

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Sports-inspired art: Immortalising athleticism and societal impacts of sport heroes in Ghana

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Abstract

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The research on sports-inspired art in Ghana sought to explore the profound intersection of athleticism and societal impact, specifically focusing on immortalising the legacies of sports heroes through sculptures. Through a qualitative case study approach, the study delved into various artistic expressions that encapsulate the essence of Ghanaian athletes, emphasising not only their remarkable physical feats but also their broader influence on society. The study employed personal interviews and direct observations together with archival and document studies that allowed the researchers to convey the emotional depth of the athletes' stories, transcending traditional artistic boundaries. A visual analysis with photography provided an intimate look into the lives of sports heroes beyond the field, capturing moments of resilience and their significant contributions to society. The study suggests more installation of permanent artwork in strategic locations in Ghana, serving as enduring landmarks that celebrate and commemorate the enduring impact of Ghanaian sports heroes.

Introduction

As a material culture, sculpture is an important part of the vibrant history of human societies. It expresses values, aspirations, and a sense of collective identity. Defined as the tangible artefacts and objects crafted by human hands, sculpture provides a rich repository for examining the intricate interplay between society and its revered figures (Kader, 2000). The journey into the heart of dynamic interaction, focusing specifically on the societal impacts of sports heroes through the prism of sculptures, can be overemphasized. DiCarlo (2018) argues that sports heroes, adorned with accolades and celebrated for their athletic prowess, extend their influence beyond the realms of the playing field. They become cultural icons, embodying shared aspirations and collective pride. Amidst this cultural landscape, sculptures emerge as powerful conduits for storytelling, capturing the essence of sports heroes and elevating them to the status of cultural narratives.

Observing sports heroes, Ghana, a country located in West Africa, is known for its strong passion for sports. The most popular sport in Ghana is football, which is played and enjoyed by people of all ages and backgrounds. Football matches are held in various

stadiums across the country, and the national team, the Black Stars, is highly revered (Horner, 2010; Omuya, 2023; Kuch, 2023). Apart from football, Ghana also has well-organised sports associations for a wide range of sports. Basketball has gained popularity in recent years, with the formation of the Ghana Basketball Association and the establishment of professional leagues. Boxing is another sport that has a rich history in Ghana, producing world-renowned boxers such as Azumah Nelson and Ike Quartey (Ampong, 2022). Athletics is also highly regarded in Ghana, with the country producing talented sprinters and long-distance runners. The Ghana Athletics Association (2022) organises various competitions and events to promote the sport and identify promising athletes. Volleyball, swimming, tennis, and hockey are among the other sports that have dedicated associations and enthusiastic participants in Ghana.

Ghana's sports authority plays a crucial role in overseeing the day-to-day operations of sports and games in the country. It ensures that sports facilities are well-maintained, organises national competitions, and provides support to athletes and sports associations. The authority also collaborates with international sports bodies to facilitate participation in

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global sporting events. Ghanaians participate in sports for various reasons (National Sports Authority (NSA) 2023; Ghanasoccernet, 2014). For many, sports are a source of fun and entertainment, allowing them to engage in physical activity and socialise with others. Sports also provide a platform for self-expression, allowing individuals to showcase their skills and talents (Ghildiyal, 2015; Merkel, 2013; Jarvie, 2006). Additionally, participating in sports promotes good health and well-being, encouraging a fit and active lifestyle. However, sports in Ghana go beyond personal enjoyment and health benefits (Forrester, 2018). Charway and Houlihan (2020) add that many individuals and communities engage in sports for socio-economic, and political purposes. Goris (2023) shares that sports events often bring people together, fostering a sense of unity and national pride. They also contribute to the local economy, attracting tourists and generating revenue through ticket sales, sponsorships, and merchandise.

