Creation of in situ monuments: the case of the ARCAM site in Yaounde

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Abstract

The institutional shaping of the State of Cameroon began in 1946 in this place with the creation of the Representative Assembly of Cameroon (ARCAM) by decree n°46-2376 of the French government. This same site, which today serves as the "Yaounde Pilot Linguistic Centre", is a highly symbolic place that has witnessed the constitutional evolution of the country, from the State of Cameroon under UN trusteeship to the Oriental Republic of Cameroon. It was in this room that the form of the State was developed and the very first President was sworn in. Given this exceptionality, it is quite curious that this site doesn't stand out from a visual point of view, with a remarkable artistic and sculptural representation executed according to the site, to play an active, alternative and unique role in promoting and safeguarding our historical and heritage legacy. Proposing a sculptural monument in-situ remains the main objective of this research, because, situated in the heart of the city of Yaounde, the idea is to revitalise this space of such great importance, to draw the attention of the public authorities and the citizens of the city to the importance of this site so that it no longer continues to sink gradually and surely into oblivion. Based on historical and factual data, field surveys and a methodological approach to the creation of works based on Mnémo-Génératisme, several proposals for in situ sculptural works were made, and a model developed using ceramic technology was produced. This in situ sculptural monument would be a permanent solution to restore this mythical space, which no longer needs to demonstrate its importance.

Keywords: Creation, In-situ Monument, History, Yaoundé, Mnemo-Generatism.

Introduction

In-situ monuments are fascinating because of the artistic, functional and historical connotations that condition the work. Andrea (2008) describes them as works made in response to the place for which they are intended and on which they react. To this end, the term in situ refers to art objects made solely for the place they occupy. They are executed as a function of the place in which they are mounted, to play an active, alternative and unique role there, so it is certain that these works take into account not only the physical place in which they are inserted but also the historical, geographical and socio-cultural interface of the site (Benoist et al, 2016). The idea of in situ monuments stems from the desire

to reveal the value of a site, its specificity and its remarkable identity, which had been ignored until then. The ARCAM site in the heart of Yaounde is just one example. It summarises the major historical events that marked the constitution of the State of Cameroon. These include: the oath of office of the very first 'Prime Minister' of French-speaking Cameroon in 1957; the election of the first independent Assembly in 1960; the election and swearing-in of the very first President of French-speaking Cameroon; the adoption of the national anthem, the motto, the flag of Cameroon (green, red and yellow) and, later, the seal of Cameroon (pondi, 2012).

The site of the current "Yaounde Pilot Linguistic Centre" as a focus of interest has been the subject of several scientific studies, notably (Tele, 2023), (Amougou, 2018), (Essono, 2016), (Pondi, 2012), (Abwa, 1998). In their works, these authors describe the particular nature of the historical events that took place in the modest building that hosts this site from 1946 to 1960 and from 1961 to the present day. Given this exceptionality, Emmanuel Pondi (2012) declares that, because of these distinct and highly symbolic activities intimately linked to the ARCAM building at the time, it is doubtful whether one could find a room more charged with political history in French-speaking Cameroon, which recounts the genesis of the constitution of the State of Cameroon. However, some fundamental concerns are not raised in their writings, including the question of enhancing and creating symbolic visual attractions, or building a public monument of a functional and expressive nature, the main objectives of which will be to revitalise the past, define the present and shape the future of this site.

Given the creation of an in-situ monument for the site of the present Yaounde Language Pilot Centre, our research methodology was built around intensive field surveys, giving pride of place to oral traditions and the selective recognition of spaces to be memorialised. Several patriarchs and former administrators were interviewed, including Fouda Onambele (son of Fouda Andre), Louis-Tobie Mbida (son of Andre Mari Mbida), Datouo Theodore (Vice-President of the National Assembly) and many others. The genetic approach was used upstream to

circumscribe our object of study in time and space, with particular emphasis on reconstructing the genesis of the site, as well as the major events that contributed to its inevitable shaping. This was followed by Louis-Claude Paquin's heuristic approach, which focuses on the design and creation of works of art based on semiological, symbolic and phenomenological elements specific to their environment. It enabled us to apply Mnemo-Generatism, understood as a methodological approach to research-creation, which led us to the creation and modelling of a monument for this site.

