context. This procedural consistency not only minimised researcher bias but also enhanced the dependability of the findings. Additionally, the study utilised information from reputable sources such as Google scholar, the Kyambogo university library and other authentic publications.

3.9 Data analysis

Thematic analysis: This was used to analyse the data collected through observation and interviews for the first and second objectives. Audios obtained were transcribed and analysed to identify similar concepts and meaning. Comparison was made for data obtained from the craftsmen, musicians, cultural leaders, and opinion leaders. A thematic presentation was done giving specific quotations.

Visual analysis: This involved interpretation and examining of visual materials such as drawings, photographs, paintings, illustrations etc. made during the observations, interviews and critiques to extract meaning. This method enabled efficient uncovering of deeper insights that

would not have been immediately apparent in text-based data. The key components included: observation of visual data to identify key components such as shapes, color, materials; formal analysis of elements of design, composition and techniques of production/assemblage; contextual analysis; interpretation of visual data to identify themes, messages and values conveyed; and critical analysis (Rose, 2016).

Studio experiment: The researcher utilised both the subtractive and additive techniques of sculpture production including carving, modeling and assemblage/ construction to create both three dimensional (3D) and two dimensional (2D) sculptural forms. The data collected especially in reference to the symbolism and meaning of the design of the *Akogo* musical instrument was useful in creating and contextualising the sculptures. The concepts were shared with the participants to ensure that the sculptures not only play a functional role but importantly embody the values and symbolism of the *Akogo* instrument.

3.10 Ethical considerations

The Directorate of Research and Graduate Training, Kyambogo University provided a letter of introduction to the researcher to seek necessary permission and support from the leadership of the Iteso Cultural Union to enable him carry out the study. This letter was presented to participants i.e. the *Akogo* craftsmen and *Akogo* players/ musicians prior to any engagements. The researcher ensured to notify the participants that their views would be recorded and used for purely scholarly objectives. The participants, throughout this study were given specific identity codes such as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, PX, rather than use their actual names. This was aimed and protecting their identity. Appointments were made first with the study participants to ensure that their day-to-day activities as well as treatments, if any, are not interrupted. This ensured the researcher gets enough time to ask all the questions and make the necessary observations related to the study. They also signed Informed consent forms affirming their willingness to participate and be quoted in this study. The interactions with the participants were conducted in both English and Ateso, the local language for both the researcher and the participants, to ensure accuracy of the meanings. All authors whose information has been used in the study have honored by quoting them as sources of information.

3.11 Limitations of the study

At a personal level, the main challenge for the researcher was juggling between work obligations, personal errands and study obligations. The researcher had to utilise the holiday of May and took a leave from work in June to conduct studio experiments and critiques to ensure timely completion of the project.

Faced with a significant scarcity of scholarly literature on the *Akogo* musical instrument of the Iteso, the researcher relied heavily on local narratives and oral history. This called for purposive sampling of informants, triangulation, documentation and transcription of responses and contextual analysis to ensure not only credibility of data but also scholarly acceptance.

Owing to the time and resource constraints the researcher ensured that the prototypes developed are accurately measured and scaled for future mass and industrial production.

Despite these challenges, the research effectively demonstrated the potential of sculpture as a medium for preservation of cultural artifacts and meaning. This has contributed to both the academic and artistic discourse on cultural heritage conservation and innovation.

CHAPTER FOUR:

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Overview

In this chapter the researcher presents, analyses and interprets the findings in accordance with the purpose and the objectives of the study. The findings were obtained through the methods selected in chapter three. These methods included in-depth interviews, observation, critiques and studio experimentation of sculpture making. Having obtained the necessary data from the field the process led to the creation of several sculptural prototypes of items used in a traditional marriage ceremony, the main cultural rite where *Akogo* plays major significance.

4.1 Cultural and historical significance of *Akogo* traditional musical instrument of the Iteso

In order to realise the first objective of this study, which was to examine the historical and cultural relevance of *Akogo* to the Iteso community, the researcher used interviews as a way of interacting with legendary *Akogo* players, makers and cultural leaders. On the significance of *Akogo* in the Iteso communities, one respondent identified in the study as P1 remarked:

> ... He treasured his *Akogo* so much that he even made a rope out of a cow hide which he would sometimes strap around his shoulder. My brother didn't always play *Akogo* although he was good at it. One time I remember him telling Dad that he wasn't playing the instrument well. My Dad challenged him to a contest. I was swiftly appointed as the adjudicator. I remember battling within myself to choose the winner because my brother really impressed me with his skills. Eventually, I announced my brother as the winner of the contest. I can still remember how hard my dad laughed before teasing me that I would need to change my home for choosing my brother over him. That day, impressed by his skills, he offered to make for my brother his own instrument. By that time, I wasn't really so interested in playing it. But I think maybe I was also just young. I am not sure I was actually interested in any of the musical instruments that existed then. I just enjoyed listening to the melodies to which I would occasionally dance...

Another participant identifies as P2, a popular *Akogo* player turned trainer in his local church, noted:

> My heart bleeds these days whenever I attend functions, especially marriage functions... I got my wife because of *Akogo*. Now I will tell you the story. You can ask her if you want more proof. I was a known and enthusiastic *Akogo* player and equally good in dancing. We would often go do play *Akogo* in ceremonies. On my uncle's marriage, we played *Akogo* the way I can never forget. I believe that's one of the days I can never forget. My wife is a niece to my uncle's wife. We made everybody dance till they were

> tired. I was definitely the star. My wife now was equally a great dancer. I noticed how she shook her waist. After the ceremony, I was lucky to see her again. I jokingly told her that a good dancer like her needed a good player like me…

Expressing his worry for the future of *Akogo*, he continues:

> I have been playing *Akogo* in church for 28 years now. These days I play less, I train others. But it is worrying how you children don't want to learn this instrument. You prefer keyboards (meaning pianos). All the players in our choir are aged men; we only have two young people. My son is one of them, and I think he just plays to impress me. I can see that he doesn't enjoy it. But what can we do? Times have changed. You will choose what is good for you.

Another participant, a respected cultural elder, P5 agrees with P2 when he notes:

> Don't call me tribalistic, but I strongly believe that playing those foreign songs of yours in traditional marriage ceremonies, songs you don't even understand, is an abominable act and an abuse to your culture. *Akogo* was our heartbeat. We had Ajosi, Edonga, Etida, and others but nothing beat *Akogo* in igniting excitement among people. It was something extraordinary. That instrument has power. During marriages, we would introduce ourselves to the venue of the marriage with our instruments. It didn't matter how distant the home was, *Akogo* made the journey short. And the bride would feel loved. On the day the bride would be accompanied to her marital home, we would again organise and welcome her together with her people with lots of music and dancing and ululation. Partly, we aimed at demonstrating our purest skills because she would definitely be accompanied by other beautiful girls. One stood a chance to win a woman's heart with good skills in playing the instrument. This was music from our hearts not just to fill the silent environment like you do today. So, that instrument is not just a piece of wood. It is a symbol of our culture, our love, our unity. I personally no longer play it, I am old now. My fingers are weak. But I still keep my instrument. It reminds me of my youthful days.

Akogo forms a great part of the identity of the Iteso people. It is embodies the values that the community holds dear. Such include unity, devotion and teamwork demonstrated in the playing of the instrument. It serves as more than just a traditional musical instrument, but also as a vessel of historical continuity, communal belonging and cultural expression. Through ceremonial practices and events such as storytelling, marriage (*Edukone/ Emanyit*), and initiation rites (*Asapan*), the use of *Akogo* reinforces Iteso values, ancestral knowledge and social cohesion. As (Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2005) observes in relation to Ugandan musical traditions, instruments such as *Akogo* are deeply interwoven with ethnic identity and ritual performance, often acting as markers of group affiliation and cultural pride. *Akogo*'s unique timbre and form distinguish it

from other lamellaphones. This symbolises not only creativity but also the musical ingenuity of the Iteso.

A renowned *Akogo* player, craftsman and head of a popular *Akogo* band (P4), recalling how he picked interest in playing the instrument reminisced:

> When I was young it was common for people then to work in groups. Activities like weeding groundnuts, sorghum, millet, and heaping potatoes, weeding cassava, and even harvesting were done communally. The yield was more often plentiful and would overwhelm a single family. My father would often work with some men who shared the village with us, some relatives, others just friends. Heaping potatoes in a big garden would just take a few hours. Money was not the form of appreciation. It was food, and alcohol accompanied by *Akogo* music. After work people would retreat to the hosting home. After some rest, they would be served with chicken, *Ecadoi* (spider flower sauce), *Ibilenga* (smoked mudfish) pasted with roasted groundnut paste, *Alinyo* (Shea oil sauce) and thereafter lots of *Ajon* (local brew made from millet). During this time the men would play *Akogo* as ladies sang and joined in the dance till late. Young people by that hour would have returned from herding and would join the occasion. It was a marvelous sight. It was a celebration of unity, love and accomplishment. I started playing *Akogo* at about the age of seven, from then onwards it has been my identity and passion. Almost everything I have is because of that instrument.

Meanwhile, another participant, a community leader, *Akogo* enthusiast and Iteso Cultural Union (ICU) elder, P6, noted:

> We had different forms of music and several instruments such as *Adungu (bow harp), Alamaru (flute), Arigirigi, Atenuso (drums), and many others.* But *Akogo* stood out. Whenever the County chiefs, Sub-County chiefs, Parish chiefs, Bishops or occasionally the president, we would organise different groups of *Ajosi, Ekiria-kiria*, and *Akogo.* But more often, the *Akogo* band would press a different button. It made even the weakest old folks get up on their feet. Everyone, including those who don't speak Ateso would join in the dance. It was marvelous. It was beautiful. We did not care about radios or big speakers. We had our own music system. We loved it. We owned it. It most cases, we were rewarded for it. Sometimes the most outstanding band would win a big bull.

Another participant P7, a 72 year old experienced traditional *Akogo* craftsman and renowned player shared:

> It was a lucrative skill back then; it fetched us some good fortune. Sometimes we would be paid with money. Other times it would be with chicken or even a He-goat. *Akogo* was a loved instrument; most young people knew how to play it. Knowing how to make the instrument was a different thing. It was tiresome because the process is slow but also requires a lot of care and detail. A small mistake during carving could spoil the entire work. But I enjoyed making because I had enough mentorship from my grandfather. My

father, despite his profound skills, wasn't very interested in making. He just enjoyed playing it.

Speaking about the kind of festivals in which the instrument was used he added:

> *Akogo* was like your music system today. It was used everywhere. It was common in marriages; actually it made the main music in marriage ceremonies. Without it there seemed to be no life. But it was also played during the celebration of Twin births, or a new birth in the family. We would also play it during clan conventions. During our days it was common for segments of the same clan to come together once in a while.
> I equally remember that whenever a woman lost her relative, especially her mother or father, on her return the clan of the husband would organise a welcome ceremony, in reality it was like a cleansing ritual. They would sprinkle some prepared herbs and water on her as we played the *Akogo* and other instruments before settling for a special meal. Amidst the grief she would feel loved. *Akogo* music served as a therapy. Those melodies would make one forget their sorrow and pain for a while. It was medicine.

From the submissions of the participants P1, P2, P4, P5, P6 and P7 it is evident that *Akogo* has had immense influence on the life of the Iteso at both the personal and communal level. The instrument has not been just a companion for individuals but also ignited insurmountable joy and happiness, fostered unity and love, and generated several other social and economic benefits to the community of the Iteso. This is supported by (Hodges, 2020) who observes that communal music making, usually hinged on indigenous instruments, enhances empathy, social bonding, and emotional synchronisation, which in turn fosters unity and group belonging.

One respondent, P3, a seasoned cultural defender and author of articles in the now defunct Etop weekly newspaper remarked:

> I know that it is impossible for culture to remain static, it has to change. People my age do not behave the way our grandparents or even parents behave. But as culture evolves we must know which things to adopt and which ones to discard. In those songs of *Akogo* that young people no longer want to associate with are several lessons. They teach an individual how to relate with his parents, how to care for his wife and children. There are lessons against laziness, conflict, violence. In one song you get several lessons that guide you as you grow. I am not implying that today's music has no lessons; my point is that what *Akogo* music gave you is what you needed to know.

Another respondent, P8, a member of *Akogo* band in Mukongoro-Kumi agreed with P3 when he noted:

> When we play that instrument (meaning *Akogo*), we are not just entertaining you. We are educating, encouraging or rebuking you. As we pluck the keys we are sending a strong message. If it is marriage ceremony, we are teaching the husband, the wife, the father and

> mother, the sister-who are very difficult, including the other women in that home how to relate. You dance to the rhythm as the message is also entering. So *Akogo* should not be just taken for granted. You need to keep it and teach it to your children.

As respondents P3 and P8 note, *Akogo* has over the years served as a vehicle for passing down important cultural and moral values. These values function as lubricants of the Iteso social system. They ensure there is respect among individuals, that each member of a social group understands their roles and responsibilities. Titon (2009) supports this argument when he highlights that in many traditional societies, musical instruments are involved in rituals, celebrations, and oral storytelling, functioning as vehicles for preserving ancestral knowledge and values.

4.2 Suitability of sculpture as a medium for preservation of *Akogo* traditional musical instrument.

The researcher observed that there is limited understanding of the field of sculpture and its possibilities to the community of Kumi. Several respondents needed further explanation of what sculpture is to understand the intentions of the researcher. The researcher also observed a significant misconception among some respondents on what sculpture constitutes. May believe sculpture always has to involve people. The researcher had to rely on the preliminary models, which are almost exclusively semi abstracted replicas of the *Akogo* instrument, to unlock their understanding. Eventually, the respondents showed immense excitement at the prospect of seeing both functional and monumental sculpture. One participant, PX, a member of the choir team at St. Paul Catholic Church in Kumi remarked:

> I don't know how it would exactly look, but I can imagine *Akogo* changing into a chair that someone can sit. I don't know if someone would be able to play it. But I am sure even if it cannot be played it would make a lot of sense having it in the house or in our museum.

Another participant, P11, a member of an *Akogo* band in Nyero, noted:

> When we attend those competitions for *Akogo*, the winner is usually rewarded with money, or a bull, and sometimes they give some glass award. In football, the best goal scorer is given an award that resembles a ball; a goal keeper is given an award which resembles gloves. So can't the organisers of these events give the best band or player a trophy which resembles *Akogo* besides the money? We can spend the money in one day, but the trophy can stay for our grandchildren to see.

P12, a teacher of Ateso language at one of the secondary schools in Kumi, agreed with participant P11 when he noted:

> There is a lot that ought to be done not just to preserve *Akogo*, but also other musical instruments. I believe that other instruments are even fast disappearing more than *Akogo*. Sometimes while teaching, I get surprised when I mention some instruments and kids laugh. You may think there is something funny, until you find out it is because they are unaware of the existence of instruments by such names. I have been forced to look for some instruments just as teaching aids. It is worrying. We need a lot of revival of our culture for such treasures to survive. They are who we are. Check how many Iteso today can play guitars, or keyboards, or violins. They are definitely few. You cannot compare it with the percentage of Iteso that knew how to play *Akogo* then. So which modernisation are we even claiming to have? We need to bring back music competitions and in my opinion, having small sculptures as trophies for the best players and winning team would be a great idea. Who doesn't like trophies? And if the material is strong, someone can even keep it for hundreds of years.

P13, an elder in Nyero, also a renowned advocate and lover of traditional music, curiously observed:

> Last month, while travelling to Tororo for an eye checkup I was impressed by the sculptures of those Kadodi dancers on that roundabout in Mbale. The last time I passed there, the roundabout was empty. The Bagisu must be so proud of them. If we had a sculpture of *Akogo*, a very big one, maybe with a flute and shaker, on our round-about rather than that crested crane it would be so beautiful. I am not against the crested crane, but it does not represent us as Iteso. That instrument is what we are also proud of. *Akogo* or someone playing it would be a striking idea for a monument. You would just see it and feel you are now in Teso. And if you make a mistake to put some speakers playing *Akogo* in that monument, you will see people dancing there like they are in a party.

P14, an author of an anthology of Iteso cultural stories and proverbs, agrees with P13 when he observes:

> I have seen pictures of guitars transformed into chairs, wall clocks, tables and they look beautiful. Some have even been made into book shelves. I think if similar furniture was designed using our *Akogo*, they would be beautiful. Maybe these are the kind of things that *Emorimor* should be using. Unfortunately, you might be surprised to see furniture which is so boring with meaningless features in his office.

4.3 Structural and decorative designs of *Akogo* traditional musical instrument of the Iteso

This section presents the findings related to the second objective of this study which was to examine the existing designs of *Akogo* traditional musical instruments. It was important to

generate facts about the process, materials and mechanism of production of *Akogo* so as to inform the production of culturally grounded and practically meaningful functional sculptural works that resonate with the intended community of Iteso (Kumi residents).

During the study, the researcher made several observations in relation with the current designs of *Akogo* used within the Iteso community. The researcher noted that there are basically two types of *Akogo*; the traditionally carved (wooden), the assembled type (wooden) and the metallic instrument. The first, popular among the elderly culturally respected artisans, requires a lot of knowledge on wood seasoning processes combined with refined craftsmanship skills and abilities in carving and iron smelting.



Figure 7: The side and back views of a traditionally carved *Akogo* musical instrument. *Source: Researcher 2025. Dimensions: 35 cm x 20 cm x 6 cm*

It often involves selection of a mature stem of an appropriate tree, a gradual process of wood seasoning and preparation, use of chisels to perforate the woodblock to create a resonator box, ability to flatten steel rods and use heated metal to perforate sound holes. Steel rods usually obtained from old bicycle or motorcycle spokes for small instruments and bicycle mudguard supports for the larger bass instruments. The holes through which the copper wires used to fasten the tines, bridge, backstop and Z-bracket onto the resonator box are created using a hot steel rod. This leaves behind black holes and trails created by heat resulting from the reaction between the hot iron and wood.

The resultant instrument is often aesthetically powerful bearing specific signatures of the creators. They are also comparatively more durable and ergonomically preferable because of the usually rounded edges and grip friendly texture. The researcher also observed that this type, although usually not vanished, has a longer shelf life with some spanning over 20 years before they are retired. The participant also noted that the only components that have to be replaced from time to time are the keys (tines) which can rust and break if not properly stored. These types of instruments are also rarely damaged by wood borers owing to the well-researched production process. Trying to understand the secret behind this long life one participant P7, shared:

> It begins from which kind of wood you choose and how you handle it when making the instrument. You have to identify mature wood. You have to preserve it well. Once the wood is dry, we bury it in the mud. Let the wood absorb heat and water. Such wood doesn't crack easily when you are carving.

The participant also shared that both wet and dry wood can be carve to make *Akogo*. While explaining the second method he shared the following:

> Sometimes, especially when it is urgent, we can carve a freshly cut tree. We cut down the tree, allow it to lose some moisture for about a day or two. After, we cut the piece which corresponds with the size of *Akogo* you intend to make. You carve the general shape (roughing out) from the wood block, smear it with cow dung and bury in the ground for about a day or two. After that, you pick it and perforate to create the hollow of the resonator box and then bury it again. The rest of the details and polishing can then be done later.

The researcher learned that, in the traditional method of making *Akogo* locally referred to as *Aike* (meaning to carve), *Aoret* (cow dung) is used as both a pesticide and preservative in the crafting process of the traditionally crafted *Akogo* instrument. The *Akogo* produced in this method is not only aesthetically appealing but is also evidence of a careful, patient process requiring a well researched body of knowledge and massive experience. Most musicians prefer this traditionally crafted type because of its functional and aesthetic appeal.

The second type involves cutting thin panels of wood. Shaped in the form of the different faces, front side and back, the panels are joined together to create the resonator box. This type of instruments is often characterised by a flat base. Modern tools such as drills are used to create perforations such as the sound holes. Steel rods are bent to form the Z-brackets and others

flattened and fixed as tines. The surface of the wood is sanded making it smoother than the traditionally carved instrument which features soft carving marks on its surface. Usually these instruments are not vanished.



Figure 8: The assembled Akogo instrument.
Source: Researcher 2025.

The researcher was not able to find out a convincing reason for this. The researcher also noted that while the process is less tedious in comparison to the traditional carving method the product is less intricate and overly plain. While interviewing one of the participants, an acclaimed retired craftsman and *Akogo* player, on his opinion about the modern assembled instrument, he asked:

> Why would I play an instrument that looks like a casket? It is not just its ability to produce sound that makes it *Akogo*. *Akogo* is supposed to be curved from the base (drawing a quick sketch on the ground to show the researcher the position of the curve. It is too plain. It even gets damaged quickly. Those carpenters don't care what kind of wood they use.

The researcher noted that the attachment the Iteso people have with *Akogo* instruments is beyond just the melody the instrument produces, but also the design. The curves that define the form of the instrument carry strong symbolism and identity.

The third type, the metallic type is the smallest in a set of usually 7-13 instruments. According to one of the participants, P15, this metallic type, locally known as *Ikengere,* is the most important

of all the instruments as it sets the tone of the melody. Usually only one key (tine) is played in this instrument. Therefore, only an experienced composer uses it. The resonator box of this instrument is typically made from a thick aluminum sheet often obtained from old saucepans. These are meticulously cut in the shape of *Akogo* and joined using the interlocking technique. The other elements are installed through holes perforated using small sharp iron nails.