Furthermore, sports have been used as a tool for societal change and development in Ghana. Various initiatives and programmes use sports to address societal issues such as gender inequality, youth unemployment, and poverty (Bean et al., 2018). Sports can empower individuals and communities, providing opportunities for personal growth, skill development, and social inclusion (Lindsey & Chapman, 2017). Ghana's strong passion for sports is evident in the popularity and participation in various sports, with football being the most prominent. The country has well-organised sports associations and a dedicated sports authority that oversees sports activities. The state has taken steps to immortalise certain individuals who have made significant contributions to the nation (Ampong, 2022). Dr J.B. Danquah and Dr Kwame Nkrumah, for example, are included in the educational curricula, ensuring that their legacies are passed down to future generations (Lo, 2011).

Additionally, monuments have been erected in their honour, further solidifying their status as national heroes. However, it is worth noting that not all heroes or icons have been recognized in the same way (Adomako, 2004). While individuals like Ohene Gyan and Baba Yara have been immortalised by the state, it has not been in the form of statues. This raises the question of why certain individuals are chosen for such recognition while others are not. One area where recognition is lacking is in the realm of sports, particularly boxing. Ghana has a rich history of producing talented boxers who have achieved great success on the international stage (Ghanasoccernet,

2018). However, these sporting heroes have yet to receive the same level of recognition as their counterparts in politics and education. This study argues that a nation like Ghana, which has embraced sports as a means of asserting itself both internationally and locally, ought to honour its sporting icons by sculpting and erecting more statues in their honour as national heroes (Ankrah, 2018).

The importance of recognising and honouring sporting icons goes beyond mere symbolism. It serves as a source of inspiration for future generations, encouraging them to pursue excellence in their chosen fields. Additionally, it helps to preserve the history and cultural heritage of the nation, ensuring that the achievements of these individuals are not forgotten (International Olympic Committee, 2016). The establishment and legitimization of heroes or icons in Ghana or any nation is a complex process that involves the formal actions taken by the state. While individuals like Dr J.B. Danquah and Dr Kwame Nkrumah have been recognised. Likewise, the realm of sports-inspired art has drawn considerable scholarly attention, but a notable research gap persists. Brassard (2023) explores the correlations between art and sports with movement, physicality, aesthetics, emotion, game play, and culture. Again, Shorkend (2019) presents various ways of looking at sport through the lens of art-aesthetic concepts. In Ghana, Agyei and Adu-Akyem (2010) designed and produced trophies for games and sports, particularly in the form of metal art. Ankrah (2018) produced an aluminium statue of Azumah Nelson as part of the immortalisation of Ghanaian sporting legends at Essipon Stadium, Sekondi-Takoradi, in the Western region of Ghana.

Identified within the landscape of sports-inspired sculptures are several notable gaps warranting scholarly attention. Primarily, while existing literature acknowledges the existence of such sculptures and their cultural importance, there remains a dearth of ample studies specifically focusing on their societal impacts within the Ghanaian context. However, the relationship between material culture, in the form of sports hero sculptures, and its profound societal implications remains underexplored (Charway & Houlihan, 2020). This study sought to contribute to bridging these identified gaps by providing a holistic analysis of some sports-inspired sculptures in Ghana. Through rigorous investigation and theoretical engagement, this study provides insights into the ways in which these sculptures shape community identity, foster pride, and preserve cultural heritage. This study also unties the intricacies of the dynamic connection

between sports and sculpture, shedding light on how these tangible representations contribute to the construction of cultural meaning, the formation of identities, and the evolution of societal values.

The study's goal is to understand community dynamics and interaction by probing the impact of sports hero sculptures on community dynamics, social cohesion, and interaction. It also evaluates how these sculptures serve as focal points for communal gatherings, celebrations, and the transmission of cultural traditions. To guide this exploration, the following key question that forms the backbone of this research was asked: To what extent do sports hero sculptures function as catalysts for community engagement, social cohesion, and the preservation of cultural heritage?