I. Geographical location of the ARCAM site

The ARCAM site is located in the heart of the city of Yaounde, the capital of Cameroon and window of the Republic. This emblematic site in the capital of the Centre region is located 300 km from the Atlantic coast, between latitude 3o 5'North and longitude 11o 31' East, on a network of hills dominated by Mount Mbam Minkom (1,295 m) and Mount Nkolodom (1,221 m) in the north-west sector, and Mount Eloumden (1,159 m) in the south-west (Bopda, 2003). The city of Yaounde, which is host to this site, covers an area of 304 km2, including an urbanised area of more than 183 km2 in 2018, and is home to a population estimated at 3.5 million in 2018, giving an average density of 19,126 inhabitants/km2 (Djatcheu, 2018). Its geographical boundaries are: to the west, the Mbankomo district; to the east, the Mefou-Afamba division; to the south, the Mefou-Akono division; and to the north, the Okola district (Voundi et al., 2018).

The ARCAM site is located in the district of Yaounde 3, in the administrative centre of the city and about a hundred metres from the National Museum. It is neighbouring the Hilton Hotel on the main Avenue Marchand Street and covers an area of around 2,000m2. The site comprises just one building, constructed in 1945 in the aftermath of the Second World War, at the dawn of independence (Amougou, 2018). This building remains the unconditional witness to all the stormy debates that led to the constitution of the French-speaking State of Cameroon. Now known as the 'Yaounde Linguistic Pilot Centre' (image 01 and

photo 01), it continues to sink into oblivion, gradually taking with it all the key secrets of the origins of the constitution of the State of Cameroon.

Location of the ARCAM site

Image 01: Google Maps of the Centre Pilote Linguistique site captured on 15/05.2024

Photo 01: ARCAM building, the current Yaounde Linguistic Pilot Centre. Photo Tele Djosseu 2024

II. ARCAM site, a place of memory

The expression "memory place" represents a fairly heterogeneous whole. It first appeared in the 1980s, following the publication of a book by the French historian Pierre Nora. It refers, in particular, to places associated with exceptional events in the past, which communities have chosen to remember, or to an important moment that occurred in an exceptional context (Nora, 1997). The Grand Larousse (2018) also defines this expression as: "A significant unit, material or ideal, of which the will of men or the work of time has made a symbolic element of some community". A memory place bears witness to the recent or distant past of memorable circumstances that occurred in an area. It draws on the nature and exceptional value of the place from a historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view. Its exceptional character stems from its impact in the past, the surrounding populations and the events that have crystallized the place over a well-defined period (Andrea, 2008). The events that took place at the ARCAM site between 1946 and 1960 reflect the analyses of Nora (1997, 2006) and Andrea (2008), when they assert that an object or site becomes a memory place when it escapes oblivion, and when a community or nation reinvests it with its affect and emotions.

The rapid disappearance of our national memory today calls for an inventory of places of remembrance which, thanks to the will of scientists, have become

shining symbols of the nation. The case of this research is a concrete illustration of this. The ARCAM site, which Marc Guillaume (2000) refers to as involuntary monuments, i.e., places that were not intended to be monuments, but which have become so through a process of patrimonialisation of the memorial and identity referents of the city and that of Yaounde, is our field of study. This desire to commemorate is reflected today in the creation of monuments that illustrate not only the stories of the past, but also the hopes and vision of a more sober and representative future through visual elements in our urban spaces. The ARCAM (Representative Assembly of Cameroon) building, in which the autonomy of French-speaking Cameroon was celebrated on 10 May 1957 by the first head of the East Cameroon government, André Marie Mbida (Amougou, 2018), is undoubtedly a memory place whose historical value is of inestimable importance for Yaounde and Cameroon.