The study also enabled the researcher to understand that the procedure of making *Akogo* is a highly intricate artistic process. Because of this, in Teso today, only a few skilled artisans are able to craft it. To ensure the efficiency of the instrument, the artisans have to ensure that the trees are mature and well-seasoned to prevent cracking and pest infestation. There are basically two approaches used today in the making of *Akogo*: the traditional (complex and unique) and the modern (simple and basic).

Traditionally, a mature soft wood tree was identified to be suitable for carving. It is carefully cut with a sharp hand axe. Those felling the tree have to ensure the process is performed carefully and patiently to protecting the stem from splitting. Once cut, it is left for about two to three days to allow the tree sap to drain. The desired part of the stem is then cut out and transported home. The artisan then roughs out the craft by removing the tree bark. Fresh cow dung is smeared all over the wood then it was buried in the ground for three days. This is done to limit rapid moisture loss that can cause cracking. The fresh cow dung also serves as both a pesticide and preservative against fungi and bacteria.

After the three days the wooden piece is picked out and carved from the sides to create the hollow box. The smearing with cow dung and burying is repeated for a day, or two. Panels are prepared to cover the perforated sides of the resonator box. A wooden rod, measuring about a square centimeter, is prepared for use as the backstop. The lower section of the instrument is always cut curving inwards. This curve is one of the distinct design features of the *Akogo* instrument of the Iteso. The upper part is cut ensuring the front face, pointed at the center, overlaps the back face allowing for space that will be perforated for fastening the tines, Z-bracket, backstop and ridge to the resonator box.

The sides are then covered with the panels which are fixed using locally smelted iron nails, often measuring about one inch in length and about two millimeters in diameter. A natural glue extract from a tree locally known as *Ebule* (Ficus brachipoda) is dried then melted under fire and dripped around the edges to close the tiny gaps left behind. This is to ensure that sound only gets out through the designated sound holes. Sound holes are drilled on the upper section using a special chisel-like hot pointed metallic rod, leaving behind round tiny black holes enough to accommodate a small one millimeter sized- like wire used for fastening the tines. Metallic rods, often obtained from bicycle mudguard supports, or bicycle spokes are flattened to make the tines.

The tines are always crafted proportional to the size of the instrument. A bridge made by bending a metallic rod in a half rectangular shape, is placed just below the backstop. This should lie on the same level, or slightly higher than the backstop. The backstop and the bridge form the foundation upon which the tines, often arranged from the longest at the centre, to the shortest at the sides, are placed. A Z-bracket, often fastened using tiny copper wires, is then placed on top of the tines to hold them tightly together allowing for only the possibility of tuning but not detachment. Sound holes, often circular in shape, are cut into the resonator. One large hole is always placed just between the two pairs of the tines, and others at the back and the base of the resonator box. Traditionally, the instrument is never vanished, yet the wood stays for decades without cracking.

Today however, using wood obtained from commercial stores, carpenters cut several panels of the wood to make the resonator box. These panels are joined using wood glue and small one-inch nails or shoe tacks. Small wooden strips are cut and placed as backstops to accompany the steel rods. A set of fourteen (14) or less small steel rods are flattened to make the tines which are then fastened between the bridge and the Z-bracket using tiny copper wires of about one millimeter in diameter. This technique is often faster enabling the craftsmen to make more instruments within a shorter time. However, the users of this method, many of whom are ordinary carpenters, ignore some traditional specifications, such as the base curve which makes their instruments appear basic and often undesirable to the traditional *Akogo* players.

It should also be noted that there exists a distinct type of *Akogo* that is metallic. It is called *Ikengere*. To make this type of *Akogo*, the craftsman will require an aluminum sheet, usually obtained from an old saucepan. Using hand carving tools such as pliers and chisels, it is bent in the shape of the instrument. Other perforations such as the sound holes and those for fastening are created using nails.

Typically, the *Akogo* instrument has 6 keys on each side. However, some smaller instruments can have less. The instrument is usually made as a set of 5 or 6 pieces. However, for large bands, this number usually goes to about 12. In these sets there are always three categories, the small, medium and the big (bass) instruments. These cover the highest pitch to the lowest (bass). While there have been a few modifications in the design of *Akogo* today, the structure has generally stayed.

4.4 Reinterpreting the design and structure of *Akogo* into functional sculptural artworks

Akogo has been used before to inform the creation of artworks for contemporary spaces. For instance, Orhon (2022) utilises the instrument to create paintings for interior spaces of a hotel. His paintings range from studies of the instrument to performance of the players of the instrument. Mayanja (2015) as mentioned by Orhon (2022) also incorporates studies of *Akogo* in his paintings and drawings. Whereas these researchers have made an admirable effort, there are no known works in which *Akogo* has been used to inspire sculpture. However, there are numerous cases where artists from Africa have made considerable efforts to use musical instruments to inspire sculpture for contemporary spaces. Zimbabwean sculptor, Masimba Hwati for example combines sculptural form with sound through installations that reflect indigenous musical instruments, fusing together mixed media and performance to evoke ancestral rhythms and cultural memory (Hwati, 2016). Meanwhile Kenyan innovator Kioko Mwitiki employs welding and metal fabrication to create instrument inspired sculptures from recycled materials, creatively preserving tradition while also promoting environmental sustainability (Paukwa, 2025). These African examples offer a good illustration of contemporary artists' attempt to celebrate and honour musical instruments through functional, symbolic sculpture.

As a three-dimensional art form, sculpture enables the reinterpretation of symbolic objects like *Akogo* into functional, interactive and commemorative forms that appeal to different generations.

As Donkor et al (2024) note, sculptural forms, especially when placed in ceremonial or public spaces, can evoke shared memories and reinforce cultural identity by transforming intangible heritage into tangible spatial experiences. By integrating motifs inspired by *Akogo* into marriage related sculptures such as gazebos, entry arches, the researcher creates narratives that embody the Iteso ideals making culture both visible and participatory. This is supported by Prasetyo (2021) when they assert that effective sculpture in heritage contexts must not only replicate traditional aesthetics but as well sustain symbolic meaning through contextual placement and material expression. This transforms sculpture from being merely an art form to becoming a cultural language which sustains the life of *Akogo* within the Iteso identity.

4.5 Studio experimentation

The use of this method enabled the researcher to accomplish objective 3 of the study which was to produce innovative sculptural designs inspired by *Akogo*. In order to achieve this, it was necessary for the researcher to make several studies of the instrument as a basis for understanding the form and the elements of *Akogo*. This enabled the researcher to understand the proportionality ratios of each component and to extract the most significant features of the instrument that could inspire the creation of the sculptural ideas.

4.5.1. Objective studies of *Akogo* musical instrument

Goldstein & Brockmole (2017) argue that objective drawings allow the researcher to capture precise proportions, structural details, textures and ornamental patterns of the instrument without subjective distortion. Aware that accurate visual analysis creates the foundation for translating cultural and aesthetic qualities into functional art, it became necessary to make objective study drawings of *Akogo* before developing sculptural ideas and concepts. This included capturing the basic features, such as tines, Z-bracket, bridge, backstop, sound holes, copper wires, and the resonator box. It also included understanding size relationships of these components, the patterns of arrangement, the colour and texture of wood used, and the general structural composition of the design unit of the instrument. This ensured that the resulting sculptural reinterpretations of the instrument retain the identifiable features that anchor it to the original *Akogo* form hence preserving its cultural recognisability. Furthermore, the drawings in (Figure 9) below served as a research tool that enabled dissection of the instrument's components such as the tines, resonator

box, bridge, and sound holes informing the abstraction, stylisation and integration into the new sculptural forms.

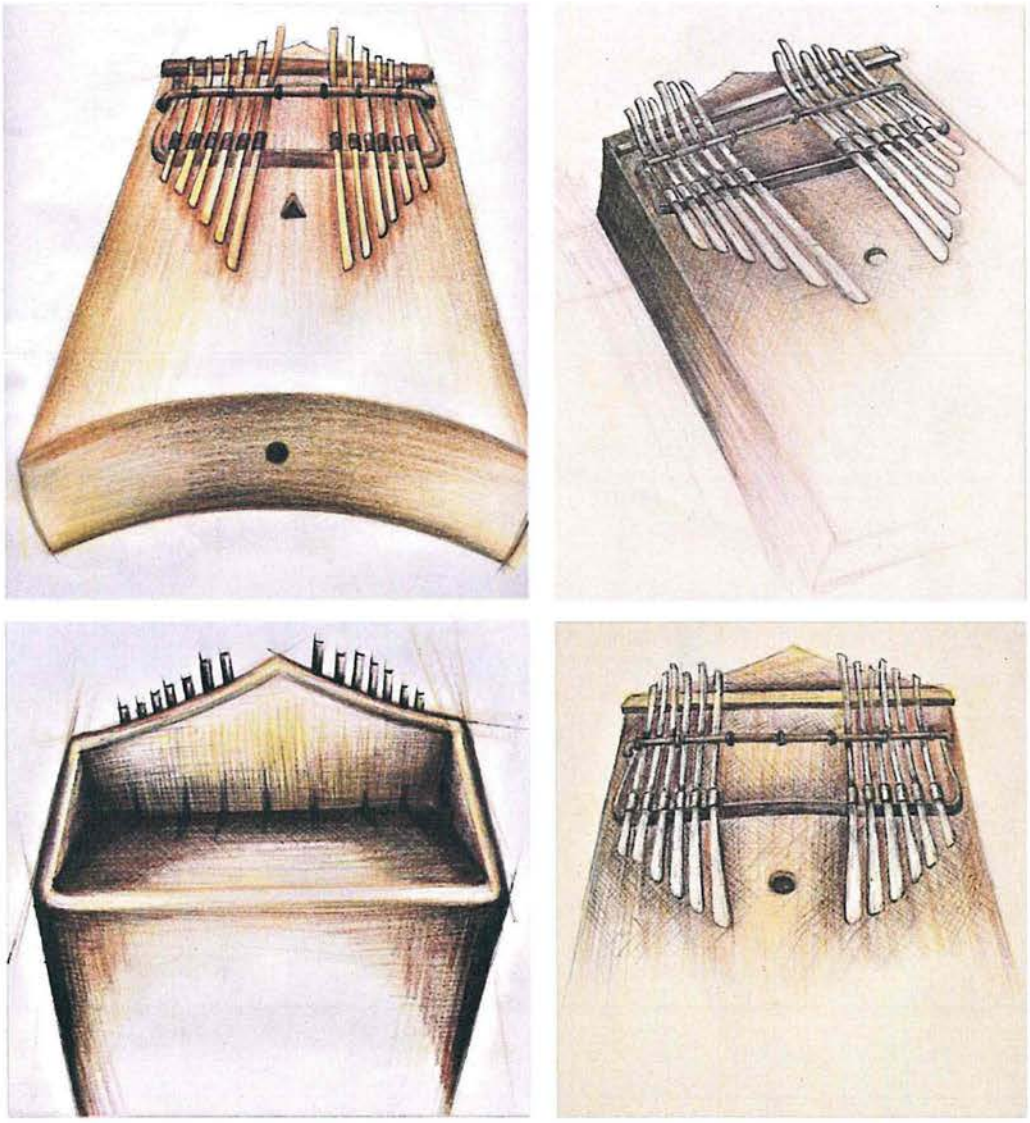


Figure 9: A photo collage of the objective studies of the *Akogo* traditional musical instrument.
Media: Colored pencil and ball point pen on paper.
Source: Drawings by the researcher 2024.

4.5.2 Sculptural Reinterpretations/Prototypes

The researcher created several functional sculptures under one theme: Traditional Iteso Marriage. The choice of marriage as the central theme for the development of the functional sculptural

forms was grounded on both culture and relevance. First, marriage ceremonies among the Iteso, like many other African communities, are rich with symbolic meaning, rituals and community participation. As a progenitor of many other social engagements in which *Akogo* music was used such as child births, naming ceremonies, birthday celebrations, communal work, clan competitions, initiation rites (*Asapan*) including death, marriage stood out both in relevance and practicality by offering an ideal setting in which the preservation and celebration of the intangible heritage such as music traditions can be achieved. Through marriage ceremonies the study was able to bridge innovation and continuity ensuring the instrument was not displayed as a mere artwork but experienced as a living part of community life. Secondly, marriage is one of the few occasions in which extended clans and communities of different generations gather. This creates a good opportunity for intergenerational transmission of values through dialogue. By embedding *Akogo* into these shared experiences, the sculptures strengthen collective memory and foster appreciation for traditional art forms in the modern celebratory environment. Therefore using marriage as the thematic fulcrum allows for the reimagination of *Akogo* in a sculptural form that is functionally integrated, aesthetically meaningful yet also culturally restorative.

The researcher creatively reinterpreted the formal and symbolic elements of *Akogo* into several sculptural forms that include; the entry arch, the gazebo, photo booths, the bridal chair, the walkway, several dining table ideas, flower vases and guest chairs, all designed for use in the Iteso traditional marriage setting. This approach aligns with the design-based research (DBR) methodology, which emphasises iterative making, contextual testing, and refinement of ideas/concepts within a real world cultural environment (Barab, 2004). By integrating form abstraction with symbolic translation, the identity of *Akogo* was preserved and extended into physical structures that invited the viewers for both interaction and cultural reflection. Thus, through deliberately embedding *Akogo* elements into ceremonial artifacts, the studio process not only generated tangible design outcomes but also ensured that the identity of *Akogo* is actively blended with contemporary cultural practice.

The researcher executed the work in both his studio in Kumi and at the studio space at MAID House, Kyambogo. The choice of the two places was strategic. The studio in Kumi enabled easy

access to the community of the Iteso while the one in Kyambogo enabled easy access to material and professional guidance from fellow artists and supervisors.

4.5.3 The Traditional Marriage Entry Arch

In Iteso traditional marriage ceremonies today, the rites of bride price and giveaway are conducted simultaneously. These are conducted from the bride's family. Several preparations are conducted involving the relatives, friends of the bride. Often, professional support is sought from other service providers to make the venue ready for the event. Among the guests expected are the groom and his entourage, kinsmen of the bride, friends, community leaders, the religious fraternity and the entire community that wish to attend the ceremony. Most of the guests are expected at the venue prior to the arrival of the groom and his entourage. The arrival of the groom marks the beginning of the entire ceremony. However, there are specific rituals that must be adhered to before the groom together with his companions can be permitted to enter the marriage venue. While these rituals are not standard, adherence to them is held in high regard.

At the entrance to the venue is often placed a fabricated (metallic) arch, provided by the decoration service provider. As the groom and his entourage arrive, they are meant to walk through this arch with permission from the opposing chairperson and master of ceremonies after meeting the prescribed pre-agreed requirements. Ushers, often comprising of adolescent and young adult girls, dressed in the traditional regalia, adorn the guests with the prepared identity, such as brooches, before they are guided into their designated section in the venue. These events occur against a background of selected cultural melodies and beats tailored in meaning and rhythm to the marriage rite. Traditionally, these melodies were often of *Akogo* and related instruments such as *Alamaru* (flute), *Adungu* (bow harp) and shakers as men chant and women ululate upon the arrival of the long awaited guests.

The researcher's creation of the marriage arch (Figures 10-16) as one of the functional sculptures in this study is an artistic response to the need for culturally rooted visual forms with the ability to celebrate, preserve and transmit the identity of the Iteso. In a society where *Akogo* is no longer the main source of music played at these ceremonies, and marriages are increasingly inter-tribal, the entry arch created in the motifs of *Akogo* provides a great opportunity to commemorate *Akogo*'s role in the Iteso culture through such thresholds. As Agawu (2016) notes, in African

ceremonies, the act of crossing a threshold, such as a entering a marriage site, often holds ritual significance that symbolise transition, union, and spiritual passage. In creating this entry arch, whose structural rhythm and form mimic the elements of *Akogo*, the artist transforms this moment of entry into a unique and immersive cultural experience. Through the design of this marriage entry arch, the researcher has succeeded in creating a culturally meaningful yet also aesthetically powerful visual gateway that prepares the couple and the guests for a grand entry into a sacred space of tradition, celebration and continuity. Sculpture therefore attains both its architectural role as well as a cultural mission- preserving the heritage of *Akogo* through symbolic reinterpretation within the living tradition of the Iteso community.

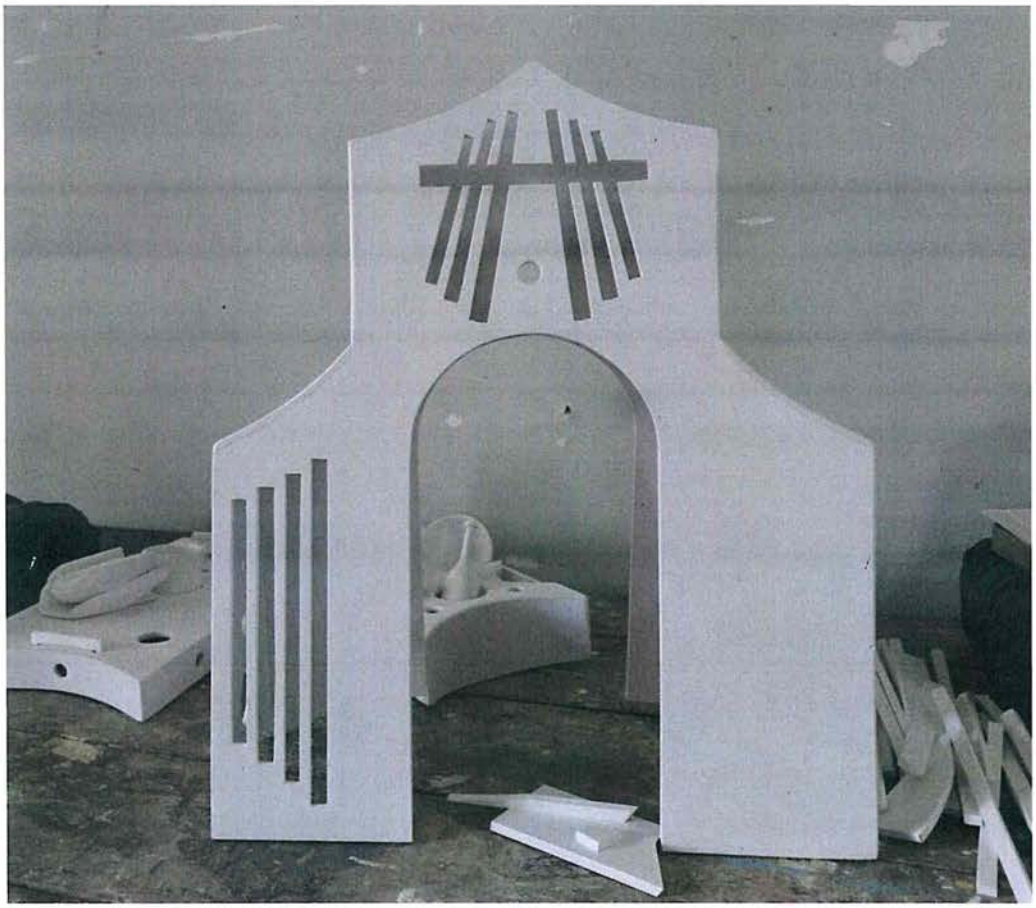


Figure 10: A photo of front view of an incomplete entry arch.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025. Dimensions: 32 cm x 41 cm x 15 cm

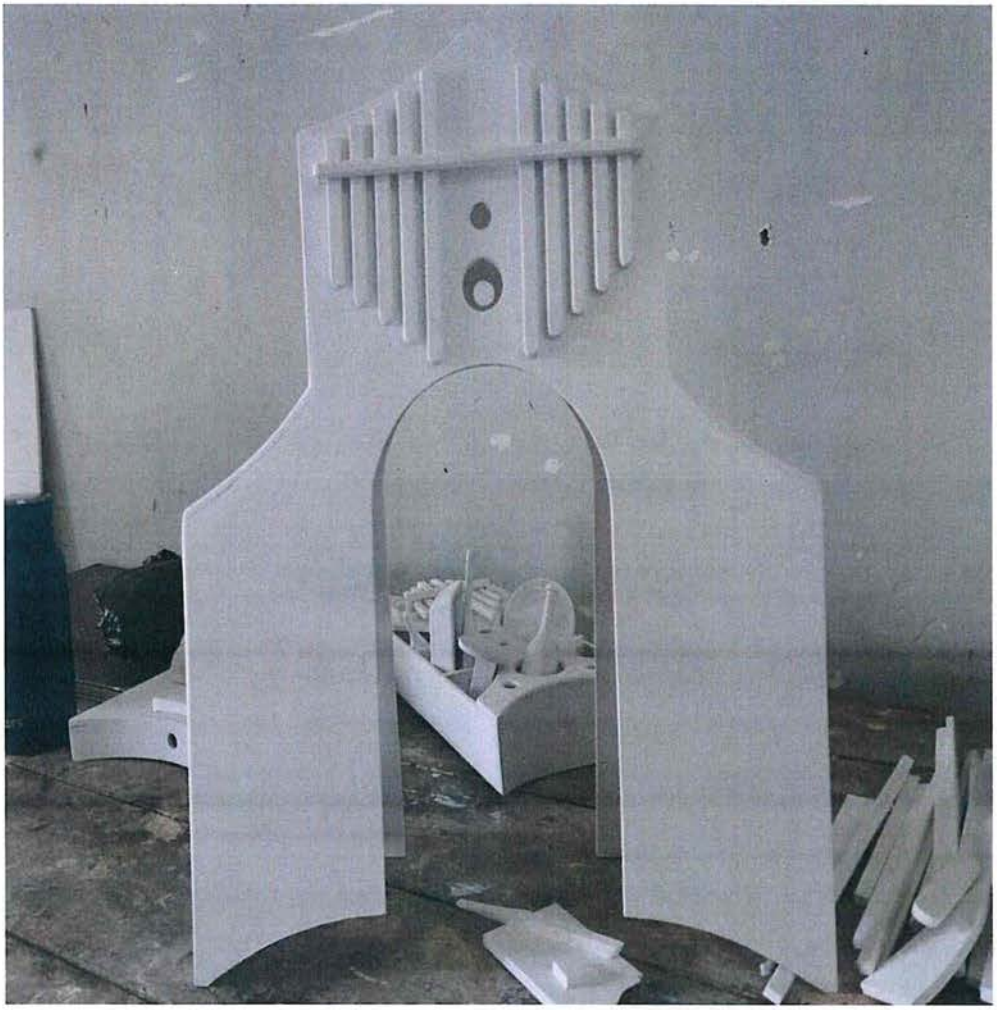


Figure 11: The back view of the incomplete entry arch visible from the venue site.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025 Dimensions: 32 cm x 41 cm x 15 cm