In addressing these objectives and questions, this research endeavours to illuminate the intricate relationship between sculpture as material culture, sports heroes, and the profound societal impacts that reverberate through the collective consciousness of society. Through the lens of sculptures, this exploration sought to uncover the hidden narratives etched in concrete, stone, bronze, aluminium or other artistic mediums such as Azumah Nelson's statues at KNUST, Kumasi; Tennis Player at University of Education, Winneba; Gymnastic at University of Education, Winneba; Asamoah Gyan and Michael Essien's statues at Kumasi; Abedi Ayew Pele's statue at Tamale; Marcel Desailly's statue in Accra; The Black Starlet statue; May 9th disaster statue in Accra, portraying not only the athleticism of heroes but the cultural richness they bring to the human experience (Ankrah et al., 2022; Morgan et al., 2021).

Literature Review

Halbwachs' Commemoration and Collective Memory Theory

The research adopted Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) collective memory theory that is based on the fact that monuments, paintings, and memorials are repositories of collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992). Sport-inspired sculptures are visible histories that safeguard the sports heroes' past and their achievements recalled and recalled from generation to generation. It answers why sport-inspired pieces of art are valued by Ghanaian societies as national heritage and history. The Commemoration and Collective Memory Theory argues that societies form monuments, symbols, and stories to retain and solidify collective memory such that eminent persons and incidents are anchored in

public memory. The theory is quite applicable in the case of sports-inspired sculptures in Ghana because the works of art immortalize sports icons and solidify their legacy in national and international history (Iwuagwu et al., 2023).

In Ghana, the publicizing of sports heroes such as Azumah Nelson by the media and through sculpture serves to confirm Halbwachs' proposition that collective memory is formed and maintained through shared representations (Ankrah, 2018). The media report and celebrate their achievements, translating individual sporting success into a national and international story. Statue erection of athletes is a physical, permanent form of commemoration, with the assurance that their memory would be recalled by generations to come. Statues are concrete instantiations of social memory, bringing closer the determination, perseverance, and patriotic pride exhibited by such athletes (Nagata et al., 2023). Halbwachs' work indicates that commemorative monuments are both national and global in nature. Such heroes as Azumah Nelson transcend the nation-state boundaries, reaching out to individuals in all parts of Ghana and creating a sense of global recognition and respect. This global influence aligns with the argument that collective memory is flexible and evolving continuously in line with the demands and interests of a particular society (Tahiru, 2022; Botchway, 2019).

Additionally, the historical development of sports and sculpture highlights Halbwachs' idea that cultures use artistic figures to maintain the continuity of the past. Ancient Rome and Greece, where sculptured sportsmen honoured human power; Renaissance and Industrial Revolution, where sculpture also evolved alongside the advancement of society; the use of artistic forms to depict sport figures has always been a part of maintaining cultural continuity (Yellowbrick, 2023; Arcangeli, 2022). Cortsen and Rascher (2018) posit that currently, diversification in sculpture techniques and materials and sports professionalization both symbolize modern values and innovations. Lastly, the sports-inspired sculptures of Ghana are tangible foci of shared memory so that the achievements of national heroines and heroes remain rooted in culture, public culture, and memory. Through the erection of these memorials, the country reconfirms its legacy, unites its citizens, and creates intergenerational memory (See Figure 1), all which support Halbwachs' argument of how societies retain their dearest stories.