Built of baked clay bricks and covered with white plaster at the time, the only building on the site had in turn served as a setting for illustrious parliamentary classes. In 1946, it was the site of the Representative Assembly of Cameroon (ARCAM). On 30 March 1952, ARCAM was institutionally transformed into the Territorial Assembly of Cameroon (ATCAM). Its deliberations took place in the same enclosure, which was more powerful than the previous assembly (Essono, 2016). On the eve of independence, the structure was given a more liberal autonomy, which is why in 1956 it adopted a new name, that of the Legislative Assembly of Cameroon (ALCAM). The same building was once again refurbished to reflect these institutional changes, with the number of representatives now reaching 70. The last transformation of the building housing Cameroon's local assembly took place in 1960, just after the proclamation of Cameroon's independence. The Legislative Assembly was definitively renamed the National Assembly of Cameroon (AN) (Pondi, 2012). This place has witnessed in turn the constitutional evolution of the country, from the State of Cameroon under UN trusteeship to the Eastern Republic of Cameroon. It was in this room that the

form of the State was developed, and that the very first President of French-speaking Cameroon was elected (Amougou, 2018).

With its simple architecture and nothing really exceptional about it, the visual aspect of this building contrasts deeply with the testimony it bears. As Jean Emmanuel Pondi (2012) so aptly puts it, the West Cameroon House of Assembly is unlikely to be the most historically significant room in the world, as it has witnessed heated dialogue, quarrels, arguments, disputes and threats, but also joys, victories, applause and celebrations.

Whether it is the national anthem, the motto and the flag of Cameroon, the constituent elements of the existence of a State took shape in this place, in this building. The site is rich in its diplomatic and notable character. It alludes to the discussions, analyses, debates, votes, dialogues that existed between several parliamentarians. In a figurative sense, the building of the former Chamber of Deputies embodies the wisdom of the city of Ongola. This place is impressive in the number of events that took place within it, whether democratic or not. It is in this same room that the flag of Cameroon "Green, red, golden yellow with a star on the red stripe" was adopted, as was the national anthem "O Cameroon Cradle of our fathers" without forgetting the election of the very first president of the Republic of Cameroon (Abwa, 2010).

The historic building now welcomes all Cameroonians wishing to devote themselves to the practice of bilingualism since courses are given in English for French-speaking citizens wishing to learn French and in French for learners wishing to speak and write English. In view of the major events mentioned above, closely linked to the buildings of the National Assembly of the time, one cannot doubt the emblematic and heritage value of this exceptional memory place.

III.   Creation of an in-situ monument based on Mnemo-generatism for the ARCAM site

The creation of an in-situ monument in the context of research creation consists of a thoughtful and permanent interaction between the process linked to

inventiveness and theoretical, methodical and scientific discourse. According to Claude Paquin and Noury (2018), this implies a focus on the devices for producing and disseminating knowledge. Visual creation methods are increasingly characterized as a compact block where practice and theory form one. Findeli and Coste (2007) note this well when they point out that for about three decades, the meaning of artistic activity has been directed towards new avenues of reflection with regard to the methodological question, due to the desire of researcher-creators to elucidate for themselves the "how" of the work by linking theory and practice; conceptual and experiential. Artistic practices understood as a mode of expression, as a place of construction or as a research process are now among the most common (Gosselin, 2009). Such an approach is centered on an interest in the educational aspects of artistic activity, as well as the potential for mediation and communication (Paquin and Noury, 2018).

As part of our research, it was important to use a creative methodology such as Mnemo-Generatism (Tele, 2022), which respects the principle of research creation as a scientific and professional activity. It is a conceptual and practical approach that manifests itself through a hybridization of historical, cultural, customary and contemporary data. It is characterized by the abundance and interweaving of different techniques, motifs and aesthetic conceptions arising first from a cultural affiliation, and then from other heterogeneous fields, hitherto foreign to each other and in the process of reciprocal assimilation. This crossing of several ordinates generates a new form that is necessarily astonishing, which responds to new challenges and issues inducing a plurality of contents but, which then lets shine through the technique, materials, forms and even aesthetic categories, an unfinished or imperfect fusion of distinct referents (Tele, 2022).

The creation of the in-situ monument for the ARCAM site integrates the specificities of this creative approach, knowing that the historical aspect is a primordial element in the reflexivity of the work created. The challenge of this visual formatting also lies in the capitalization of the place where the monument was created, in order to integrate past symbolic gestures and the site which is an

integral part of the work. When memory, history, culture, ergonomics and the contemporary intertwine, it is necessary to understand the kind of creative method and artistic production that they can generate.