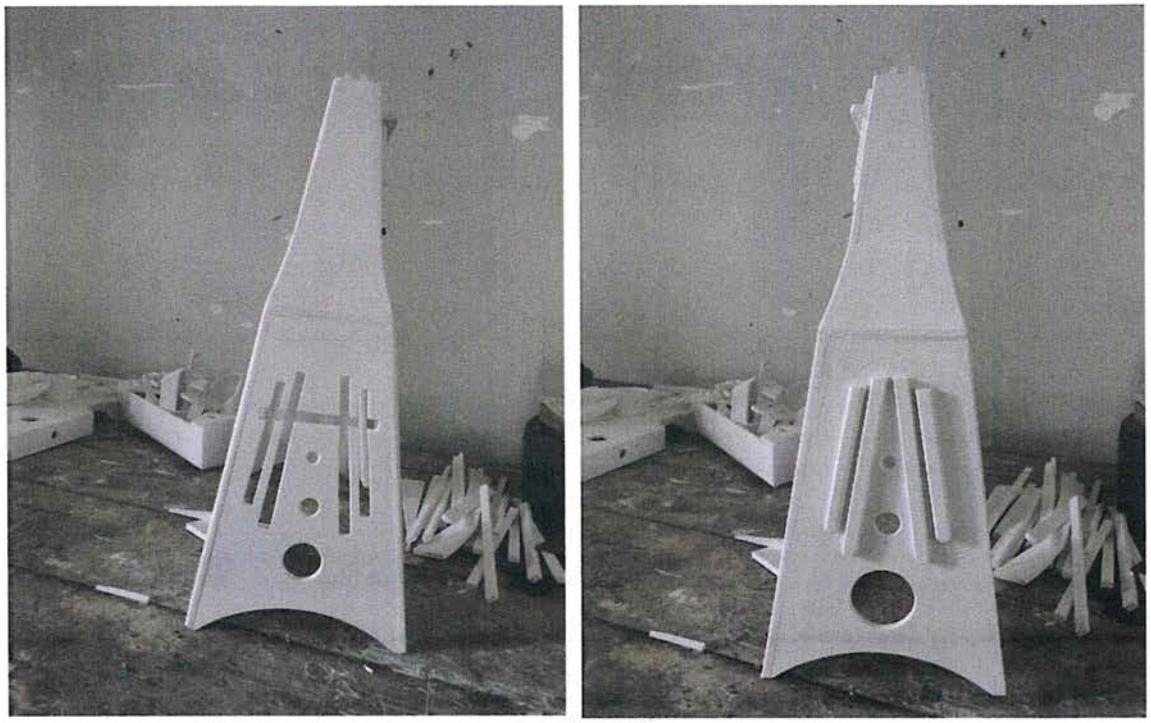


Figure 12: Side views of the uncompleted entry arch.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025

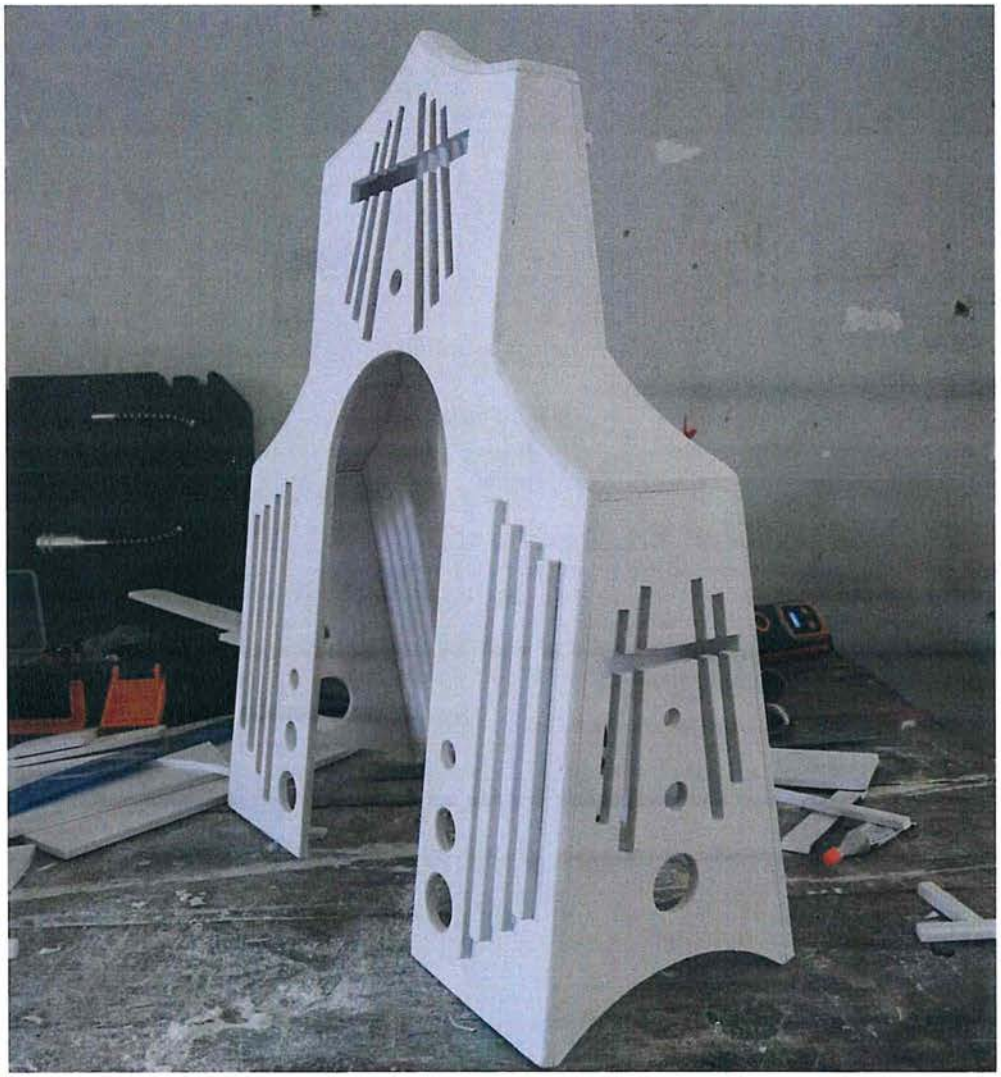


Figure 13: A three-Quarter view of the nearly complete entry arch

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025



Figure 14: The back view of the finished entry arch.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025

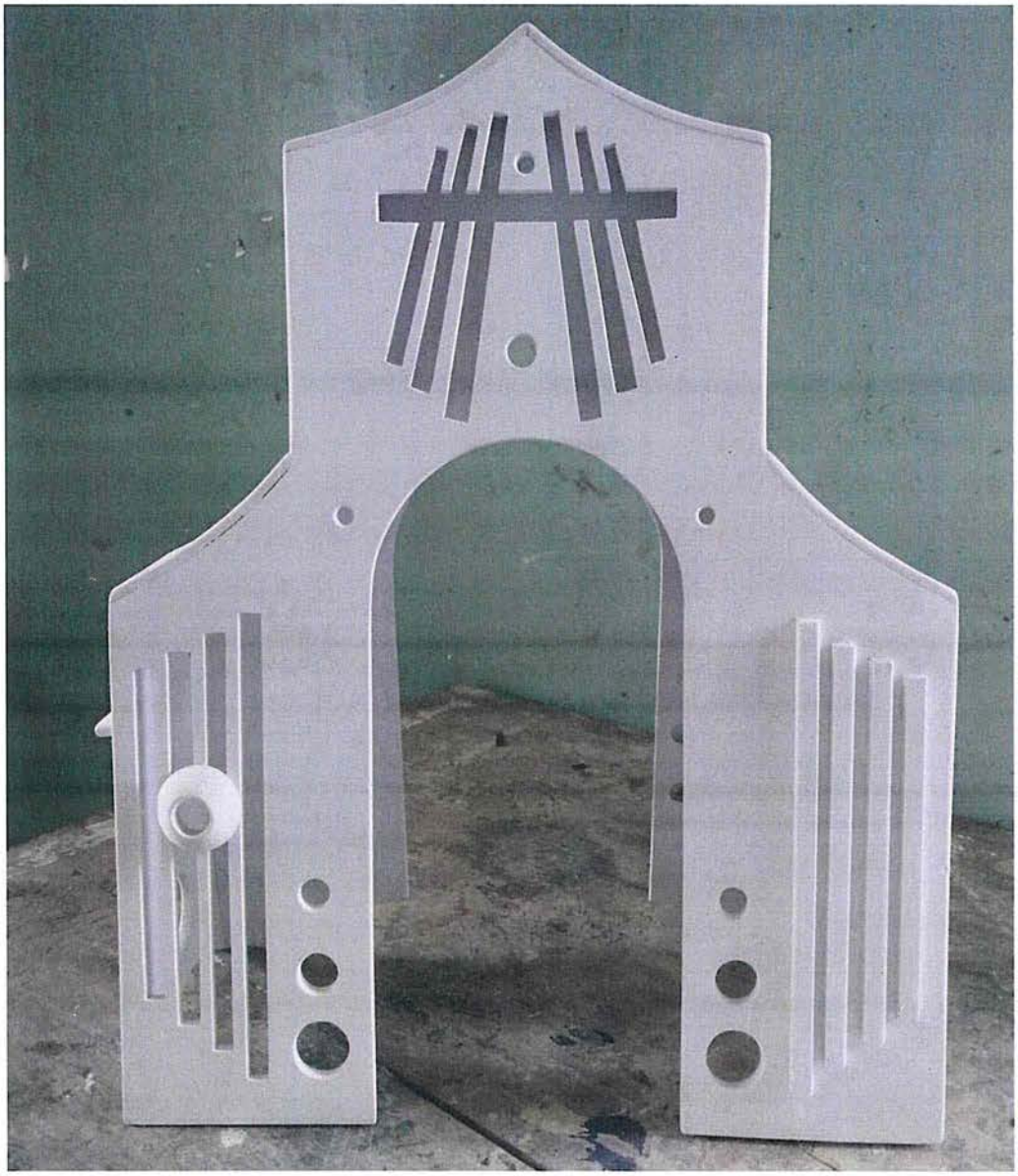


Figure 15: The front view of the finished entry arch.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.

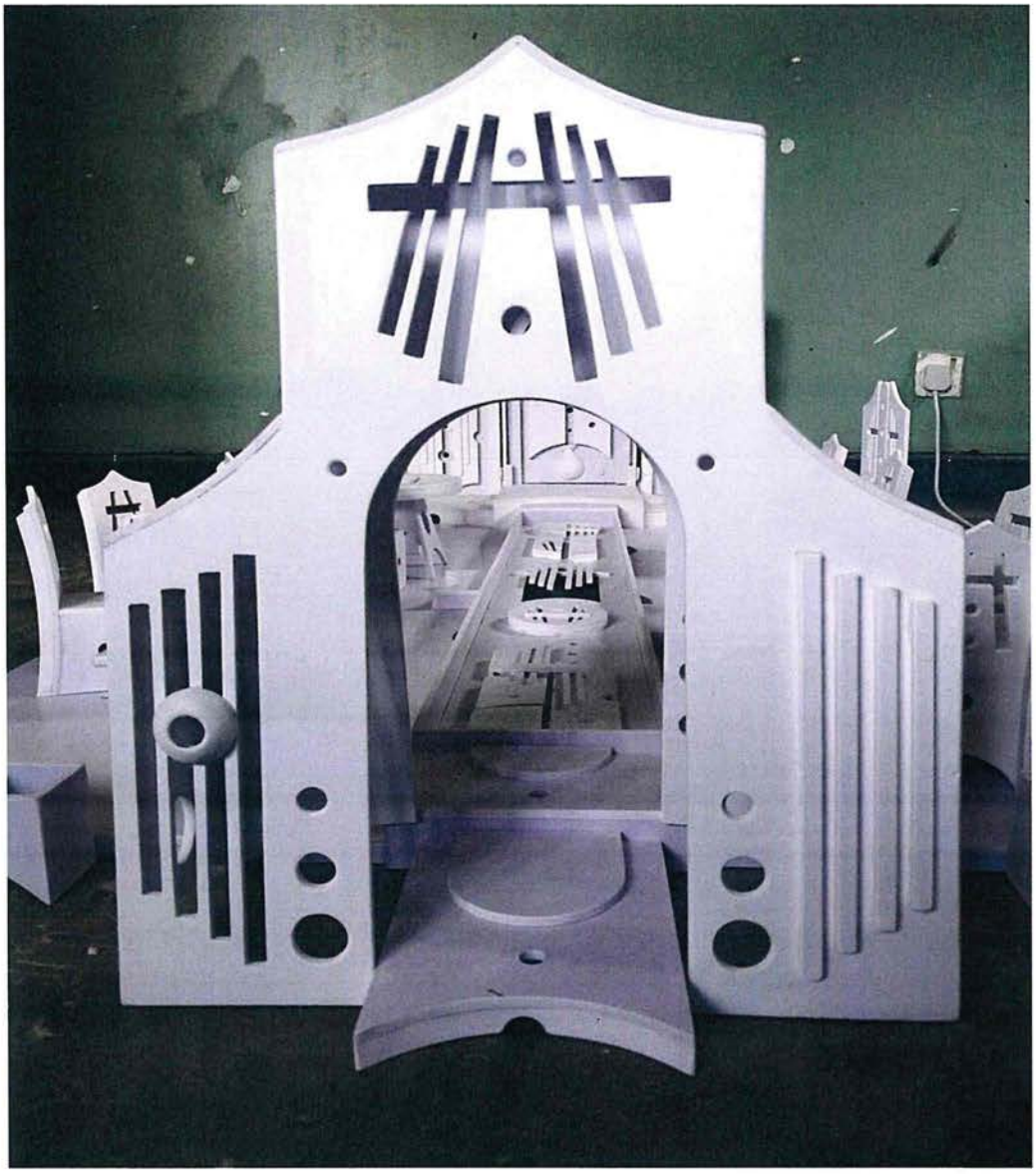


Figure 16: The final view of the entry arch seen from the front in the sculptural composition setup.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025

.4 The traditional walkway

In traditional marriage ceremonies in the contemporary Iteso community, event decorators place an essentially plain or woven fabric running from the entry arch to the gazebo. Often decorated

to match the colour themes and express identity, these walkways highlight the focal points while also providing photo-worthy moments in the ceremony. During the studio experimentation, including the walkway as part of the sculptural composition became both practical and symbolic.

The sculptural walkway (Figures 17-18) is designed to guide the movement of the participants in traditional marriage ceremonies while providing them with a rich visual experience of the Iteso cultural wealth. Yet also, from a spatial planning perspective, the walkway contributes to the structured navigation of space, enhancing accessibility to other sculptural features such as the gazebo, the bridal chair and the photo booth. Beyond their utilitarian function, the walkway performs a symbolic role by drawing from the ritual theory where such pathways represent transitional moments in life, most notably the movement from singlehood to marital union, reflecting (Turner, 1969) concept of liminality in ritual processes.

Aesthetically, the walkway was integrated with several motifs borrowed from the components of the *Akogo* musical instruments, such as the tines, the resonator box, the bridges and sound holes. These motifs not only act as rhythmic visual threads that enhance the ambiance of the ceremonial site but also connect different sculptural elements within the composition. Materially, the use of foam board to construct the *Akogo* inspired walkway, offers flat, defined planes consistent with the tonal wooden surfaces of the *Akogo* musical instrument. Combining form and function triggers the transformation of the walkway from merely a passage into a sculptural experience that honours tradition, guides ritual and elevates the ceremonial experience for the contemporary Iteso community.

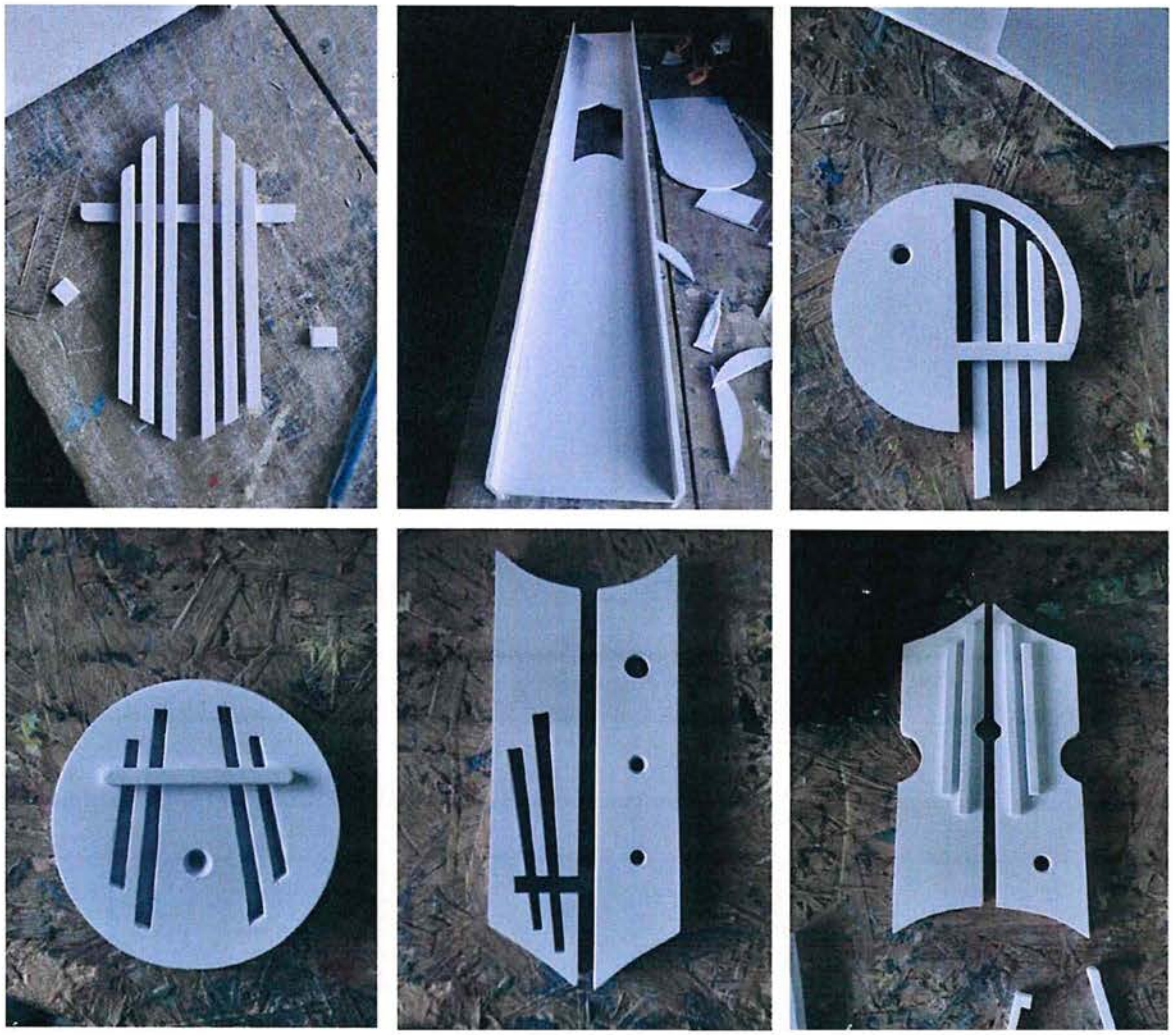


Figure 17: Relief sculptural components of the walkway.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.