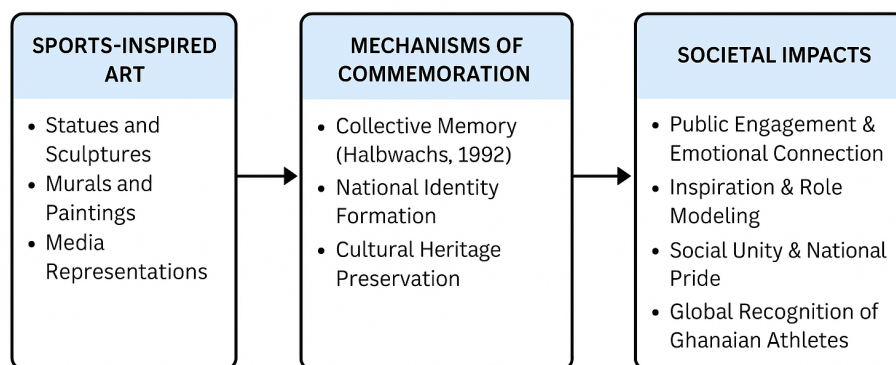


Figure 1. Concept mapping on Halbwachs' Commemoration and Collective Memory Theory (Image by Authors).

Methods

This section outlines the key methods utilised in this research. The methodology employed in researching the relationship between material culture, sports heroes, and societal impacts, specifically through sculptures, was crucial for gathering far-reaching and meaningful data. The study employed a qualitative case study approach to select specific sports hero sculptures as casestudies to conduct in-depth analyses (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Hammersley, 2013). This scrutinising process of sculptures selected has taken into consideration the historical context, artistic choices and socio-cultural impact within the represented communities. The choice of sculptures was purposive, concentrating on representations of the most popular and well-known sports personalities in Ghana. These figures such as Azumah Nelson, Asamoah Gyan, Michael Essien and Abedi Pele were selected due to their national and, in some cases, international prominence, as well as their symbolic value in Ghanaian sports history and public consciousness. Their popularity ensured that the sculptures served as powerful markers of collective memory and community identity, making them suitable subjects for analysing the intersection of art, heroism, and societal impact. The researchers purposefully selected eighteen (18) individuals, including artists (sculptors), sports experts, and enthusiasts. Among the eighteen (18) research participants, five (5) were chosen from the art industry, five (5) from sports agencies, and eight (8) from local communities situated near the selected sculptures. These included residents, fans, and community leaders from neighbourhoods in Kumasi, Takoradi, Tamale Central, Accra, and Winneba, where the sculptures are publicly accessible and integrated

into daily social life. Additionally, ten (10) sports-inspired sculptures were selected from these diverse locations in Ghana, representing a broad cross-section of regional and cultural perspectives (See Table 1).

The study used face-to-face interviews with artists, sports experts, and enthusiasts within communities where sports hero sculptures were prominent. The study gathered oral histories to capture first-hand accounts, perceptions, and personal narratives related to the sculptures and the sports heroes they represent. The study delved into archival records, including historical documents, newspapers, and archives maintained by cultural institutions. The study uncovered historical perspectives on the creation and reception of sports hero sculptures, providing insights into the evolution of societal values over time. It also engaged in direct observation by immersing researchers within the communities where sports hero sculptures were prevalent. This method allowed for simply viewing or listening to the subjects of the research without asking specific questions or manipulating any variables (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Focus group discussions were facilitated to encourage collective reflections on the cultural significance of sports hero sculptures. This method promoted interactive dialogue among participants, uncovering shared values, memories, and interpretations (Hennink, 2013). Visual analysis was employed to deconstruct and interpret the symbolism embedded in sports hero sculptures as supported by photographs. This method involved a systematic examination of the visual elements, such as form, composition, and style, to extract meaning and cultural narratives (Ledin & Machin, 2018).

Table 1
Population and sample distribution.

