

# The Fading Beauty



The dying of South Africa wooden sculpture

ART&CULTURE

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Wooden Sculpture

## The Profound Masks

“You see the mask, they are really normal and cheap, but it was our passports to our hometown once.” said Andile Makubalo, the only one wooden sculpture master in the Green Market Square (Acquires from Greenmarket Square is a historical square in the centre of old Cape Town, South Africa. an informal flea market trading mainly African souvenirs, crafts and curios).



(Source Wikipedia: Green Market Square )

For years he had been making, processing and selling masks here. He was once the crucial herald of their tribe's spiritual well-being. But now, the significances of the masks are declining.

“ We are not allowed to enter the tribe without the masks being wore.” According to Andile Makubalo, the various designs on the mask are usually the symbols of each indigenous tribes,



the guardians of the tribes can only tell the identities of their clan people by the decorative patterns on their masks. “ Since the tribe is too large, the guardians can't assure if the visitors are really from our own side, plus many conflicts between tribes happens too often.” The function of the masks we expressed just like the passport in our modern society .It’s quite fun to see the comparison between the ancient way and the modern way to enter a region.



Another thing valuable to be mentioned is the emotions shown in the masks. As we all know, Ceremonies have their different purposes, for wedding, funeral, the return of the

warriors. The patterns drawn in the masks also stands for happiness, sadness and honorable. When the ceremonious rites or the festivals took place in the tribes, people wore the masks with bright colors. On the contrary, the tribe people wore the dark color masks when engaged in the funerals or sacrifices.

### The Materials that used to make the Sculptures

There is a strong timber named ebony rich in Africa, it could be used as the material of the wooden sculptures. The sculptures made in the ebony has the beautiful bright charming color, was considerable admired by people. The Ebony's density is bigger than the water, which means the inside issues are really tight. If people soak the ebony into the water then dry it up, the model of the sculpture will be much more sustainable.

The excellent timber offer the wooden sculptures development with the exceptional natural advantage. The group of people who live near the resources enjoyed it a lot, and they put the wooden art integrated into every aspect of life. From formal ceremonies and religious rite to daily household tasks. The wooden art full of people's life, and became the part of the tribal culture. The change actually consolidate the position of wooden art, and help the wooden art could continue to be pass off. Some sculptures seems normal may carrying the important duty to their ceremonies. It reflects the cycle of life, from birth through initiation to adulthood to death, to becoming an ancestor.

Carving art in South Africa are ancient and hold the important position in the history. African sculpture takes many forms and offers us great insights into the cultures and tribal communities from when it came. Wooden sculpture in South Africa, traditional paintings in China and oil paintings in Europe together constitute three main schools of the world arts.

### The miserable current situation of the wooden sculptures

However, the status quo of the wooden sculptures creates a ironic contrasts with its once prosperity. “As a person who lives in South Africa for 51 years, I have little knowledge of South Africa Wooden Sculptures.”Mr. Norman,who is a local English teacher in South Africa, he said that “I think traditional culture and beliefs have changed and eroded in many younger South Africans and the number of people for whom these works have their traditional significance may have declined in the last 20 years.”

The commercialization of the sculptures also comprised one factor of the eroding spiritual power of the wooden sculptures,many sculptures had the decorative patterns with little difference.

The Government in South Africa aims in increasing the tourism as the main portion of GDP growth, and it will share 7.9% of GDP in 2020.(The information acquires from <http://www.southafrica.info/business/economy/sectors/tourism-overview.htm#.V6IVEFfXerU>)

According to this news we can perceive that the tourism becomes one of the economic pillars of South Africa, the great demands of the travelers offer large economic opportunities for the local residents, selling souvenirs is a major methods for making money, the commercialization of the sculptures blows heavily on the sculpture traditions. The craftsmen start the process of uniformity to the wooden sculpture in order to meet the travelers’ superficial understanding of South Africa. For instance they considered the five species as the symbols of South Africa: Lion, Rhino, Bison, Leopard and Elephants, the modern sculptors make a lot of these statues to attract the travelers, however these animal statues don’t have any meanings in the tribal activities. Mr. Norman also said that when he was a child (in the 1970s and 1980s), there are no such sculpture on sale the same way as in places like Green Market Square, which means the wooden sculptures are more likely a tool for making living for local citizens,and the sculptures we see in places like Green Market Square are for the tourist market and has commercial rather than spiritual significance.

As the quality and originality of the wooden sculptures are reducing. More and more young folks in tribes leave the traditional tribe lives behind and seek the livelihood in the cities. They ask the remaining craftsmen in the tribe to carve the statues and bring them to the cities.

They are selling the sculptures while having no idea of what they're selling, sculptures in their eyes devolves from the spiritual symbols to the means of earning money.