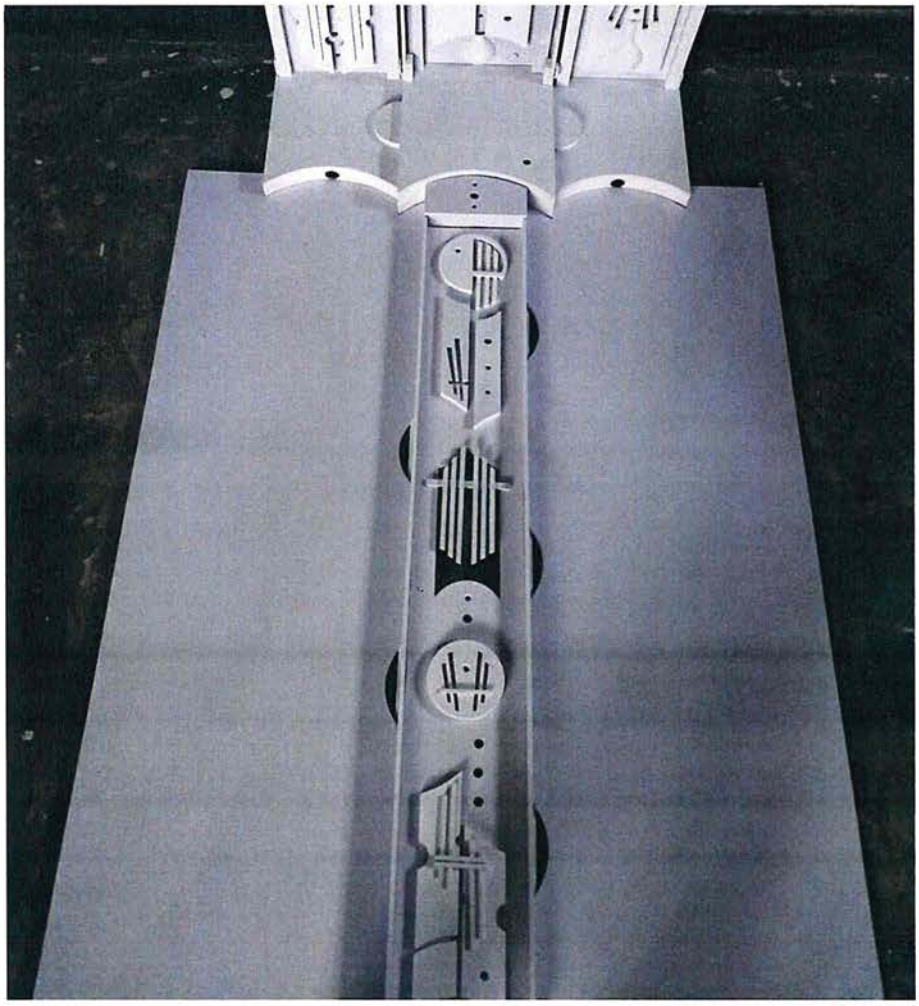


Figure 18: A complete arrangement of the walkway with all the relief sculptural components.

Media: Foam board and super glue. Dimensions: 15 cm x 13.5 cm x5 cm

Source: Researcher 2025.

4.5.5 The Gazebo

In this study, the researcher conceptualised and constructed the gazebo as the central functional sculpture within the reimagined marriage site to perform both the culturally symbolic and spatial roles (Figures 19-30). Its purpose has been extended beyond providing decoration and shelter to serving as the focal point of marital union and visibility during the ceremony. As Oduro-Frimpong (2014) notes, in many African traditional marriages, including among the Iteso,

symbolically significant places are specially designated for the couple, usually marking the moment of transition and public recognition of marital status.

In this sculpture, the entire formal structure is used in creating different components of the gazebo. The general structure mimics the resonator box of *Akogo*. The front facade features relief patterns created by cutting the form board to create negative impressions of three pairs of the tines of *Akogo* complete with the bridge and two circular sound holes. The ceiling of this sculptural work features a semi-abstracted alto relief representation of the *Akogo* instrument. On its back, much like the ceiling features a slightly larger semi abstracted *Akogo* instrument sitting just above a relief representation of the Iteso traditional water pot, a vessel commonly used in cultural celebrations among the Iteso. Between the two parts of the semi abstracted work are five circular sound holes running vertically. All these sit inside a semi-circular vertical arch.

The gazebo, in this context, is representative of a sanctified enclosure, an elevated sculptural platform where the bride and groom are ritually, socially and spiritually united before their community. It is a stage upon which the new couple makes lifelong commitments as the rest of the guests bear witness. Functionally, this sculptural work offers a defined and protective space for the couple, serving as a site for blessings, vow exchanges and sometimes, formal sitting.

According to the event design theory, structures such as the gazebo serve to anchor spatial layouts and focus visual attention thereby creating a ceremonial focal point that enhances guest orientation and narrative flow (Nelson, 2014). The gazebo's form was intentionally placed in dialogue with other sculptural representations such as the walkway, the entry arch and the photo booth emphasising its role as the centerpiece in the ceremonial process and spatial experience.

All created using foam board, the rhythmic and symmetrical arrangement of the tines, panels and perforations represent the acoustic patterns of *Akogo* metaphorically combining the functional sculpture with the spirit of musical harmony and cultural rhythm (Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2005).

In summary, the researcher created the gazebo not to serve as merely a protective or decorative architectural form, but also as a symbolically rich and culturally meaningful sculptural centerpiece which embodies unity, protection, rhythm and community.

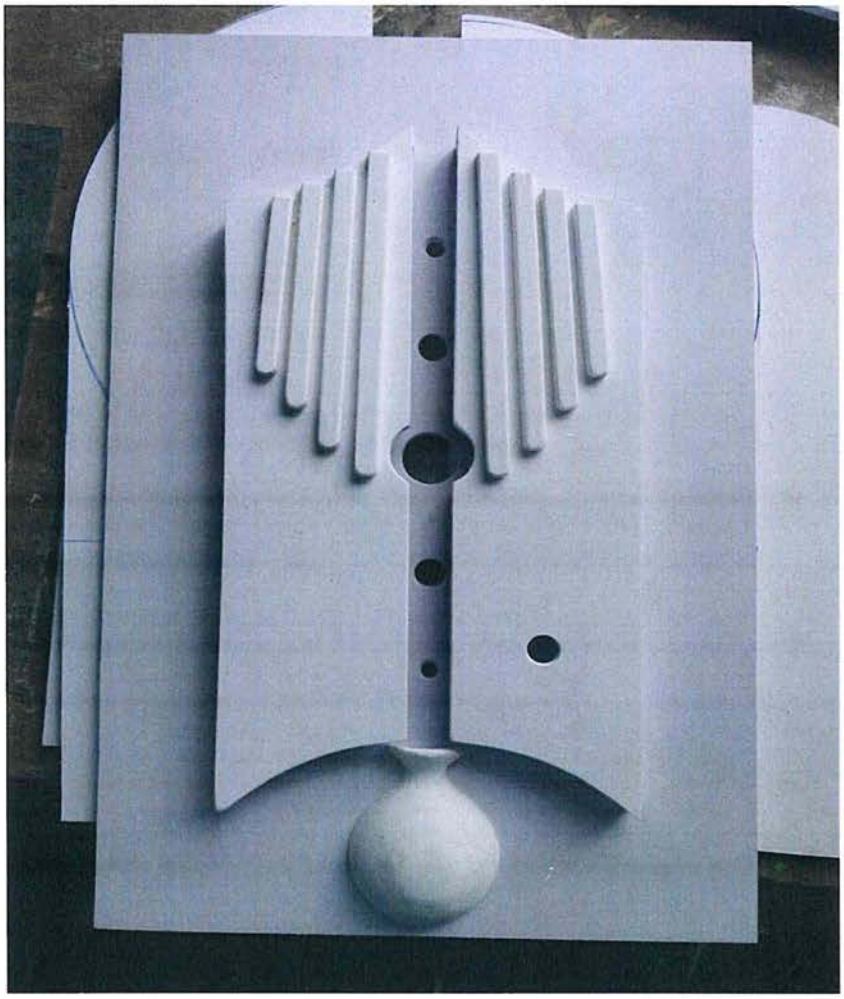


Figure 19: A photo of an incomplete relief sculptural backdrop of the gazebo.
Media: Foam board and super glue.
Source: Researcher 2025.

The image above (Figure 19) is the backdrop of the gazebo featuring a pair of two panels arranged in the *Akogo* shape with four symmetrically arranged tines each sitting on either side of five vertically arranged tines above a relief sculpture of the Iteso water pot.



Figure 20: A complete setup of the relief sculptural arrangement of components of the gazebo backdrop.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 21: The researcher joining the gazebo backdrop with the stands.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 22: The researcher joining the front part of the gazebo.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 23: The basic structure of the gazebo standing alone.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.

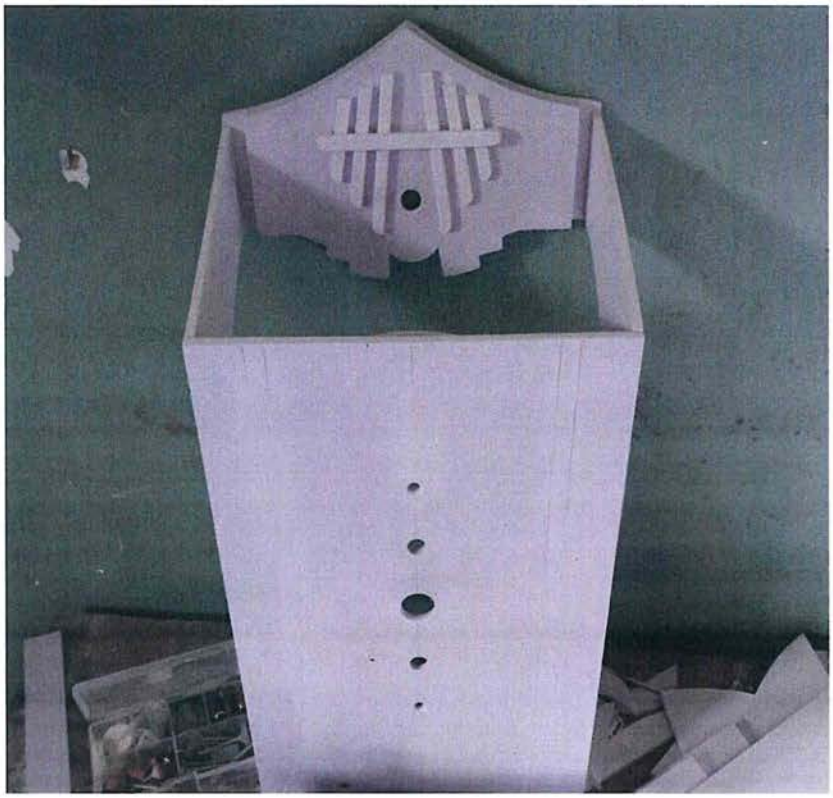


Figure 24: An aerial view of the gazebo under construction captured from the back.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.

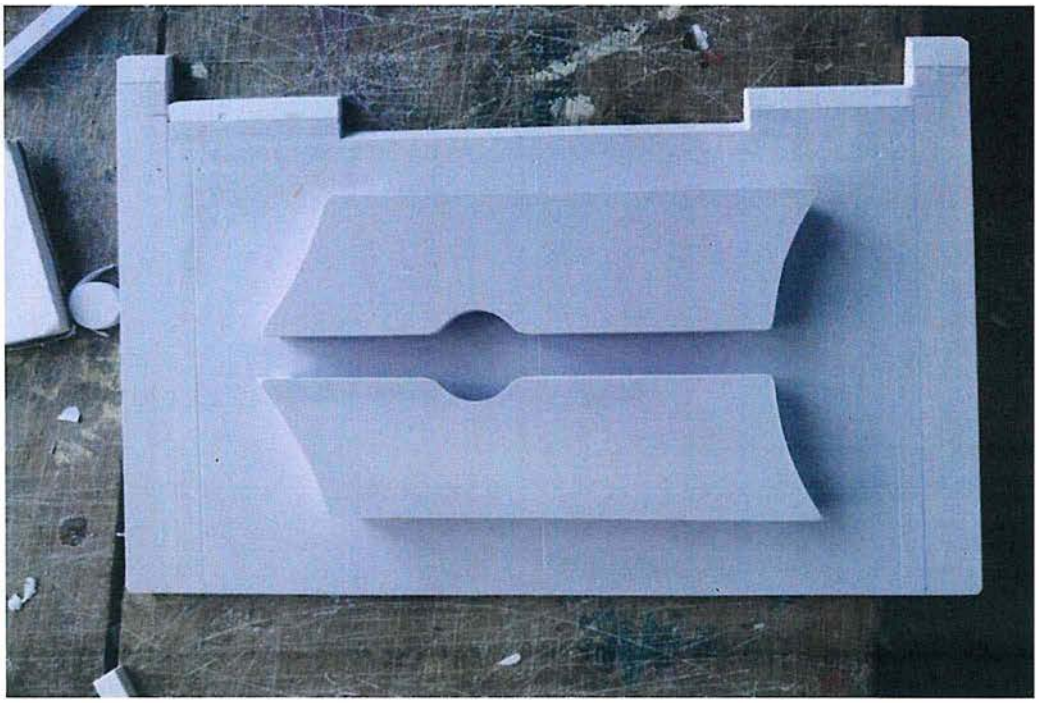


Figure 25: An incomplete set up of the ceiling of the gazebo under construction.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.

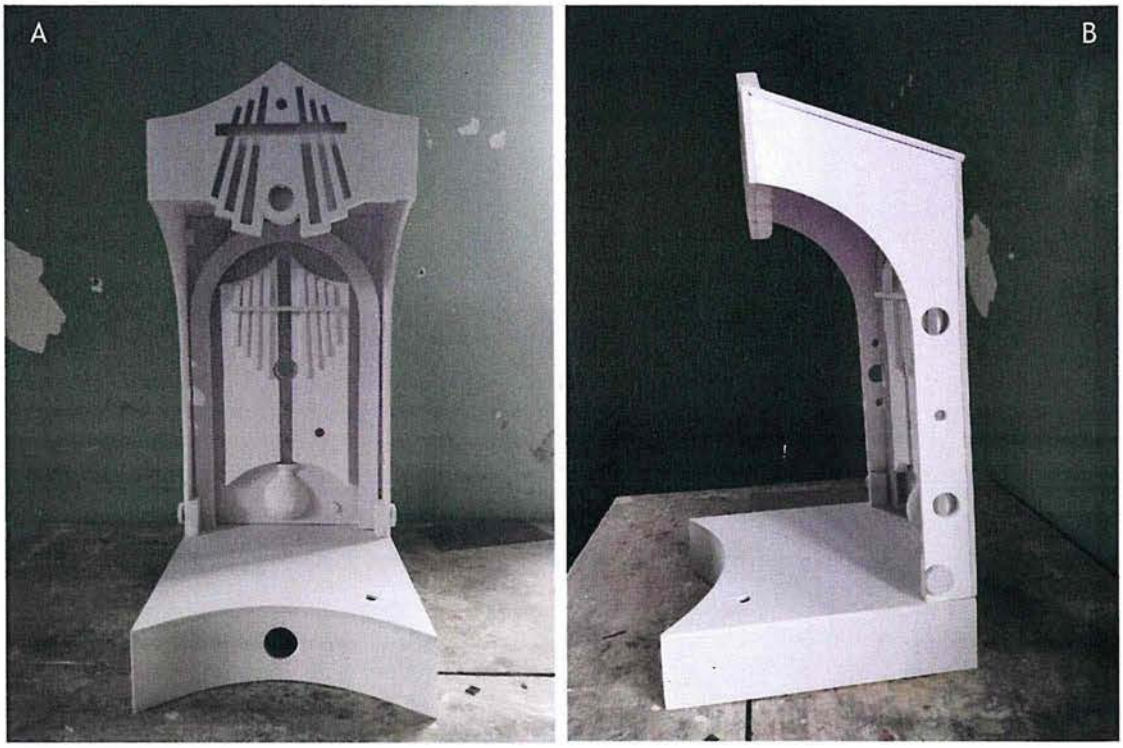


Figure 26: A photo collage showing the front and side elevation of the completed gazebo with a detachable base.

Media: Foam board and super glue. Dimensions: 52 cm x 23 cm x 26 cm

Source: Researcher 2025.

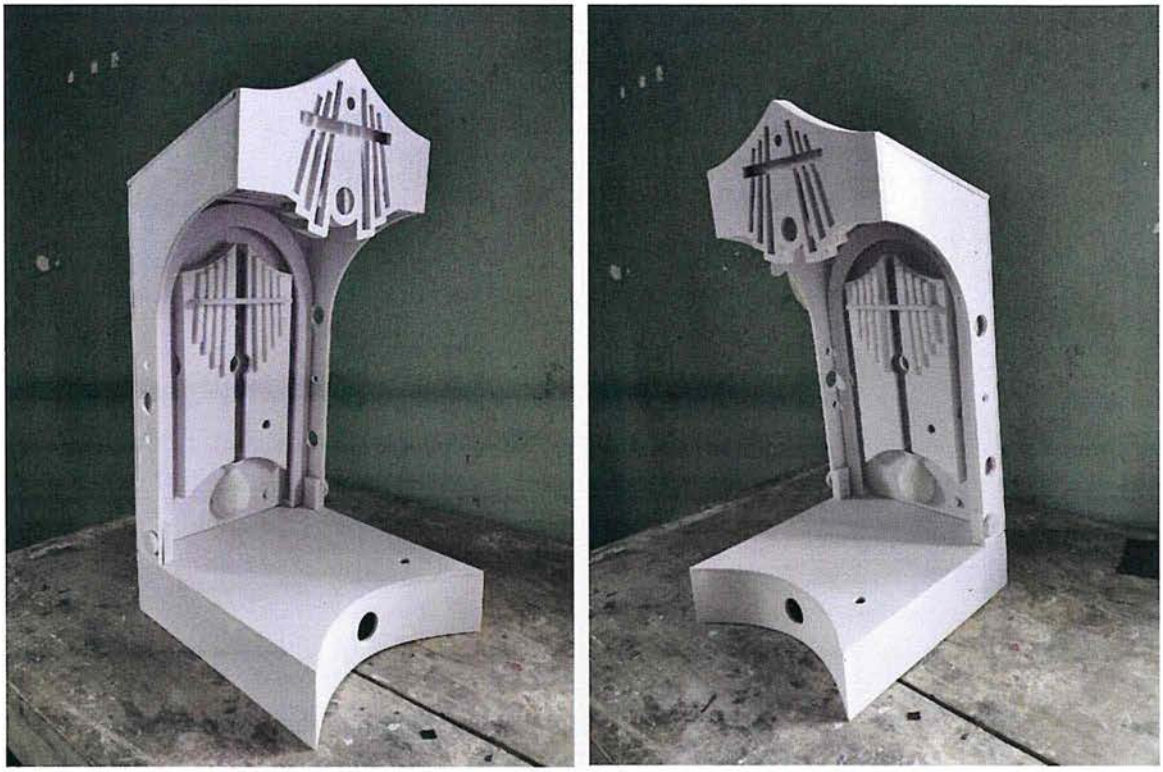


Figure 27: A photo collage showing three quarter views of the gazebo captured from the front.
Media: Foam board and super glue. Dimensions: 52 cm x 23 cm x 26 cm
Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 28: Rear views of the fully constructed gazebo captured from different angles.

Media: Foam board and super glue. Dimensions: 52 cm x 23 cm x 26 cm

Source: Researcher 2025.

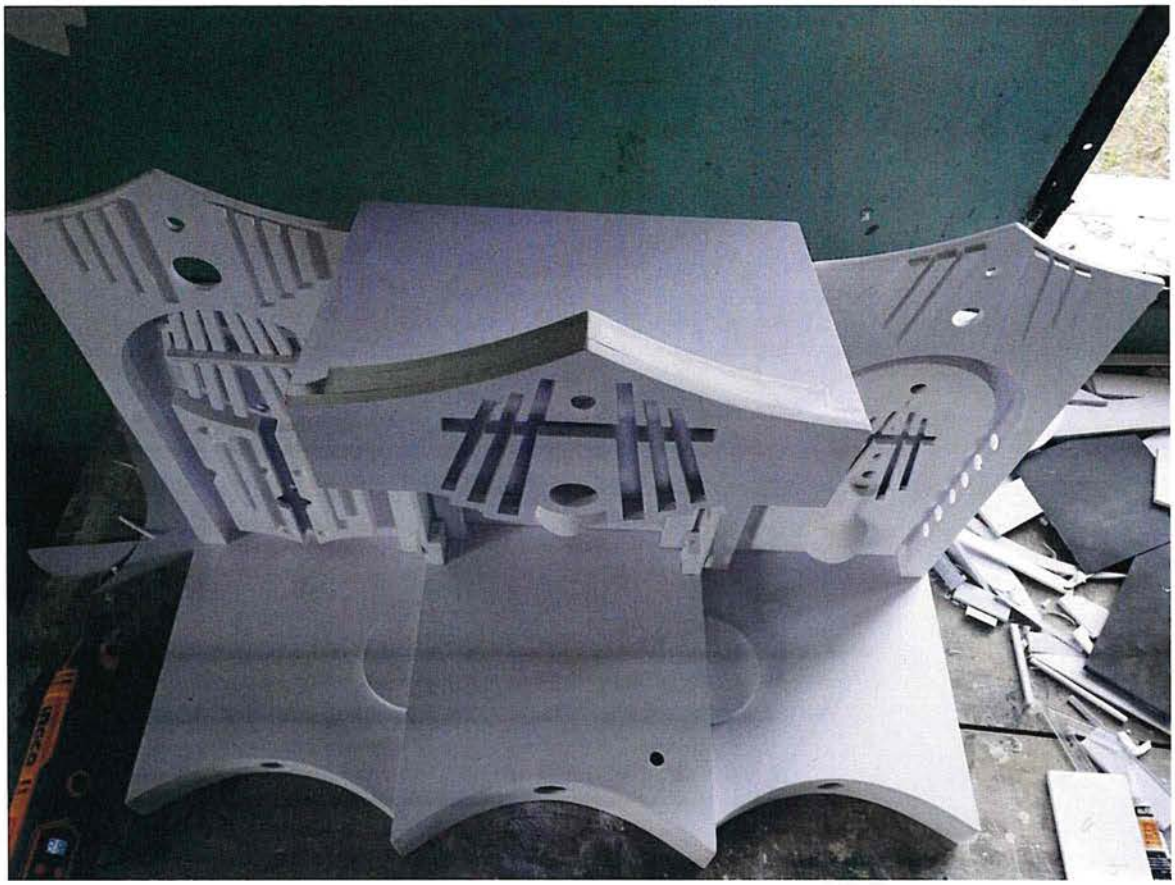


Figure 29: An aerial view of the gazebo and the photo booth captured from the front.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 30: A view of the top features of the gazebo taken from the base.
Media: Foam board and super glue.
Source: Researcher 2025.