IV.   Philosophical approach to Mnemo-generatism: time-memory, space-site

In artistic creation, each process is framed by a philosophy or a working concept, which defines the artist's field of expression, his discourse, his concerns, his challenges and even the different physical, physiological and artistic transformations carried out on his mediums of expression (Barbeau et al., 2020). The convergence between creation and theoretical discourse implies a focus on the devices for producing and disseminating knowledge. Such an approach is centered on an interest in the educational aspects of artistic activity, as well as the potential for mediation and communication. When we link the art of thinking and the art of acting, the art of articulating one's own thoughts and the art of making coherent artistic gestures, we generate as many works as there are discourses produced about these works (Paquin and Noury, 2018). Mnemonic-generatism then stands out as a performative creation methodology.

The notion of mnemonism-generatism that we abbreviate as "mnemo-generatism" results from the filiation of two important words namely mnemonism and generatism. The first is suggestive of memory, its importance and its impact on the present. The second puts upstream a permanent reconstruction, a kind of performance-skill whose objective is to avoid stagnation by favoring novelty to the detriment of the standard. The association of the two concepts contributes to reevaluating past events worthy of memory, to crystallize them in the present, while releasing perspectives in perpetual mutation in the face of time and technological advances. All put in a condition of adaptation between the public and the works, with the aim of developing an interaction between the human being, the object and the work of art (Tele, 2022).

The objective of this approach leads to freedom from the canons of traditional statuary, in order to propose forms that renounce the unique representation of reality, but which respond to our freedom of spirit. This approach draws its sources from the abstract current born in Europe during the 1910s, which aims to represent a new form of art and which gives free rein to the expression of the artist's perception (Sorlin et al., 2000). Its creation is a function of the different technological developments. But at the heart of this creation, it must remain authentic with its particularity, offer a new and original part of its civilization in order to be a counterweight to invasive technologies. The natural environment of the region, very rich in natural resources, also offers many technical and artistic possibilities. Thus, the idea of producing monuments in heterogeneous materials, with an indicative part in the promotion of local materials is an important factor of motivation and inspiration for the shaping of the monument for the ARCAM site.

In terms of method, this work draws on sociology, anthropology and the visual arts, and includes three essential approaches which can be summed up in the following five points:

The first, the "Shock", is borrowed from sociology, it highlights a well-being, a malaise or a crisis experienced within a community, a group, etc. which shares common problems and affinities. It is this which determines the search for a theme or a sub-theme.

The second stage entitled "Prospection" draws its resources from anthropology, because it is through the study of peoples that we arrive at the discovery of the images and forms which characterize and singularize them. They can then be confronted with a global or world approach. This phase which corresponds to a graphic research begins with an apprehension of an unconscious psychic representative, to arrive at a visual schematization of the forms of thought, whether they are from nature or from memory. An important element that Anzieu often describes in his presentations on the practice of the arts as being "the apprehension of a psychic representative".

The third phase called "Introspection" is a purely plastic referent that uses artistic elements, particularly drawing, to develop a personalization of the motifs, from their vulgar forms to a singular interpretation of the artist. This thus implies his style and his individual perception of one or more characteristic elements. It is close to the OLMC developed by Engelbert Mveng (1980) through the simplification of motifs and to the MCA of Pascal Kenfack (2013) thanks to its syntheses, which we understand here rather under the term of combination or arrangement in order to preserve the morphological root of images borrowed from nature or distinct communities.

The fourth stage, called "Action", is a performance specific to the artist; it corresponds to the shaping of the work according to its technical and artistic possibilities. It highlights the mediums and the different production technologies, whether traditional or modern.

The fifth stage relates to "communication". It is first of all about the analysis and understanding of one's discoveries before developing a theoretical and conceptual discourse qualifying each art work produced.

Summarizing this working method, we can say that it comes down to five points which should be applied immediately to the in-situ monument for the ARCAM site.