4.5.6 The Photo booth

For several decades, photography and videography have become an essential component of ceremonial enjoyment. Contemporary Iteso cultural marriages are not an exemption. While laying out the marriage venue, critical attention is paid to the position of the sun to ensure that it does not interfere with the quality of the images. As Couldry (2008) notes, the photo booth has emerged as a spatial device for self-expression, memory making, and cultural documentation. It serves as a site where the guests, particularly the bride and groom, pause to be photographed turning collective and personal moments into lasting visual memories. Including the photo booth in this study aligns with the contemporary event practices where interactive spaces enhance guest experience and contribute to the personalisation of rituals (Getz, 2007).

In this study, the photo booth (Figures 31-37) in this study is not merely a backdrop for photographs but rather serves as a symbolic frame which captures the social performance of union, community participation and cultural heritage, values that *Akogo* embodies. It comprises of two independent but related functional sculptures sitting on either side of the gazebo. The first one sitting on the right hand side of the gazebo features bas relief representation of the tines, resonator box, sound holes and the bridge arranged symmetrically between a semi-circular arch placed at the center of a background that is shaped like the front face of the *Akogo* instrument with a low relief representation of four pairs of tines running vertically. This entire composition sits above a base that reflects the lower part of a laterally cut *Akogo* instrument.

Visually the entire form and structure of the *Akogo* instrument is reimagined into a functional platform where images can be captured. The other on the left comprises of negatively cut impressions of two pairs of the tines and bridge of *Akogo* together with three circular sound holes of varying diameters placed symmetrically between the tines. These features sit slightly above an alto relief carving of the Iteso traditional pot. Similar to the first sculpture, this composition is equally placed at the centre of a background flat panel shaped like the front face of *Akogo* except, with low relief representation of only three pairs of *Akogo* tines running diagonally.

This photo booth has therefore provided a distinct zone for organised photography during and after the ceremony. Its aesthetic integration into the broader sculptural composition ensures coherence across the event space, visually connecting it with the other elements such as the gazebo, entry arch and the walkway. By using foam board in its construction, the functional sculpture evokes the acoustic planes of *Akogo* while as well allowing for light weight adaptability and surface articulation. The creative combination of form, texture and cultural symbolism transform the photo booth into an interactive sculptural form that engages with participants while also inviting them to create memories with the artwork through visual record.

To sum this up, the photo booth in this study succeeds in transcending its functional role as a photography space to becoming a culturally rooted, socially interactive and culturally expressive installation which allows the interplay of ritual, memory and identity reinforcing the role of

sculpture not only as a static form but also as an active participant in the preservation and promotion of *Akogo* in the Iteso community.

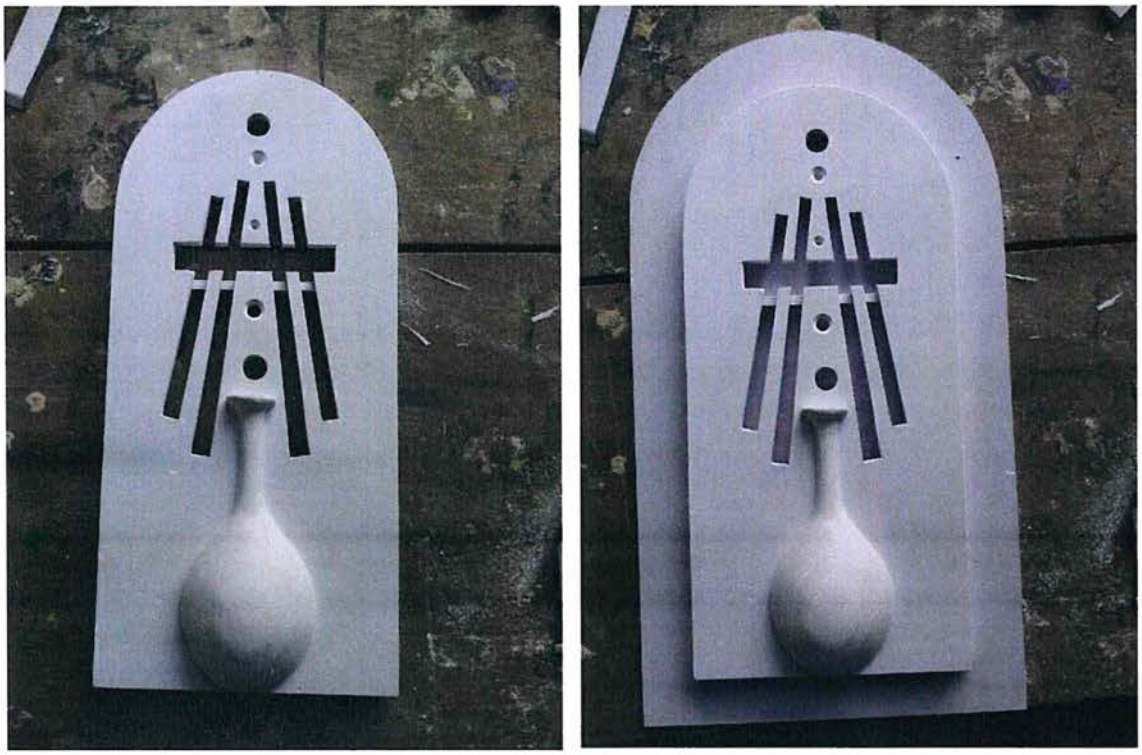


Figure 31: A photo collage of the development stages of the right hand section of the photo booth.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 32: An almost complete right hand section of the photo booth

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.

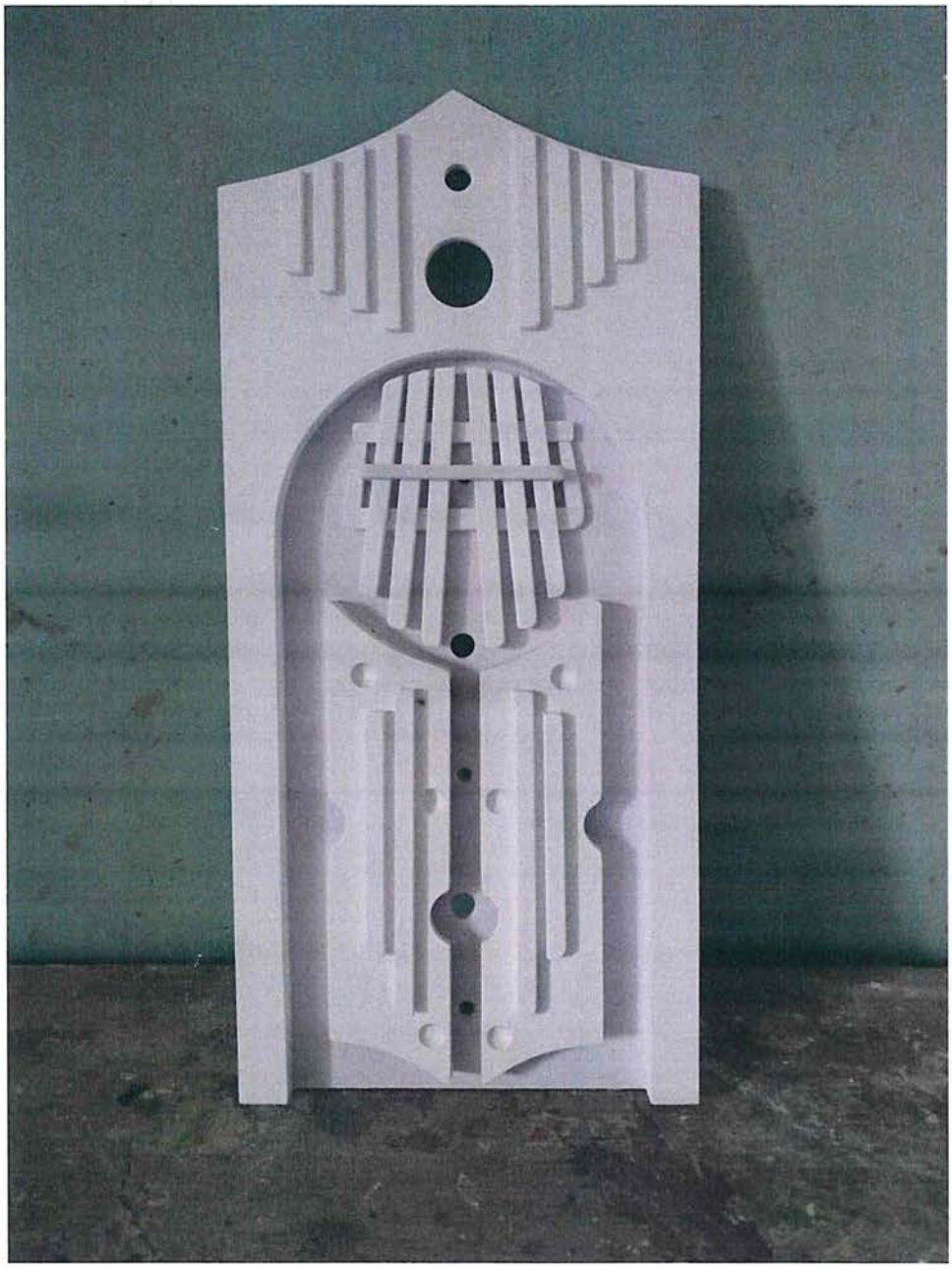


Figure 33: The left hand section of the photo booth

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 34: An *Akogo*-shaped base of the left-hand section of the photo booth

Media: Foam board and super glue. Dimensions: 20 cm x 23.5 cm

Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 35: The researcher assembling the detachable bases with the photo booth stands.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 36: A photo showing a fully assembled photo booth with both the left and right sections.

Media: Foam board and super glue. Dimensions: 15 cm x 13.5 cm x5 cm (for each unit)

Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 37: The photo booth sections sitting on either side of the gazebo.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.

4.5.7 The Bridal Throne/ Love Seat

In contemporary and traditional marriage ceremonies alike, the bridal throne, also known as the sweetheart chair, love seat or king and queen chair, serves as a focal element where the newlywed couple is formally seated during the entirety of the celebration. This chair is not only functional but also greatly symbolic, representing honour, unity and the couple's elevated status having transitioned into married life. It must be noted that in traditional settings, marriages are held with high regard enabling the couple to enjoy certain privileges in society.

Essentially, the bridal throne ought to be adorned with culturally significant motifs and materials that reflect community identity and heritage. However, the current bridal thrones used in the Iteso cultural marriage ceremonies while aesthetically appealing are devoid of the Iteso cultural

identity. Therefore, within this study, the bridal throne has been reimagined as a functional sculpture inspired by *Akogo* (Figures 38-41), thereby embedding local cultural aesthetics into matrimonial settings. This sculpture essentially features a negative pattern of the tines, bridge and sound holes placed symmetrically within a three part panel shaped like the front face of the *Akogo* instrument. The sides feature a flat plane with and inward curve below a circular sound hole. The front feature twin inward curves just below a dual partitioned cushion.

Above the cushion are two smoothly curved rectangular pillows placed on the sides and back to provide a sense of comfort. This approach allows the *Akogo*-inspired sculpture to serve both ceremonial and cultural storytelling purposes by integrating utility and symbolism. As Oyelola (2018) emphasises, functional art within the African societies - including Iteso – often transcends mere decoration, thereby becoming an active participant in ritual and social cohesion. Therefore, the *Akogo*-inspired love seat reflects more than just an artistic experimentation but also a reconceptualisation of the traditional forms to suit the modern ceremonial needs. It is through this success that the relevance of *Akogo* is sustained and promoted among the current and future generations of the Iteso.

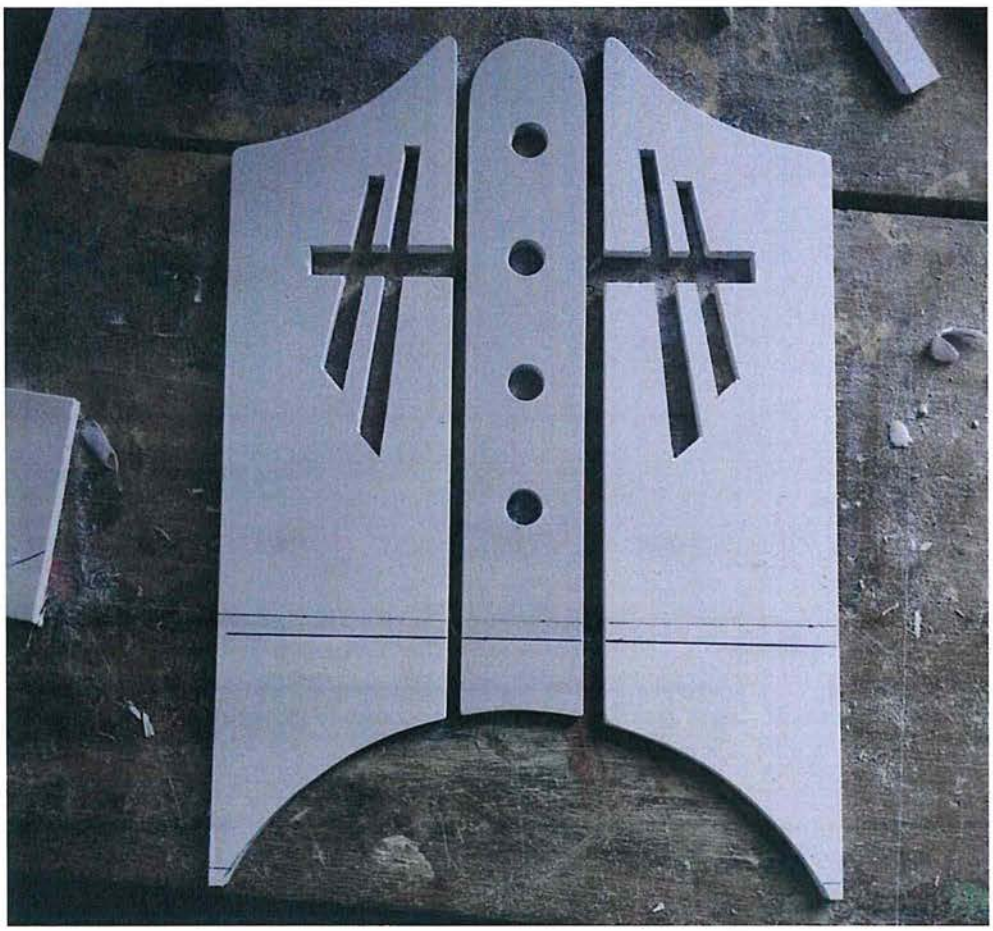


Figure 38: The back section of the bridal throne/ love seat.

Media: Foam board.

Source: Researcher 2025.

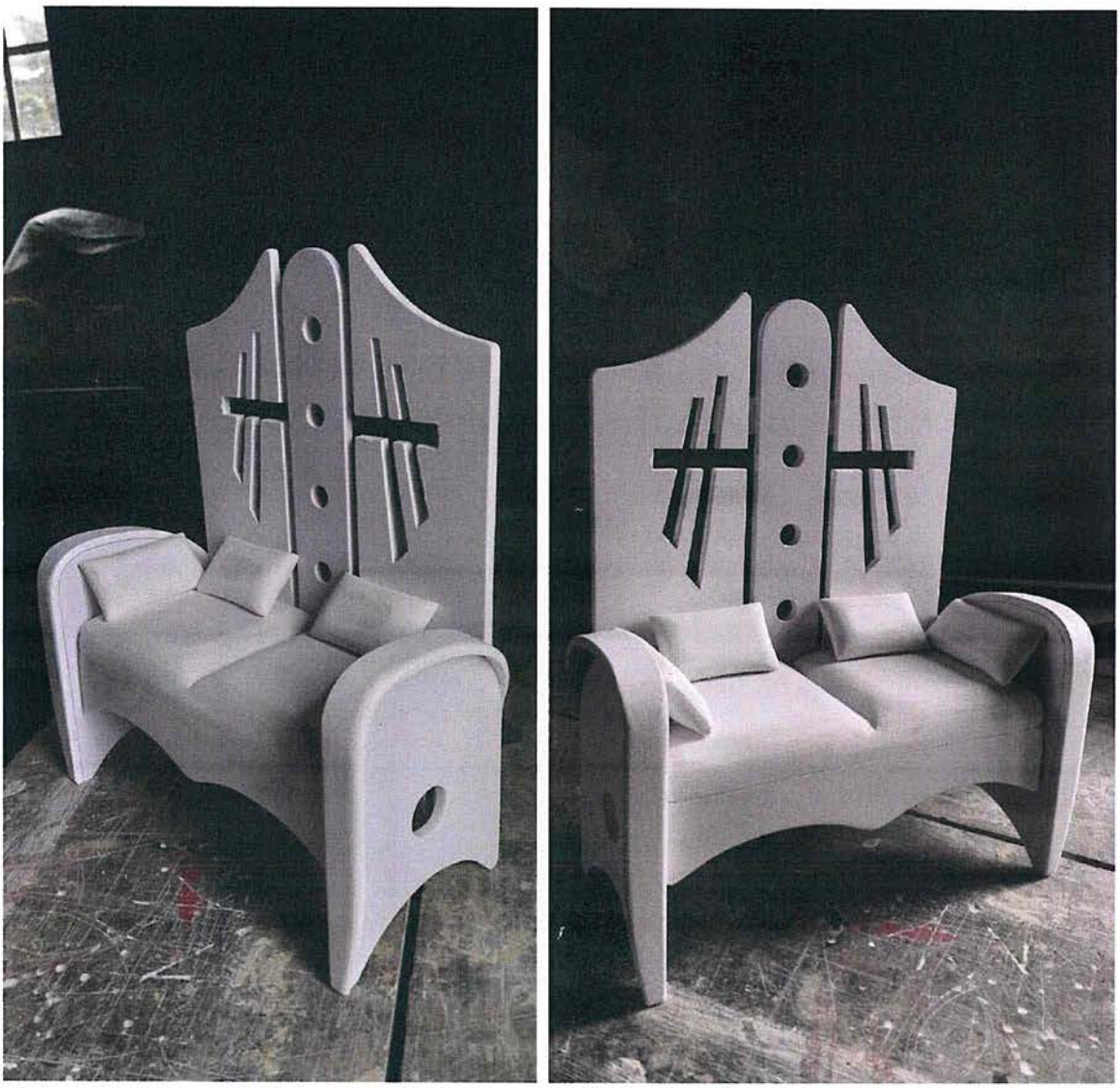


Figure 39: A photo collage showing three quarter views of the bridal throne captured front different front angles.

Media: Foam board and super glue. Dimensions: 18.5 cm x 9.5 cm x 24 cm

Source: Researcher 2025.

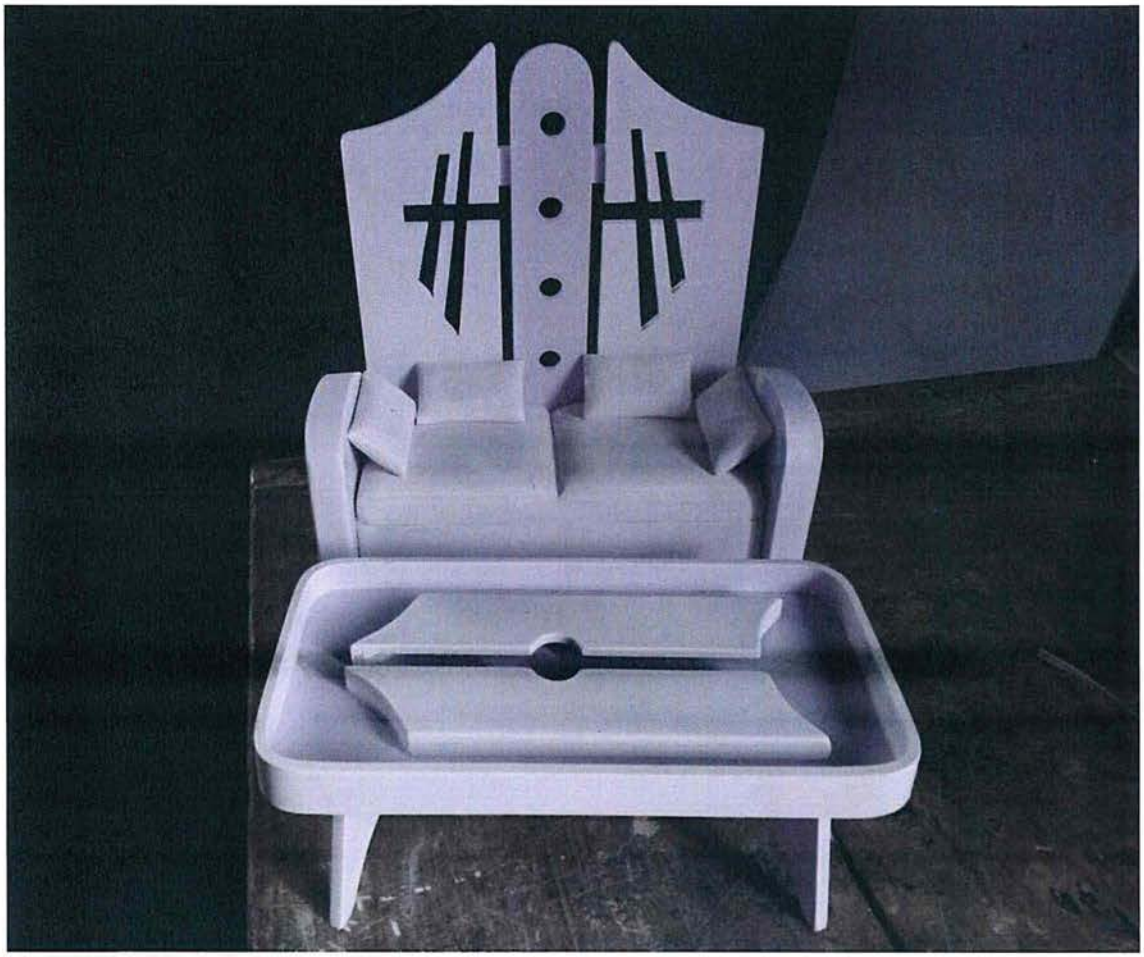


Figure 40: An aerial view of the bridal throne and the bridal table taken from the front.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.

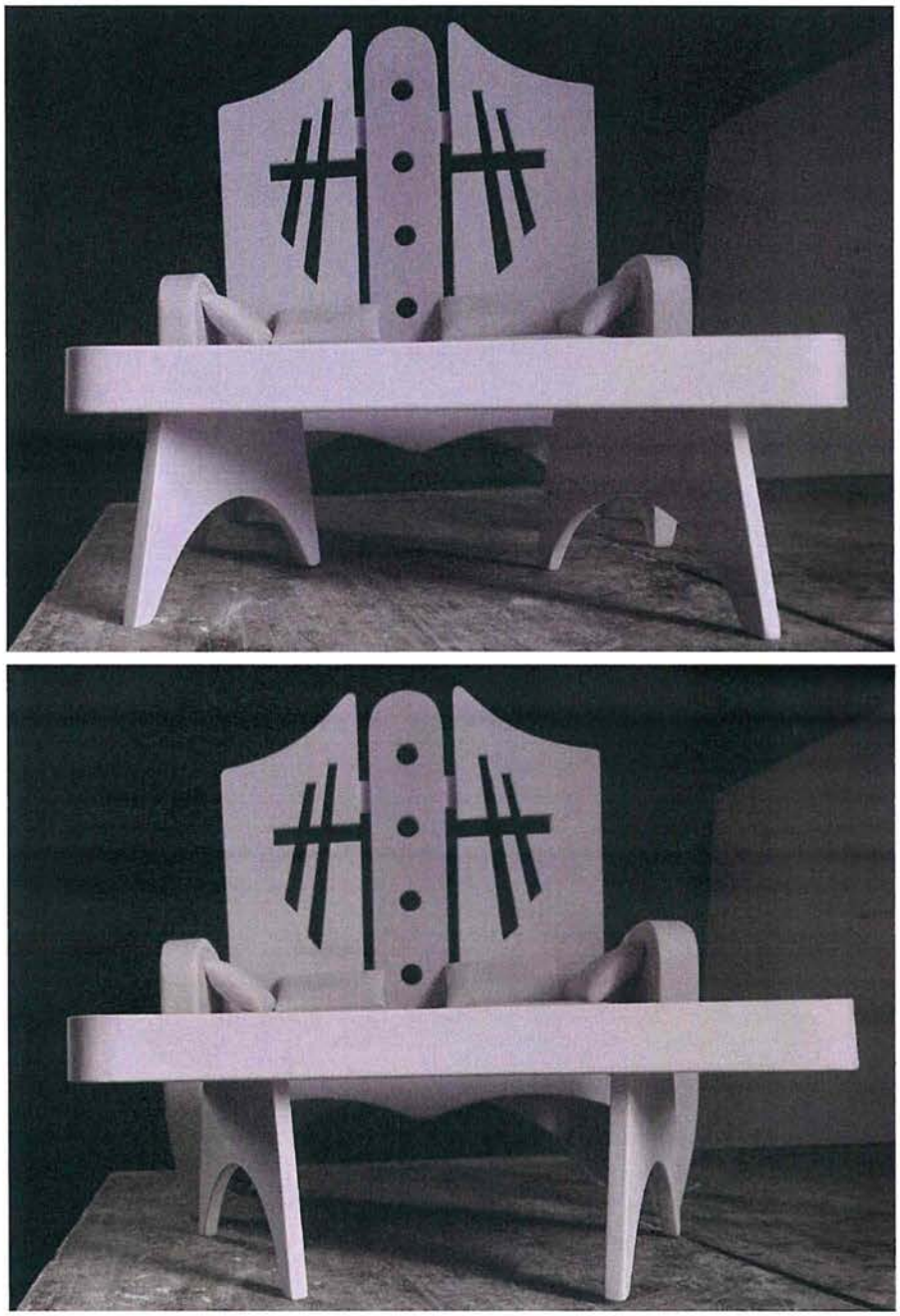


Figure 41: A photo collage of the bridal throne/love seat with the table taken from the opposite sides.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.

4.5.8. The guest chairs

Among the Iteso people (Kumi residents) chairs are not just functional hardware but also serve as a sign of hospitality, respect and communal participation. When planning for a traditional ceremony such a traditional wedding, the host must ensure the chairs exceed the expected number of guests. Creating *Akogo*-inspired guest chairs (Figures 42-43) became a necessary component of this research study as it made an important way of combining the elements of *Akogo* with everyday functional objects within the cultural marriage ceremony. By components such as the tines, the sound holes and the curves, the chair has been transformed into a sculptural embodiment of cultural pride and identity. It is a practical way of celebrating and preserving the place of *Akogo*.

These chairs also serve as educational tools able to communicate the significance of *Akogo* to both the Iteso and non-Iteso audiences. By creatively reimagining and reinterpreting the *Akogo* in this manner, the researcher reaffirms the validity and efficiency of functional sculpture as a viable form of cultural preservation and community story telling. This reinforces the argument that utilitarian objects can serves as vessels of pride, identity and heritage. This view is supported by Nettleton (2007) who argues that chairs, as design objects can serve as cultural bearers when integrated with indigenous cultural references.



Figure 42: Different stages of the chair construction/ making

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 43: A mock-up arrangement of the guest chairs around one of the tables.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.

4.5.9 The tables

Like many other Iteso cultural ceremonies, traditional marriages are events for celebration and merry making. The community not only celebrates the foundation of a new family unit but also the establishment of new relations and friendship that the union brings to both families, clans and the entire fraternity of acquaintances and associations. Therefore, in such events, plenty of cultural foods and drinks are served and enjoyed by the guests. There is a common statement among the Iteso that "a party without meat and alcohol is no party".

Creating *Akogo*-inspired tables (Figures 55-61) in this study was a deliberate attempt to merge cultural symbolism with functionality within the context of Iteso traditional marriage rites. Like *Akogo* used to be traditionally, today tables are an integral part of social gatherings among the Iteso people serving the practical function of supporting food, beverages, gifts and other ceremonial items. Through studio-based artistic practice and experimentation, the tables were transformed into sculptural works that commemorate the physical structure of *Akogo*. The design process integrated the symmetric arrangement of the tines, the resonator box, the flat and curved planes and the varied sound holes to inspire the overall form and surface decoration.

These tables do not just provide usability during the Iteso marriage ceremonies, they also embody the highly treasured values of community, rhythm and balance which are essential components of the Iteso social customs. Through the relief carvings the tables have become bearers of the intangible cultural heritage able to resonate with both the older and the younger generations enabling continuity of tradition and fostering dialogue in an innovative way. The glass top and fine finishing fuses together contemporary aesthetics with cultural meaning. Through this project, the researcher has demonstrated the effectiveness of sculpture in preserving intangible cultural values through innovatively created physical usable forms.



Figure 44: A photo collage of the aerial and side views of the rectangular table concept with semi circular sides.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Dimensions: 13 cm x 12 cm x 28 cm

Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 45: A photo collage of Concept 1 of the round table taken from different angles.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Dimensions: 17 cm x 13 cm

Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 46: A photo collage of Concept 2 of the round tables taken from different angles.
Media: Foam board and super glue. Dimensions: 17 cm x 13 cm
Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 47: A stack of concepts 1, 2 & 3 of the guest tables.
Media: Foam board and super glue.
Source: Researcher 2025.

Concept 4 (Figures 44-50) of the guest tables is created to be a multipurpose table concept. With its structure created to mimic the resonator box of the *Akogo* traditional musical instrument, the table also features two circular holes at the sides inspired by the *Akogo* sound holes. Two drawers are included created to serve as storage units in which the actual *Akogo* instruments can be stored. In the event of excitement from the proceedings of the function, the guests can be

encouraged to play the instruments for fun as an attempt to promote musical skills and tradition among the Iteso and any other available guests.

On the top are carvings of the calabash, popularly known among the Iteso as *Adere,* a legendary traditional container obtained by cutting a mature dry gourd vertically. This *Adere* is a common sight in traditional marriages. Previously used for serving water, medicine, millet porridge, and *Ajon,* a local alcoholic drink obtained from fermented millet flour, the container is now only popular for serving alcohol and as decoration. Its inclusion in the setup is to remind the audience of the articles that accompanied *Akogo* music in functions. Carvings of the water pot, also used for both brewing and serving alcohol are also included in the setup. The table therefore, serves more than a mere symbolic role, transforming itself as a custodian/ carrier of the musical heritage embedded within the instrument.



Figure 48: A photo collage of the early development stages of concept 4 of the guest table.

Media: Foam board and super glue

Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 49: The artist making finishes on concept 4 of the guest table.

Media: Foam board and super glue

Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 50: A photo collage of Table concept 4 taken from different angles.

Media: Foam board and super glue

Source: ***Researcher*** *2025*

4.5.10 The Marriage certificate frame

The Iteso Cultural Union (ICU) mandates clan heads, often referred to as Clan Chairmen to issue certificates of marriage to the newly culturally wedded couple as proof of the legality of their union. These certificates are usually issued by the clan of the bride. The issuance of the certificate also signifies completion of the requirements for that marriage including payment of the bride price and all the mandatory gifts as agreed at the time of discussion of such rites.

Including a marriage certificate (Figures 51-53) as part of a series of functional sculptures inspired by *Akogo* musical instrument is hinged on the desire to extend *Akogo*'s symbolism into all the visual and functional components of the Iteso traditional marriage ceremony. As a permanent legal and symbolic document for such a sacred union, this certificate deserves a frame that reflects deep cultural values and artistic heritage of the community. Utilising the elements and form of *Akogo* not only helps in preserving the instrument but also reinforce the role of indigenous art in both beautifying and dignifying marriage of the Iteso.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) argues that cultural artifacts become "heritage" when they are recontextualised in ways that meaningfully link the past to the present. Therefore, *Akogo*- currently purely a musical instrument- assumes an extended cultural relevance by evolving into a form that protects and highlights the legality and cultural reverence of marriage. This notion is also supported by Adejumo (2010)'s assertion that functional art rooted in cultural identity can be both contemporary and traditional; addressing modern needs while preserving cultural memory.

The fact that this frame serves as a sculptural artifact that will likely be retained, displayed, and cherished long after the ceremony makes it an ideal medium for cultural preservation and transmission enabling *Akogo* to transcend across generations. The symbolism embedded in the frame becomes part of the new family narrative which fosters pride in their cultural heritage and enables appreciation of the instrument. Therefore, the marriage frame is not created just as a decorative art form, but as visual cultural document of the Iteso identity, unity, and the evolving role of *Akogo* in the contemporary society.

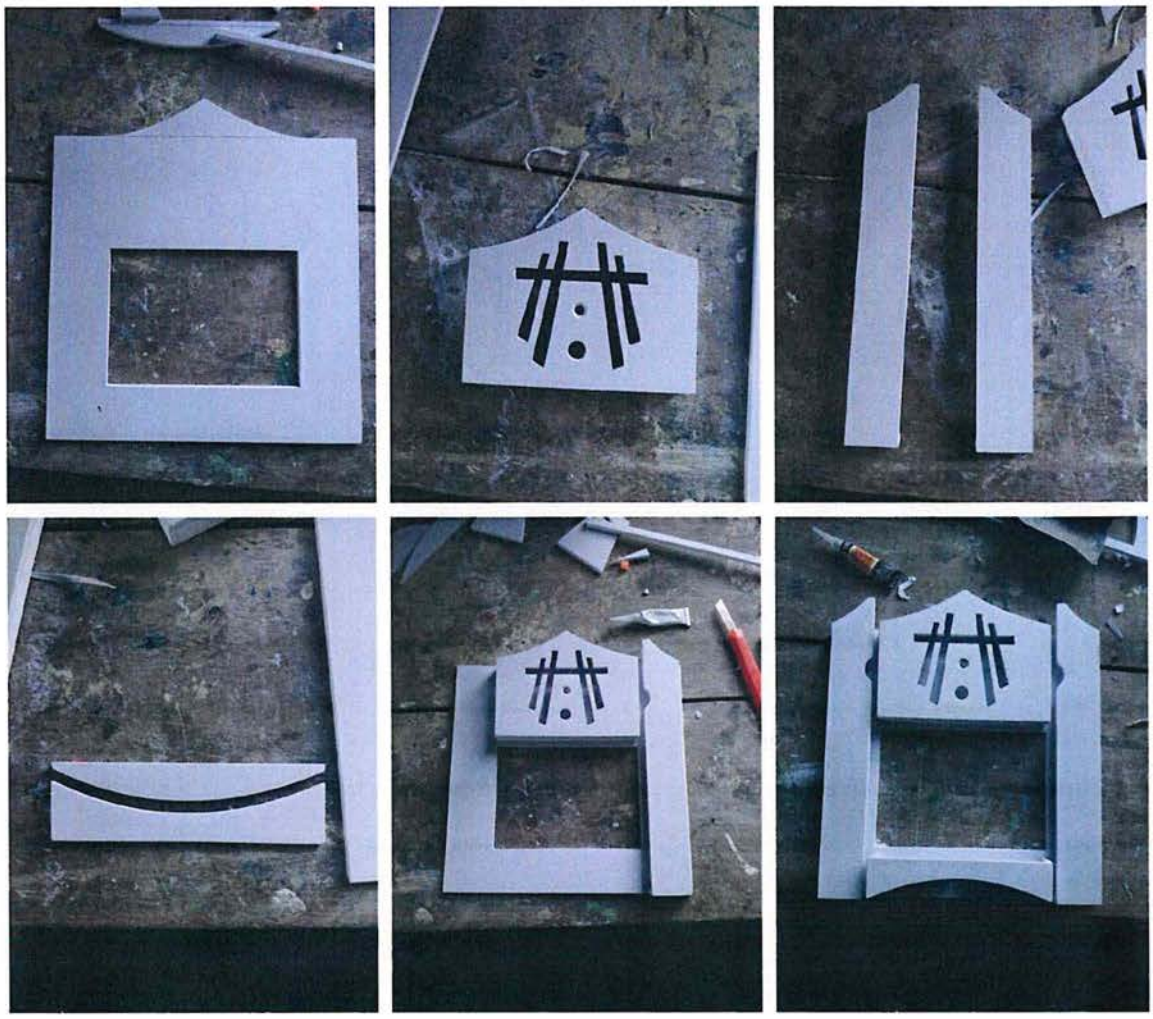


Figure 51: The Cultural certificate frame at different stages of construction.

Media: Foam board and super glue

Source: Researcher 2025

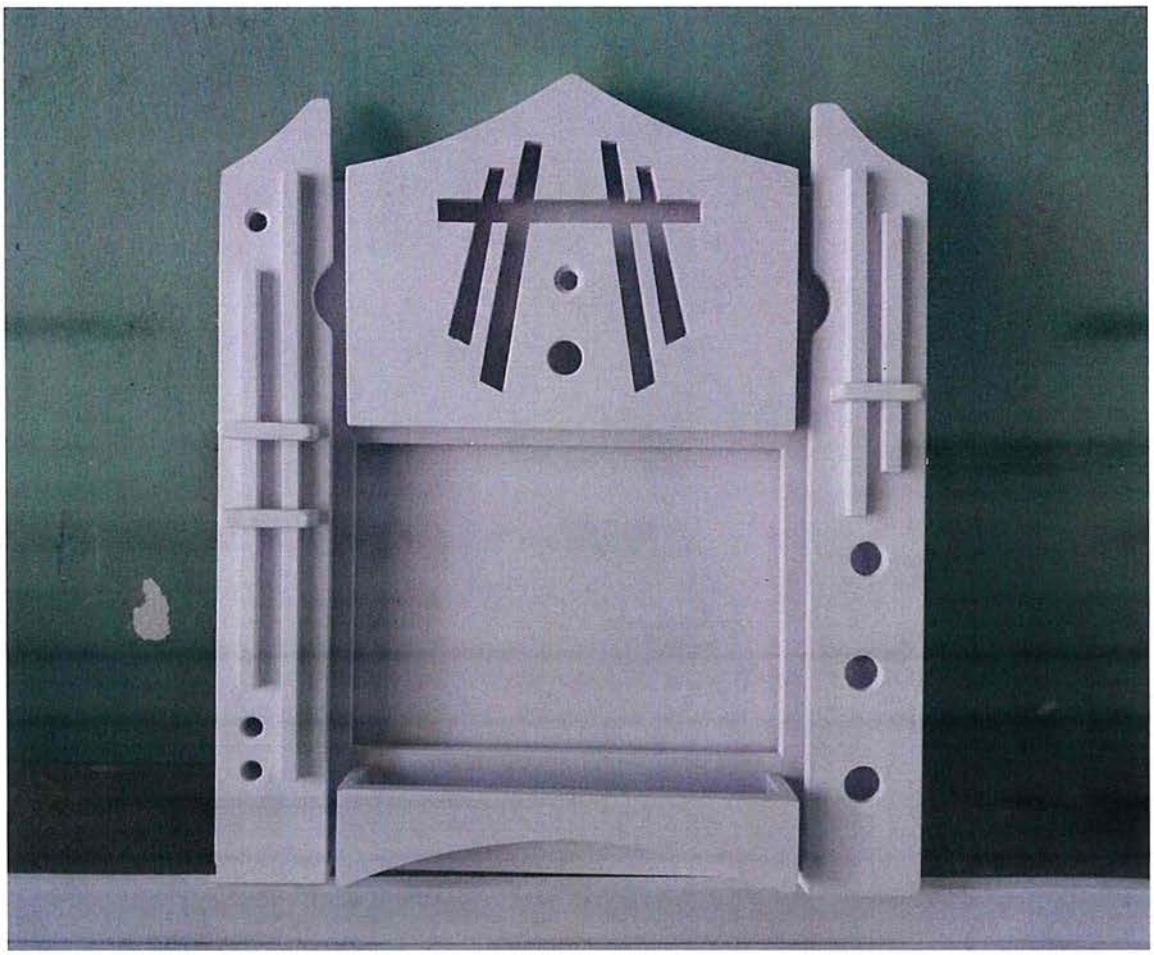


Figure 52: The final look of the photo frame sculptural concept.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.