IV.   Conceptual and practical approach

- The chock

As mentioned earlier, the beginnings of the construction of the State of Cameroon began in 1946 in this place, with the creation of the Representative Assembly of Cameroon (ARCAM) created by a decree of the French government. From the Representative Assembly of Cameroon (ARCAM), to the Territorial Assembly of Cameroon (ATCAM), then the Legislative Assembly of Cameroon (ALCAM) and today the National Assembly of Cameroon (AN), this site has witnessed in turn the constitutional evolution of the country, from the State of Cameroon under UN supervision to the Oriental Republic of Cameroon. It is in this room that the form of the State was developed, and that the very first President of French-speaking

Cameroon was elected (Amougou, 2018). *Notability* is the theme chosen for the creation of a monument allocated to this site.

Of modest architecture without anything truly exceptional, the visual aspect of this building contrasts profoundly with the testimony that it bears. Witness to heated dialogues, quarrels, discussions, disputes, threats but also joys, victories, applause and celebrations, one can doubt, as Jean Emmanuel Pondi (2012) says so well, that one can find outside the West Cameroon House of Assembly, a room more loaded with history. Whether it is the national anthem, the motto and the flag of Cameroon, the constituent elements of the existence of a State took shape in this site, in this building. The site is rich in its diplomatic and notable character. It alludes to the discussions, analyses, debates, votes and; dialogues that existed between several parliamentarians. The notable is distinguished from others by his importance, his preeminent social rank; to which his situation is worth; he is a personality of a supposedly important rank, destined to have a particular ascendancy and a preponderant influence on the other members of society. In a figurative sense, the building of the former Chamber of Deputies embodies all the characteristics mentioned above. This site is impressive by the number of events that took place within it, whether democratic or not.

The attribution of the title of notability to this site is due to the symbolic character that justifies this name. A notable is someone who is defined by their family and social position as well as by the political power acquired. It designates an individual, whose importance is recognized because of their social situation, and to whom a certain authority is granted, particularly in public affairs. As an elite, a distinguished category, but also chosen, they are given weight, a particular authority within the community, thereby becoming a privileged interlocutor of power, endowed with a form of representativeness and social legitimacy, while being able to play an interface role. Notables are those who decide, but in a democratic state, their power has been awarded to them by the people or the population they represent. By extension, the word applies to an influential elected official. The notables are then clearly elites of knowledge, who, through the

authority they exercise within their community, are necessarily led to be privileged relays for the metropolis (Chamouard and Fogacci, 2015).

Seen from a traditional angle and particularly in our study context, the notables are those who constitute the legislative and administrative power of the community. Very close to the Chief, they have a fundamental role, all decisions of the chiefdom require their approval, they participate directly in the exercise of the power of the chief, by assisting him in the development of major decisions. They constitute in fact a kind of supreme court whose goal is to ensure respect for the institutions, customs and beliefs of the people but also to limit and temper the authority of the chief (Harter, 1986).

All these qualifiers are in harmony with the role that the representatives and later, the elected officials of the nation have accomplished in this historic building of the linguistic pilot center. The images that interpret this sub-theme define the notion of notability from a traditional and modern angle, thus preserving the work's ability to reconcile the past, the present and cultural identity.
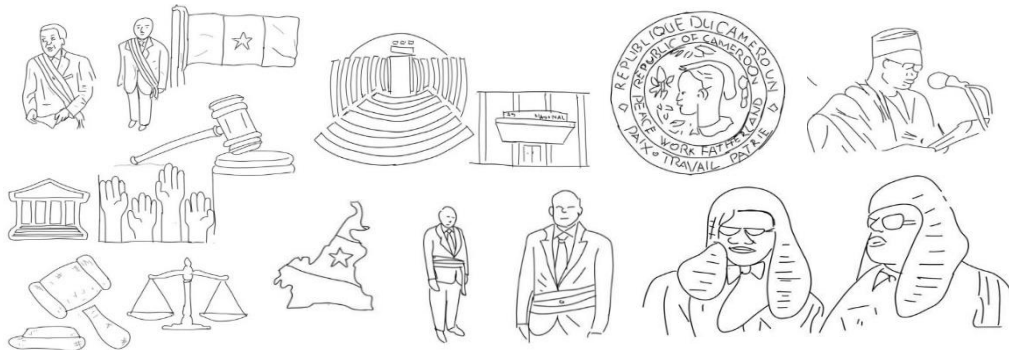
- The Prospection

The notable is distinguished from others by his importance, his preeminent social rank, to which his situation is worth, he is a personality of a supposedly important rank, destined to have a particular ascendancy and a preponderant influence on the other members of society. On the fringes of official frameworks, an authority in public affairs. The case of actors and advisers to traditional authorities, deputies, senators, judges, mayors, etc. has caught our attention in this theme. An apprehension of traditional forms gives us an approach to the images below:

Pl.1 : Prospecting for the creation of works on the thee of "Notability". (Illustration, TELE DJOSSEU G).
Iconographic sources: Pierre HARTER, 1986, Ancient Arts of Cameroon, France, Ed. Arnouville; J. M.

On the institutional level, the graphic images of notability are attributed to a certain number of representations which are as follows:


Pl. 2 : Prospecting for the creation of works on the theme of "Notability". (Illustration, TELE DJOSSEU G).

- **Stylization of forms that define notability on the traditional level**

It is a continuation of the previous step. It implements the technical and artistic capacities to strip down the original image, to give it a personal and simplified touch. Some selected images have undergone slight modifications to make the shapes less complex.

- **Stylization of forms that define notability on the Traditional**
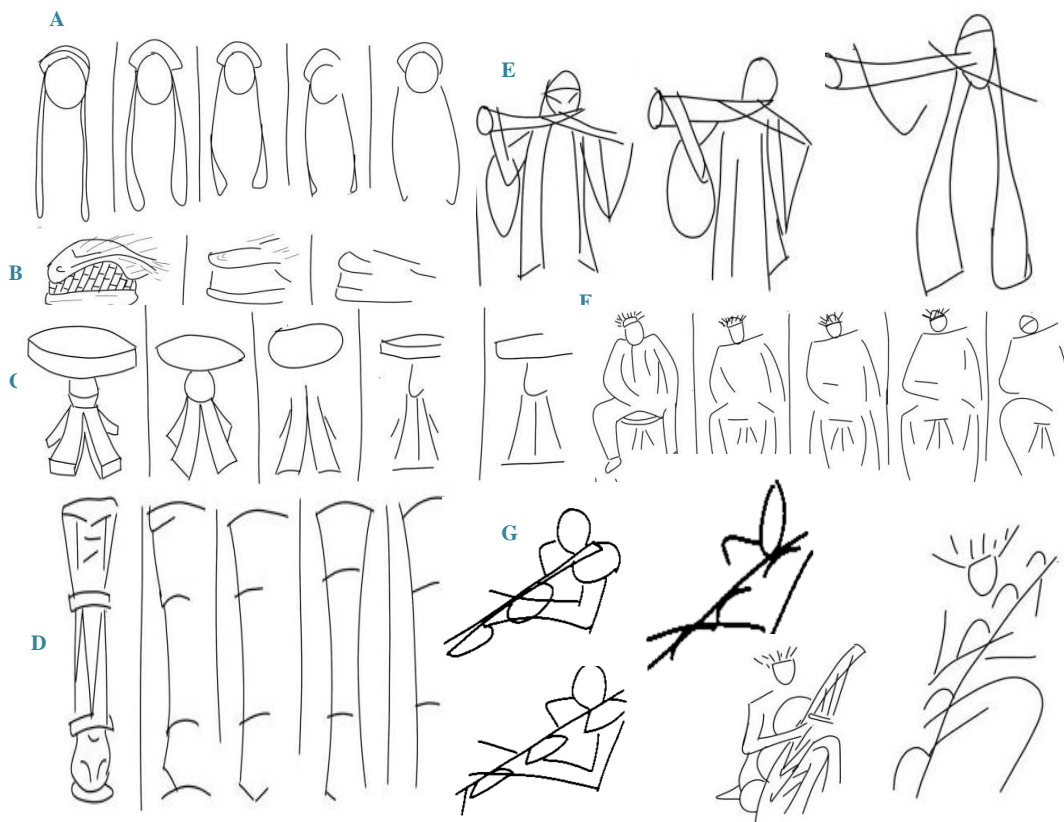
Pl. 3 Stylization of traditional forms. Illustration. TELE