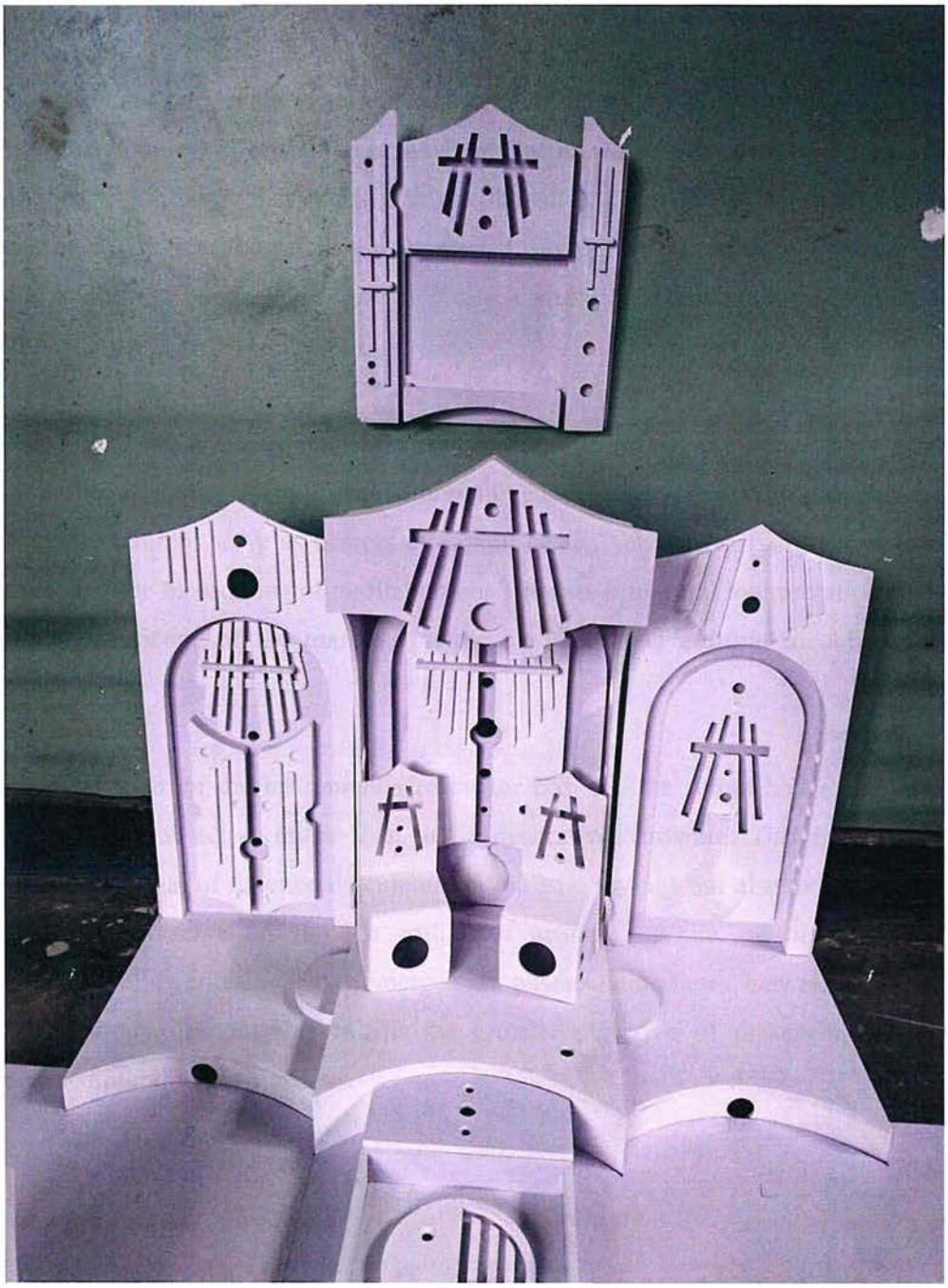


Figure 53: Certificate frame displayed above the gazebo and photo booth.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.

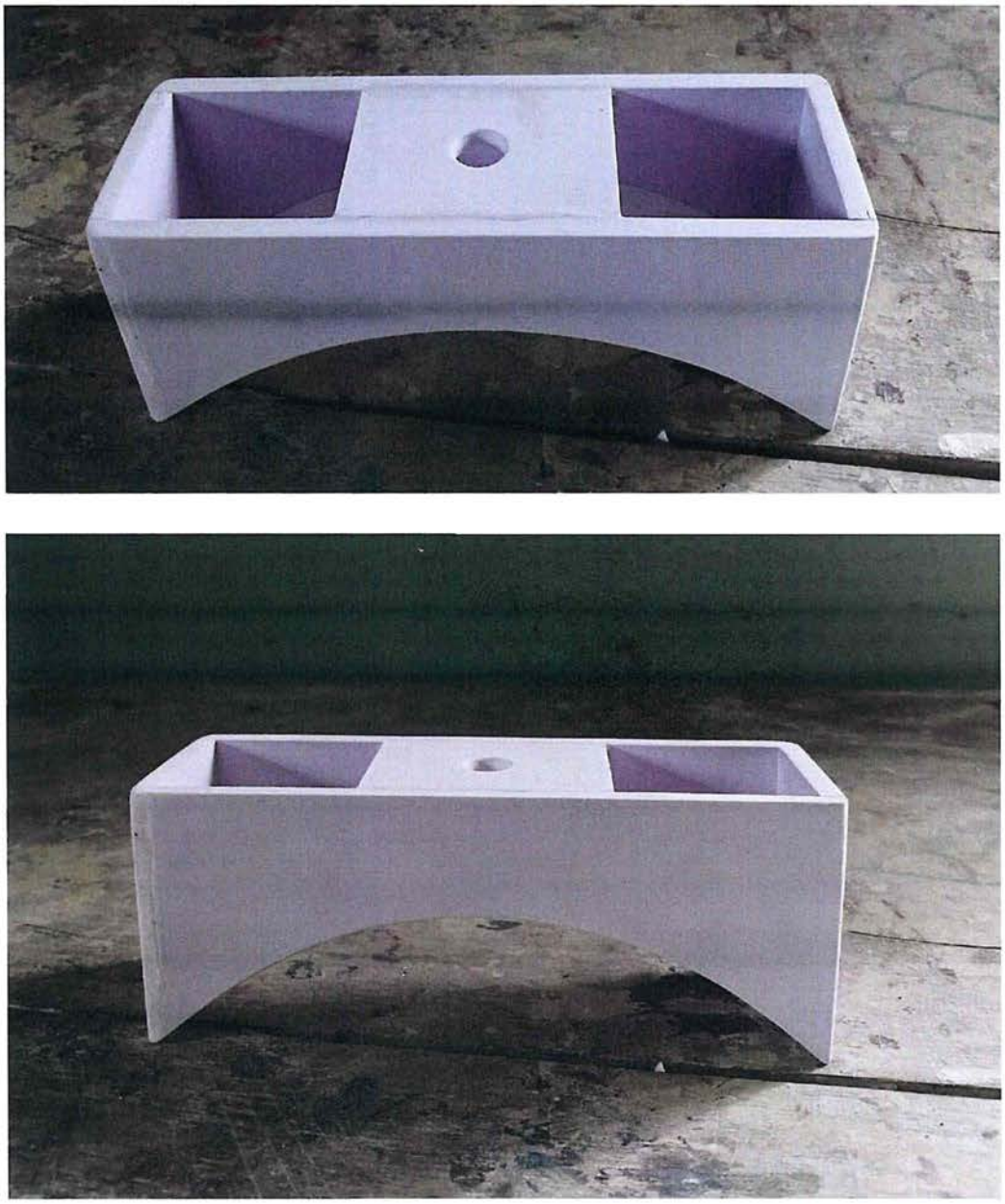


Figure 54: A photo collage of the flower vase concept taken from different angles.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.

4.6 Visual walk through the sculptural composition

This section (Figure 55-63) presents a photographic walkthrough of the entire sculptural composition featuring the design components such entry arch, the walkway, the gazebo, photo booth, the bridal throne, guest chairs and the flower vases. This is created to enable the reader to visually trace the aesthetic development, the spatial relationships, and the cultural narratives embedded in each of them. The vitality of this section is supported by McNiff (2013) who argues that images in art-based research serve both as data and as mediums of interpretation, especially when the research outcomes are physical and experiential in nature.

Therefore, this section serves as a tool for engagement and accessibility. This makes the research findings more relatable to the broader audience. Among these include educators, researchers, policy makers, culture enthusiasts, and other community stakeholders. This section enhances the communicative value of the study by putting together abstract cultural ideas into visual expressions thereby reinforcing the central goal of using functional sculpture to preserve and promote *Akogo* musical instrument of the Iteso.

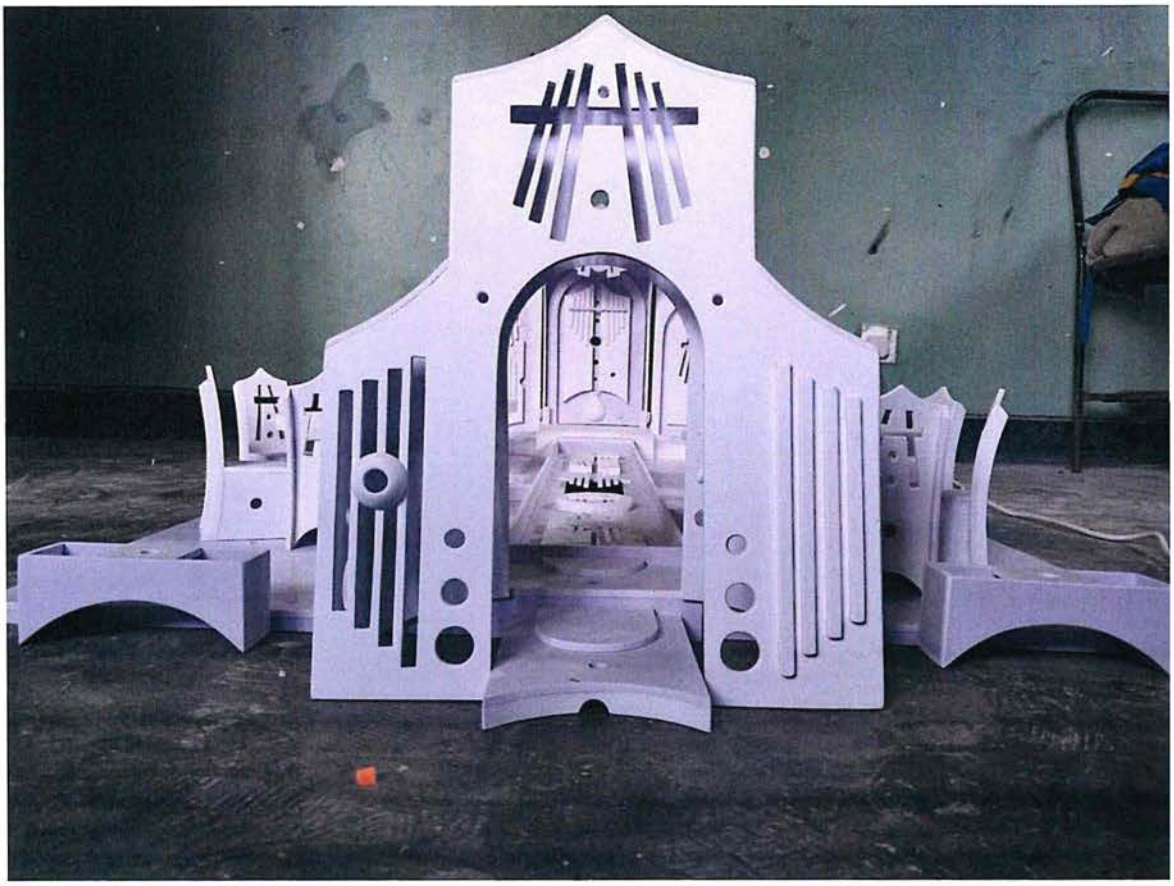


Figure 55: A photo showing the visual impression of the sculptural composition as viewed a short distance from the entry arch.

Media: Foam board and super glue.

Source: Researcher 2025.

Figure 55 (above), gives a realistic visual experience of the sculptural composition when viewed just outside the entry arch. The perspective provides the audience with a wide range of *Akogo* motifs and form creatively arranged to commemorate the iconic instrument. In this angle one is able to see the beautiful patterns of *Akogo* on the backdrop of the gazebo.

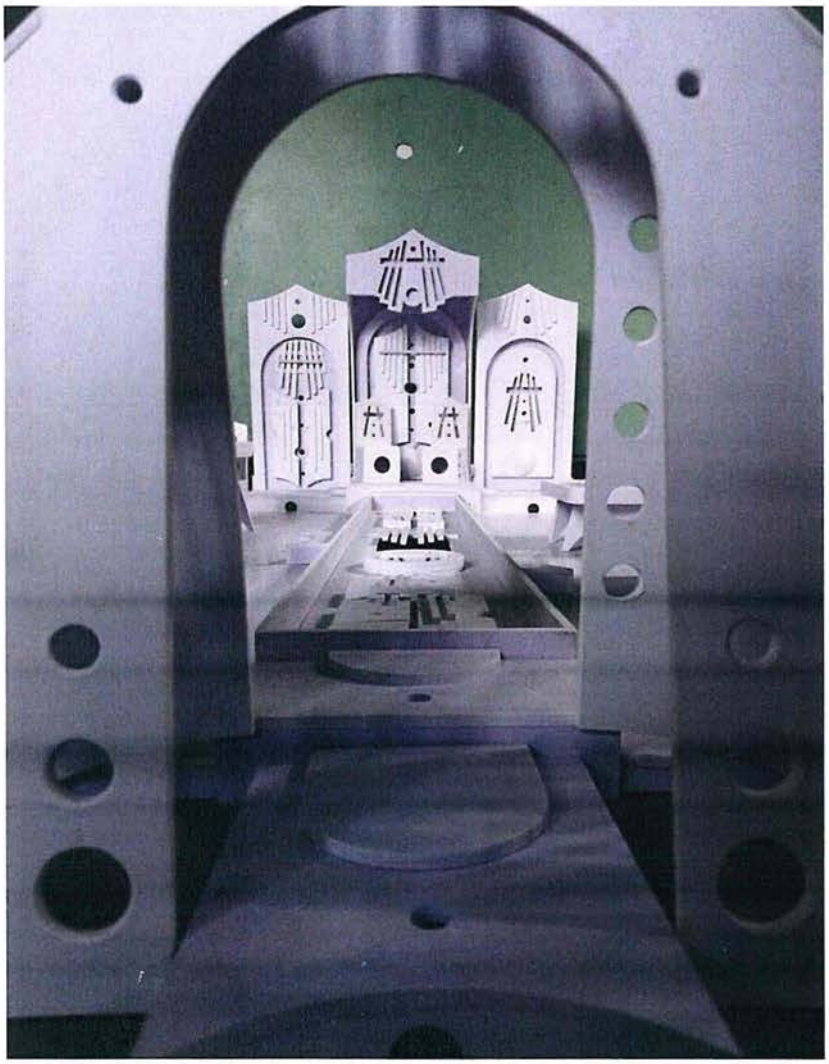


Figure 56: A view of the composition captured from the base of the stairs of the *entry arch.*

Source: Researcher 2025.

Figure 56 (above) and Figure 57 (below) are views taken from the entrance to the entry arch and the start of the walkway respectively. In varying degrees of clarity and proximity, the audience/ guests are presented with a complete view of the gazebo and the photo booth enabling them to appreciate the patterns of *Akogo* that dominate the installations. They also get a glimpse of the beautiful carvings on the walkway. The voids created by the sound holes (only visible through Figure 69) on the entry arch also give the viewer a glimpse of the tables and chairs.

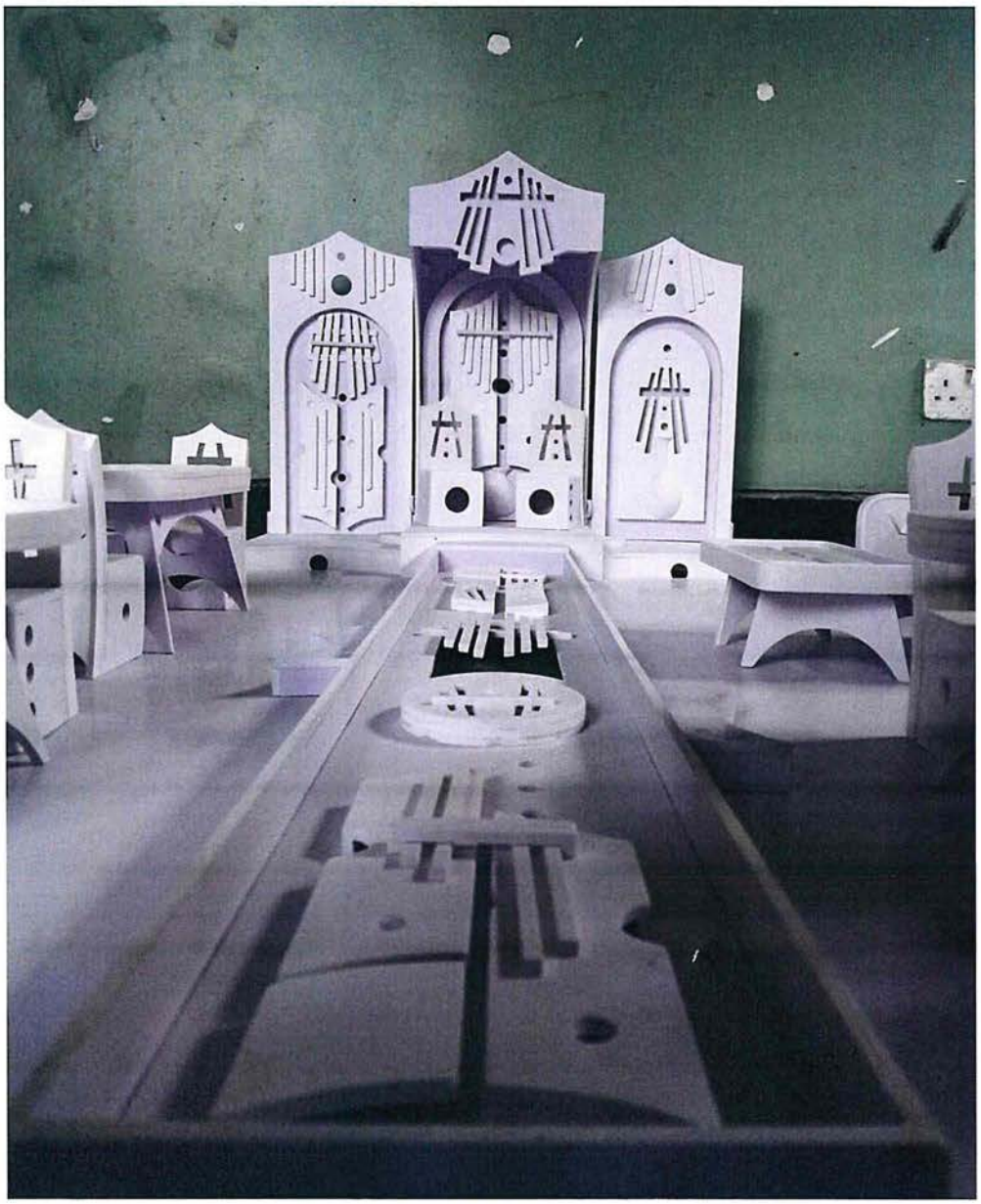


Figure 57: A view of the composition taken from inside the entry arch.

Source: Researcher 2025.

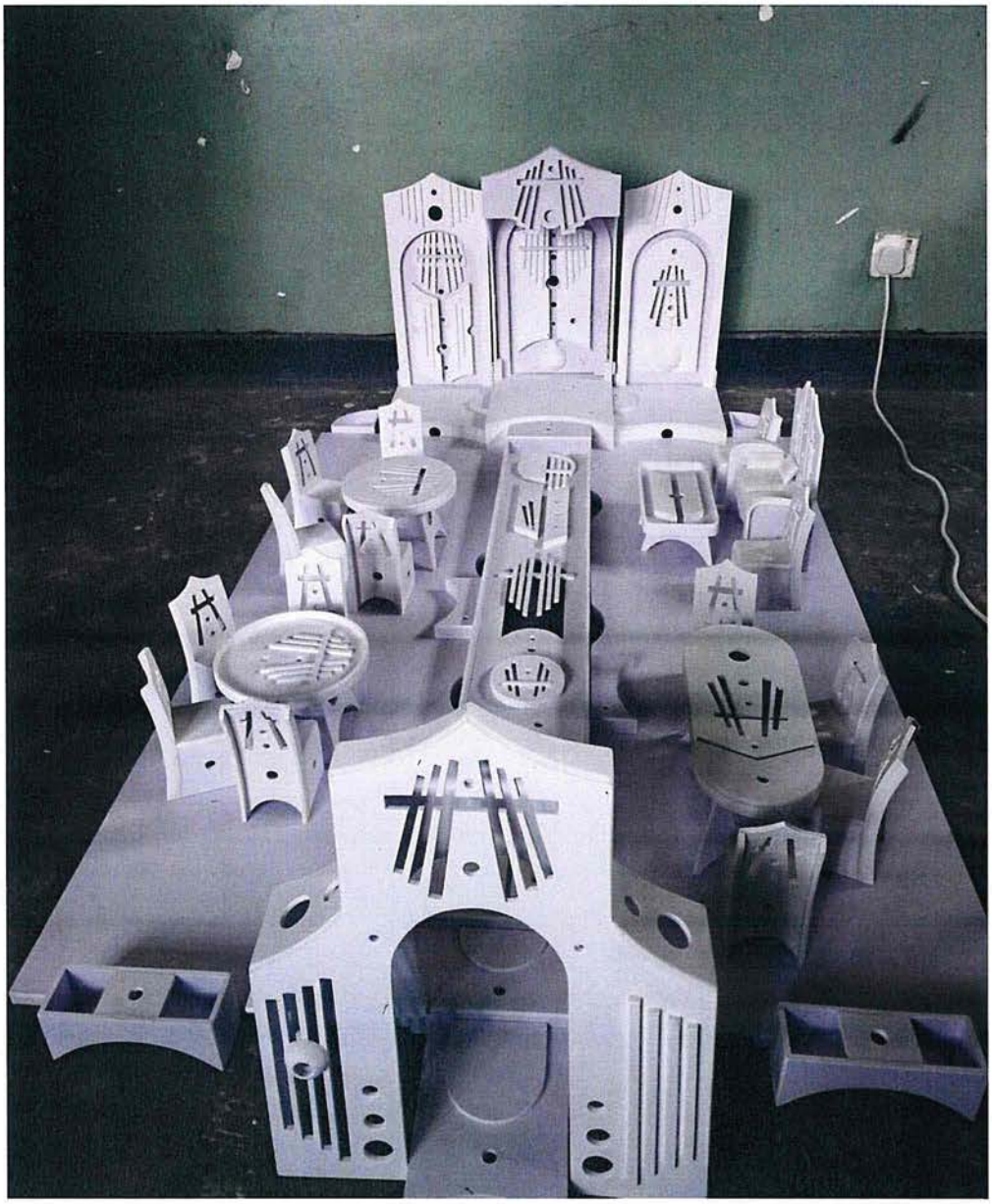


Figure 58: An aerial view of the composition taken from just above the entry arch
Source: Researcher 2025.