• Stylization of forms that define notability on a contemporary level
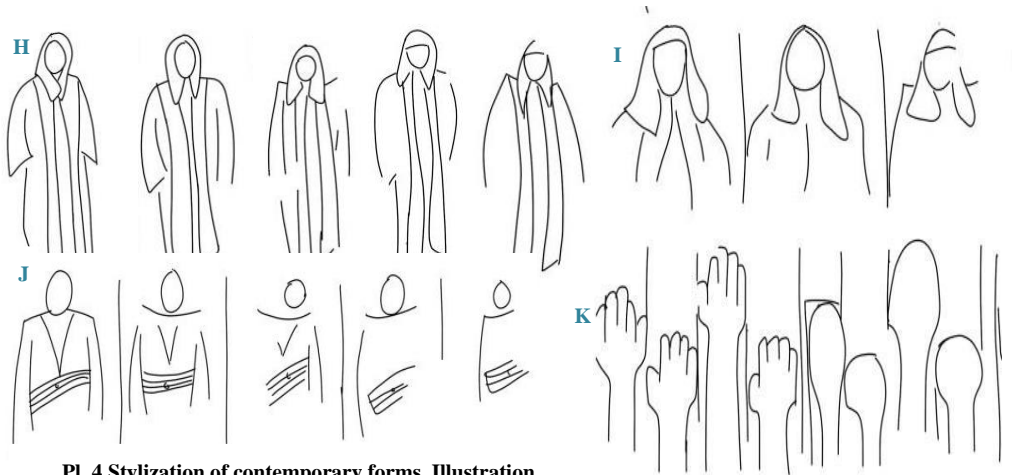
Pl. 4 Stylization of contemporary forms, Illustration, TELE DJOSSEU
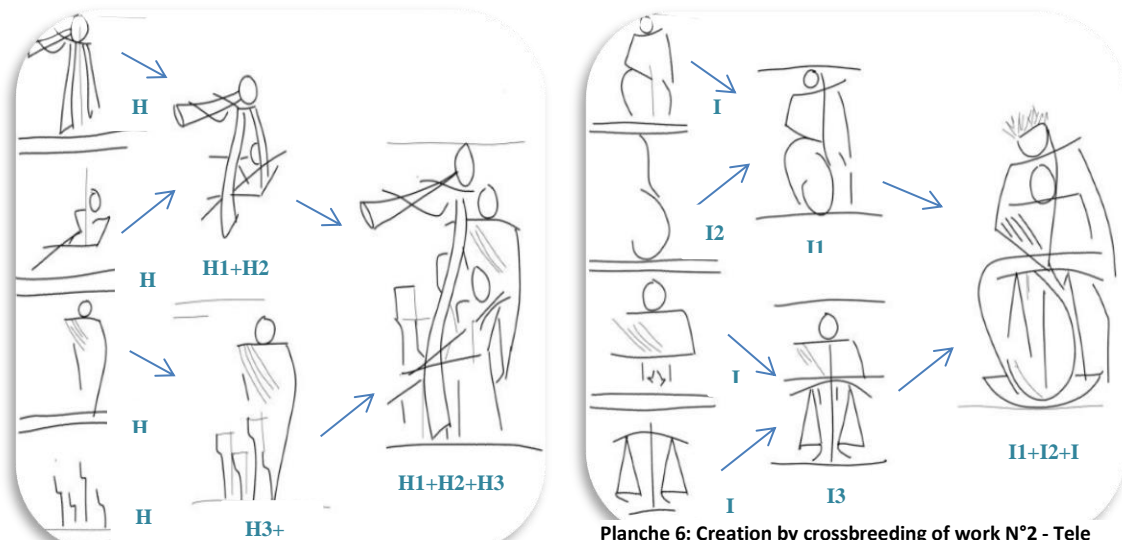
- Synthesis by crossbreeding

Planche 5: Creation by crossbreeding of work No. 1-Tele Djosseu G.

Planche 6: Creation by crossbreeding of work N°2 - Tele Djosseu G.