Figure 58 presents a close up of an aerial view of the composition taken just above the entry arch. Such a view of the real-life setting will be possible if taken by a drone. In this view the audience is presented with a beautiful arrangement of the varied shapes and forms of the *Akogo-*

inspired sculptural works. Such a view will be essential when doing the videography coverage using drones.



Figure 59: An aerial view of the composition taken from the left hand side of the setup.
Source: Researcher 2025.

In Figure 59 (above) and Figures 60-63 (below) the composition is shown in different views as viewed from above. The audience can appreciate the beauty of the different components of this setup providing a glimpse into the lived experience of such a work of creativity and innovation.

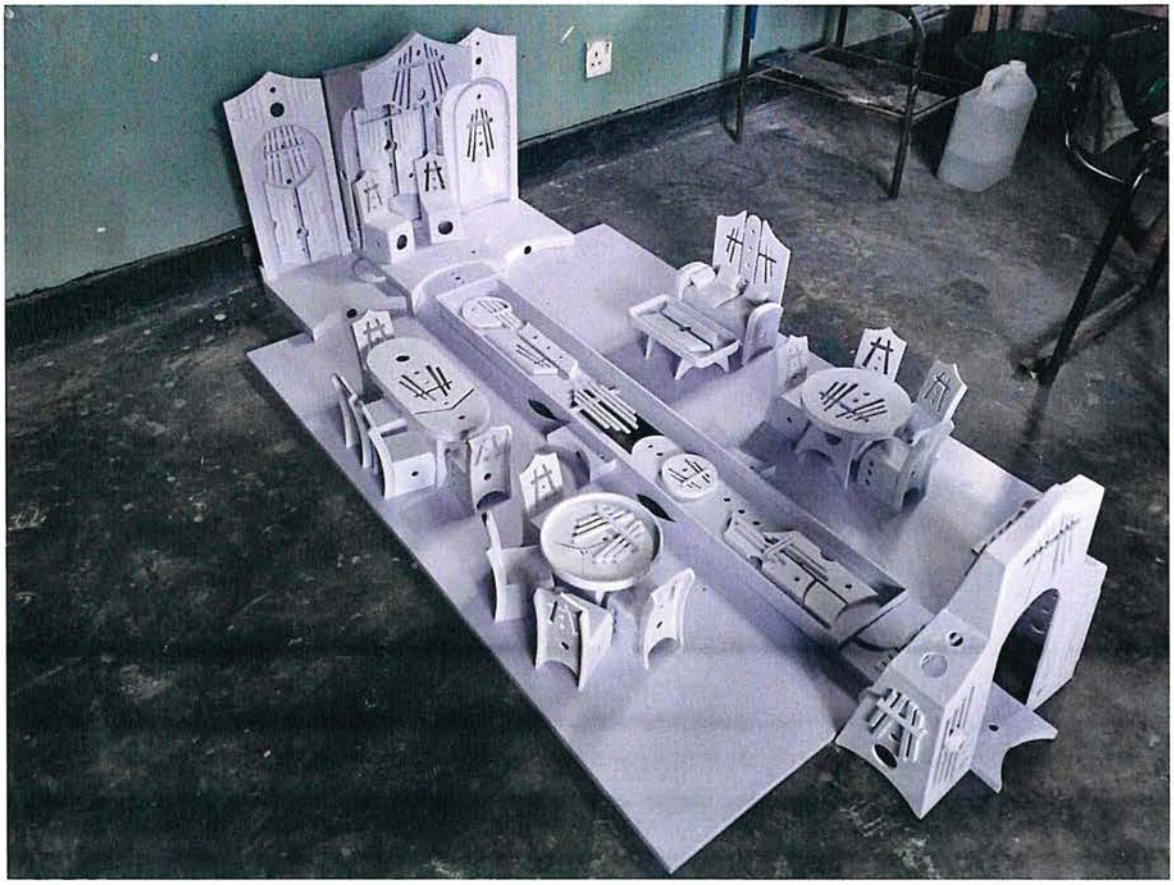


Figure 60: An aerial view of the composition taken above the front left corner of the setup.
Source: Researcher 2025.



Figure 61: An aerial view of the composition taken above the front right corner of the setup.

Source: Researcher 2025.

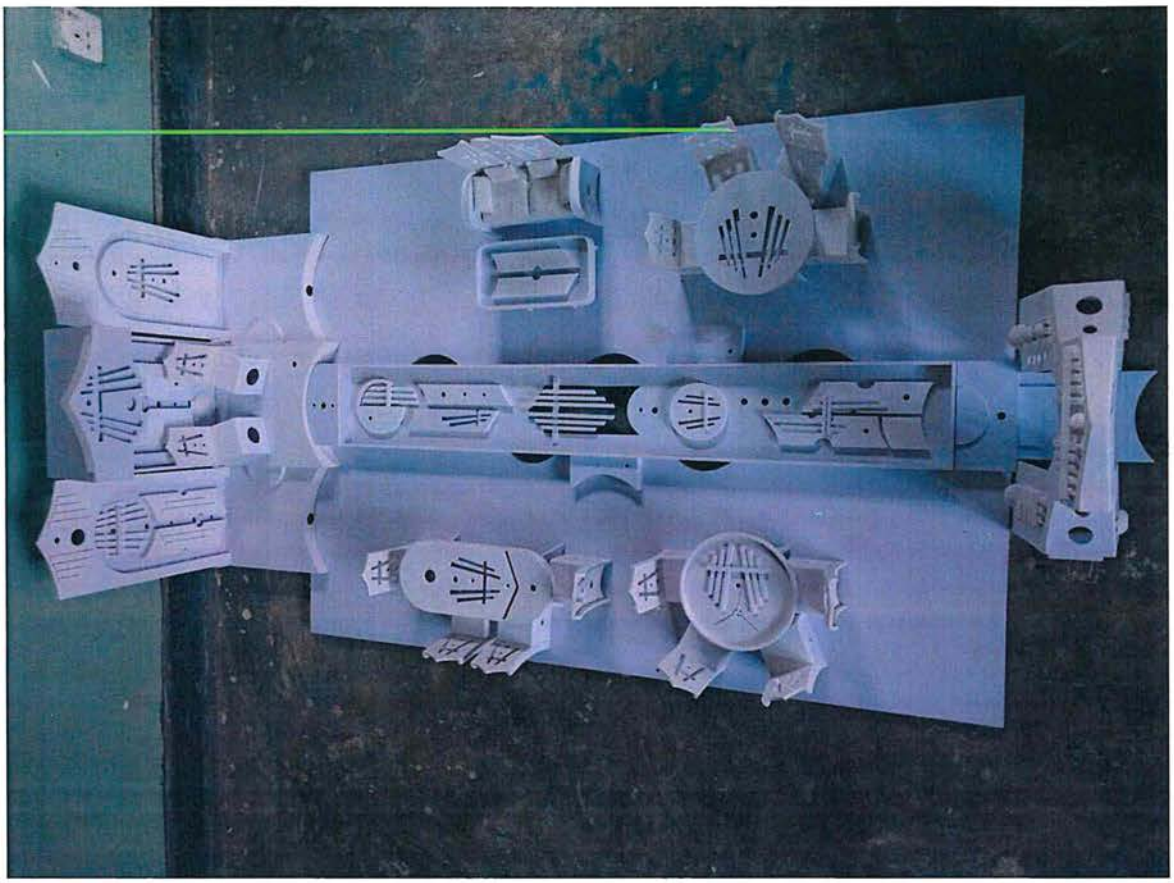


Figure 62: An aerial view of the composition taken from above the setup.

Source: Researcher 2025.

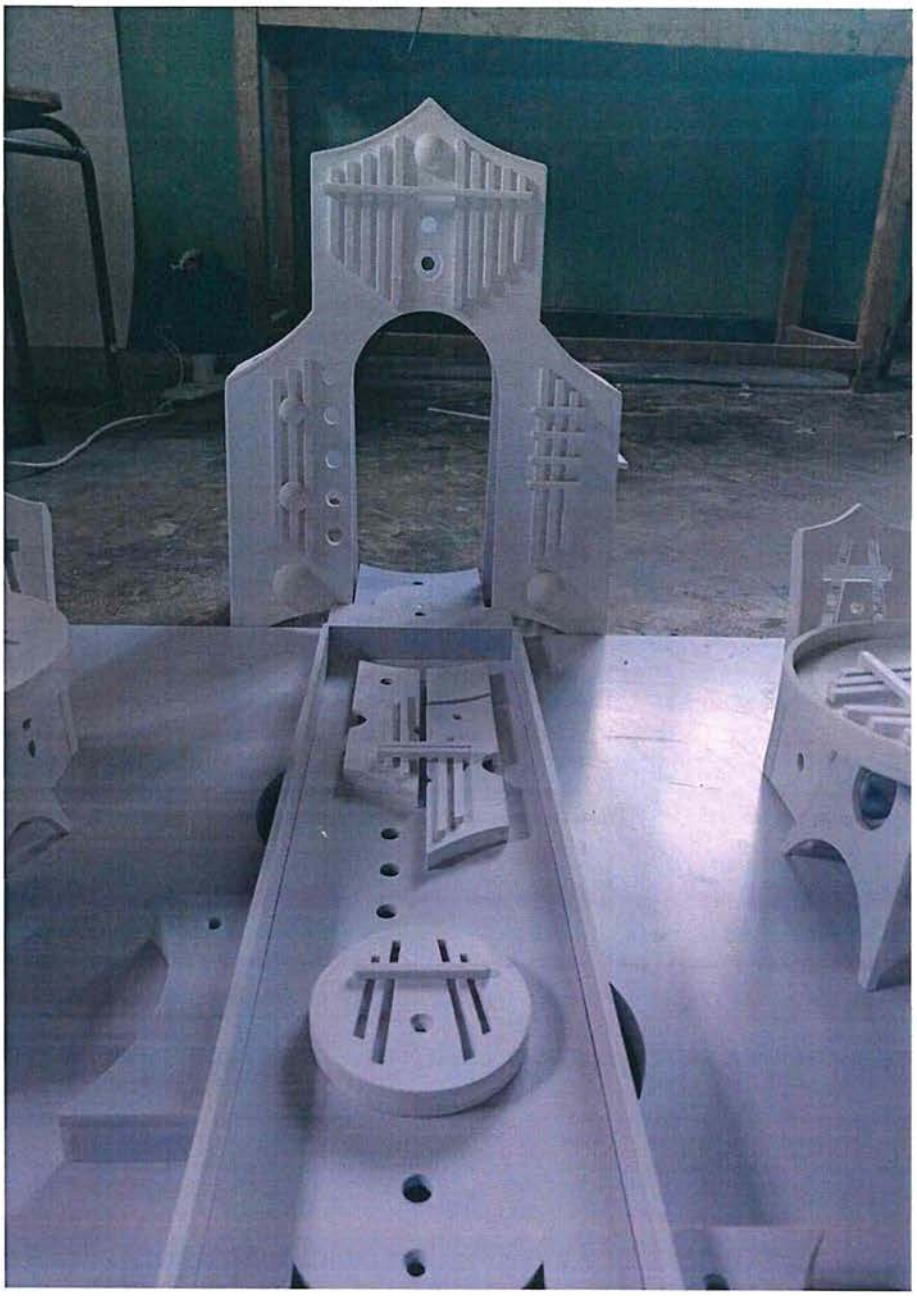


Figure 63: A view of the entry arch taken from the walkway.

Source: Researcher 2025.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Overview

This chapter presents a summary of the findings of this study, draws conclusions and gives recommendations on the preservation of *Akogo* traditional musical instrument of the Iteso community through functional sculpture to reignite interest and inspire innovation. This is structured in relation to the key objectives of this study which included examining the historical relevance of *Akogo* among the Iteso (Kumi District), analysing the existing designs of this instrument and henceforth producing innovative functional sculptural designs inspired by *Akogo* capable of renewing interest and inspire innovation among current and future generations.

5.1 Summary

The study established that *Akogo* musical instrument was more than a mere sound production instrument but rather it is a vessel through which the Iteso community expressed love, unity, togetherness and that it was useful in the modeling of the community members on social and individual responsibility, peace and harmony, including performing an entertainment function. Over the years it transformed into a powerful cultural symbol that brought pride to the community of Iteso before and even now when its use has been relegated to occasional cameos in ceremonies. The study equally established that whereas a handful of artists such as Orhon (2022) and Mayanja (2015) have utilised *Akogo* in the production of paintings and drawings respectively, no known research study had explored sculpture as a medium for preservation.

The study further established that the traditional *Akogo* musical instrument bore a great wealth of distinctive features such as the symmetrically arranged multi-sized tines, the curved forms and sound holes and symbolism that can inform and inspire modern innovations in many design fields. However, the investigation also observed that whereas there still exist, a handful of craftsmen who produce the *Akogo* instruments, there is significant erosion of the design signature of the instrument which has far reaching consequences on the material culture of the Iteso with

modern *Akogo* production mechanisms only emphasising function than design. It became evident that mentorship programs in relation to *Akogo* production were non-existent.

In relation to the use of sculpture as a medium for reinterpreting *Akogo* musical instrument to create functional works, the study established that sculpture provided numerous possibilities of transforming the instrument into several modern relatable products that will not only preserve the instrument but also inspire innovation and technological development. Through products such as gazebos, entry arches, photo booth, and others the study noted that through creative mechanisms, it was possible to reignite interest and foster love of tradition by making it fit into the contemporary needs and aspirations. Foam board was utilised as the major material for the production of the resultant functional sculptures. The choice of this material was influenced by its structural similarity with wood that forms the basic material for *Akogo* production. Different panels were joined using superglue as the major adhesive. Other materials used included acrylic spray paint and transparent acrylic boards as a practical substitute to glass.

The participants showed great enthusiasm in engaging and participating in the production of the functional sculptures describing them as phenomenal creations that not only preserve the instrument but also market the culture of the Iteso among other communities. They expressed optimism in the potential of the works in reinvigorating the desire and love for cultural endowments. The study established that in a time when culture is at war with modernity, innovative artistic practice grounded on cultural values can create a bridge that ensures coexistence between innovation and tradition fostering cultural continuity.

5.2 Conclusion

Through rigorous field research, it is evident that *Akogo* is at the risk of cultural neglect which could lead to its physical extinction even as it remains a potent emblem of Iteso identity and heritage. Through the studio exploration into the use of sculpture as a medium of reinterpretation through innovation, this study concludes that sculpture, if pivoted in cultural knowledge and explored through well guided studio practice, serves as a viable medium for not only preserving but also promoting *Akogo's* legacy. The *Akogo*-inspired functional sculptural compositions created as a setup for traditional marriage ceremonies represent a harmonious dialogue of function, form and cultural meaning and memory.

Whereas the Iteso traditional marriage ceremonies were used as a practical context for the development of these works, a similar concept can be transferred to other communities that have artifacts facing similar and related threats such as the *Akogo* traditional musical instrument of the Iteso. The use of the Design-Based Research (DBR) design allowed the artist to innovate while staying responsive to cultural authenticity and user needs. By combining in-depth interviews, observation, critiques and studio experimentation, the research design supported and informed the creative process by integrating cultural research with artistic practice.

Interviews and observation generated cultural and aesthetic insights from the *Akogo,* which were explored through material experimentation in the studio. Critiques facilitated reflection and refinement. This iterative process enabled the translation of *Akogo*'s symbolic and rhythmic qualities into functional sculptural objects such as the gazebo, entry arch, walkway, guest and bridal chairs and tables, the certificate frame and the flower vases that embody and reflect the cultural identity of the Iteso within contemporary social and environmental spaces.

5.3 Recommendations

Policy makers, including the Iteso Cultural Union (ICU), ought to promote and fund art-based research including public art initiatives especially those that integrate traditional heritage into contemporary/ modern practices. There was also need to support and promote platforms where artists can engage with local cultures in innovative ways. This is possible by realising that tradition is not a relic that should be discarded or ignored but rather a resource that can be exploited for development.

The scholarly community including universities should encourage interdisciplinary investigation that bridges studio experimentation with cultural studies. This should include documentation and analysis of local artistic practices that contribute to cultural preservation.

Artists and craftsmen should continue to explore indigenous instruments and artifacts as viable sources of inspiration for new creative expressions that resonate with the contemporary audience and needs. Functional sculpture provides a path for merging aesthetic value with cultural relevance.

The general community should embrace contemporary forms of cultural expression as valid and relevant continuations of tradition. It is important to know that culture is not static but rather an ever evolving experience. Therefore innovation and tradition can coexist rather than be in conflict.

5.4 Suggestions for Dissemination and Further Research

To ensure that the outcomes of this research are both academically impactful and socially meaningful, the researcher proposes a multifaceted dissemination strategy. Academically, the work can be shared through university repositories, peer-reviewed journals, conference presentations, post-graduate theses, and curated exhibitions. Community and cultural engagement will be fostered through public art installations, interactive workshops, artist talks, and local exhibitions that invite dialogue and participation. Digitally, the project may be extended via documentary film, online galleries or digital archives, and cultural tourism initiatives developed through strategic collaborations. At the policy and institutional level, dissemination will include policy briefs directed to bodies such as the Iteso Cultural Union (ICU) and the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, alongside partnerships with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and cultural foundations to influence practice and support sustainable cultural development.

It should be recognized that culture is continually evolving in response to social interactions, technological changes and shifting human needs. Therefore, they borrow and blend new ideas, beliefs and practices. Innovations such as digital technology, global media, and modern education also reshape how communities live, celebrate and express identity. Because of this there is need to continuously understand instruments, artworks and symbols communities use to identify and express themselves. On this account, the researcher proposes further research to focus on:

1. Comparative studies between the *Akogo* and other African lamellaphones, such as the Mbira, Sanza, Likembe, and Kalimba, which can potentially create a more robust information pool necessary for their preservation and promotion across the region, which aligns with broader frameworks like the EAC Vision 2050 and AU Agenda 2063.

2. Exploration into material innovation in cultural preservation, particularly the use of modern and traditional woods and polymers, which can contribute to sustainable art practices capable of bolstering creative industries in line with SDG 12.
3. Digital documentation and virtual preservation techniques, including 3d scanning, augmented reality (AR) and virtual exhibitions which present promising avenues for enhancing accessibility and safeguarding intangible heritage. Additionally, artistic reinterpretation of traditional instruments can serve as a powerful tool for cross generational knowledge transmission, fostering intergenerational dialogue and renewed appreciation of indigenous musical traditions.

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APPENDIX 2: INTRODUCTION LETTER FROM DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH

KYAMBOGO UNIVERSITY
P. O. BOX 1 KYAMBOGO
Tel: 041 - 4286792 Fax: 256-41-220464
Website :www.kyu.ac.ug Email: drgt@kyu.ac.ug
Directorate of Research and Graduate Training
Office of the Director

APPENDIX 8: INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Date: 05/5/2025

The Chief Administrative Officer,
Kumi District Local Government

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: ASEETE FRANCIS

This is to introduce to you the above named student Reg: No **23/U/GMAID/0485/PE** Pursuing Master of Art and Design, Department of Industrial and Commercial Art, Kyambogo University.

He intends to carry out research on **"Preserving the Akogo Traditional Musical Instrument of the Iteso Community through Sculpture"** in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the award of Master of Art and Design of Kyambogo University.

The purpose of this letter therefore is to request you to grant him permission to carry out his study in your institution.

Any assistance rendered to him will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Bosco Bua
AG. DIRECTOR

KYAMBOGO UNIVERSITY
★ 06 MAY 2025 ★
DIRECTOR
DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE TRAINING

APPENDIX 4: DATA COLLECTION TOOLS