- Action

Before submitting to the practice, it is important to present the technology that was used to manufacture the different models. The choice of ceramics as an implementation technique is not random. Ceramics are an essential element in the process of reconstructing the past, as evidenced by the numerous archaeological discoveries (Essomba, 1992; Elouga, 2001). All ceramics are produced in a particular context, they take into account environmental and cultural constraints, and their transmission is based on social configurations, such

as clan, socio-professional class or gender. It is in this sense that these technical elements provide essential information on the reconstruction of the past. It is a means of expression that relates to the art of living because it can determine the various civilizations, their traditions, their mutual influences and their successions over time. It constitutes a precise social document because the progress of ceramics follows very closely the progress of civilization (Gosselain, 2002). This is what the easy and flexible handling of its execution materials is connected to. The technology of ceramics respects a well-developed technical process that goes from the collection of the raw material to the various transformations by fire, but this shaping will simply rely on modelling and firing.

- **The modelling**

Among the many techniques that modeling offers, the pressure technique was used for the implementation, because it offers great freedom of expression.

Photo 2, 3,4 &5: Clay modeling of the monument model for the ARCAM site from the final synthesis

- **Biscuit and Glaze Firing**

The biscuit firing is the stage during which the clay undergoes an irreversible physicochemical transformation by fire at a temperature of 950°C. It consists of making the object solid, resistant, porous and ready to be handled without too much precaution (Clerrin, 2005). It is at this stage of the production that we then speak of ceramic. Following the dégourdie firing, the object undergoes a second

firing called enamel or glaze firing (940°C) during which the surface of the shard becomes translucent and impermeable after fusion.

Photo 6, 7 & 8 : Glaze firing of the model of the monument for the ARCAM site
Autor : Tele Djosseu

- **Simulation**

This section allows you to view a projection of the work created on the ARCAM website

Image 2 : Simulation of the monument relating to Notability on the in situ site of ARCAM
Auteur : Mbunkeu Kami

The communication

The work entitled "Notability" is summarized in two main characters, in a standing position, we observe the image of an old wise man supported by a cane, at the left base of the sculpture sits a character displaying the flag of Cameroon and the distinctive badge of the deputies of the National Assembly. These characters are interposed by a calabash and by a shape distributed in a disproportionate scale which symbolizes the path of every citizen, whatever his social class; this must

be taken into account in the development of the constitution of the country. The shaping material clay is only a technical pretext in the prelude to the realization of the monument on the predefined in situ site of ARCAM and taking into account the various heterogeneous materials.

Conclusion

The commemoration of a public space of historical character is part of collective memory because it consists of mobilizing memories through the mediation of affectivity, to recall the past, while making it vibrate in the manner of the present. The mission of such an activity is to maintain and preserve the identity of an ethnic, cultural or political community. This approach involves a certain number of activities, the most sensitive of which is the creation of in situ monuments, because it takes into account the physical and ideological context of the place in which it is located, because there is a voluntarily accepted place between the host place and the work that is done there, presented and exhibited there. But it would still be necessary for these places of memory to be a permanent concern of government and municipal authorities, in order not to let events of capital importance that have sometimes contributed to the constitution of a state sink into oblivion. The ARCAM site in the political capital of Cameroon is unfortunately an example.

The design and production of a model of an in-situ monument for the ARCAM site articulated the main objectives of this research. This site is distinguished by the quality and quantity of events of capital importance that took place there between 1946 and 1961, and which are part of the collective memory of the populations of the city of Yaounde in particular, and of Cameroon in general. Based on intensive field surveys, reserving a prominent place for oral traditions, and the selective recognition of spaces to be memorialized, the genetic approach and mnemo-generatism as a conceptual and artistic approach in research-creation, the above-predefined objectives were pursued. This allowed us, thanks to the technology of ceramics that uses clay as an identity element, to proceed with the shaping of an in situ sculptural work that we called "Notability" because it

expresses a diplomatic and notable character. This in situ monument reflects the hybridization of historical, cultural, customary and contemporary data that occurred in this space at a given time. It revitalizes past events worthy of memory on the ARCAM site, crystallizes them in the present, by revealing perspectives that are constantly changing in the face of time and technological advances. A simulation of this monument on its in-situ site evokes the perspectives that we give to this research work.

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