Categories of Research Participants	n	Data Collection Method	Description
Artists Sports icons Sports enthusiasts	18	Interviews	Unstructured interviews (face-to-face) were conducted with key stakeholders, including athletes, artists, community leaders, and scholars. Participants were asked about their perceptions of sports sculptures, their role in community dynamics, and their societal relevance.
		Focus groups discussions	Focus group discussions were organized with community members and sports enthusiasts to explore their collective perceptions and experiences regarding sports-inspired sculptures. Participants engaged in open-ended discussions about the meaning and impact of these sculptures within their communities.
Sports-inspired sculptures	10	Direct Observation Visual data	Visuals of sports-inspired sculptures allowed participants to share their memories, experiences, and perspectives in their own words, providing a deeper understanding of the meanings attached to the sculptures and the athletes they honor. Through open-ended questions and active listening, researchers can uncover nuanced narratives, uncovering layers of personal and collective memory associated with the sculptures and the sports heroes they commemorate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Azumah Nelson's statues at KNUST, Kumasi • Tennis Player at University of Education, Winneba • Gymnastic at University of Education, Winneba • Asamoah Gyan and Michael Essien's statues at Kumasi • Abedi Ayew Pele's statue at Tamale • Marcel Desailly's statue in Accra • The Black Starlet statue • May 9th disaster statue in Accra 			
Total	28		

Following the data collection phase, which involved semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, a systematic qualitative analysis was conducted to derive insights from the collected material. In total, 18 participants contributed to the study. Five (5) from the art industry, Five (5) from sports agencies, and eight (8) from local communities in Kumasi, Accra, Tamale, Winneba, and Takoradi. All interviews and focus group discussions audio-recorded with permission from the participants to confirm the accuracy of responses and for a more detailed analysis. Every interview lasted between 10 to 20 minutes, while the focus group discussions lasted as long as 20 to 30 minutes. All the recordings were verbatim transcripts of raw data volume in excess of 180 pages. Recording was audio form with the consent of each and every participant to make sure responses get the desired accuracy, as well as richer analysis. Each interview lasted 10-20 minutes while focus group discussions would reach somewhere between 20-30 minutes in length. Furthermore, there was verbatim transcription from all those recordings, giving over fifty (50) raw textual pages of data.

As given by Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic analysis was chosen and proceeded through the following steps in which the researchers read through

all transcripts several times to acquire an intimate acquaintance with the data and to note down first ideas. Initial coding consisted of the systematic coding of segments of data using NVivo 12 software. Codes were allocated to recurring words, phrases, and patterns that pertained to themes, including hero commemoration, community impact, symbolism in sculpture, national identity, and cultural memory. For the stage of searching for themes, the codes were grouped into broader categories, and relationships between codes were examined so as to develop initial themes.

Some of the themes identified were "Heroic Legacy and Collective Memory", and "Visual Storytelling Through Sculpture." Themes were then developed further by cross-referencing with the original transcripts to ensure internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity, that is, data within themes should be coherent while distinct from each other. An appropriate name was then assigned to each theme, backed by examples from the interviews to illustrate the particular points. The final analysis consisted of quotations from various groupings of participants organised in accordance with the research objectives and questions. Upholding trustworthiness, methods

such as triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing were put to the test.

For triangulation, data from different participant groups (artists, sports officials, and community members) were compared. Some of those selected for interviews were invited to review the researchers' interpretations of their statements to verify the accuracy of that interpretation (member checks). Data triangulation helped the researchers by combining multiple sources of data, such as visual analysis, interviews, and archival research. This method enhanced the credibility and reliability of the findings by cross-verifying information from diverse perspectives (Carter et al., 2014). Following the institutional Research Ethics Board and NSA council approval to conduct this study, participants in Ghana were approached physically and electronically via email to engage in the study. The research provided assurance on the building and depiction of sports people and events consistent with such ethical principles of respect, sensitivity towards culture, and responsible creative practice (Goodwin et al., 2020; Wiles, 2013).

Results and Discussion

Sculptures that immortalise the legacies of sports heroes are created with the intention of capturing the essence and significance of these remarkable individuals. These sculptures serve as powerful tributes to their achievements, allowing future generations to appreciate and remember their contributions to the world of sports. Crafted with meticulous attention to detail, these sculptures aim to encapsulate the physical prowess, skill, and determination that defined these sports heroes. Whether it is a basketball player soaring through the air for a gravity-defying dunk, a soccer player gracefully manoeuvring the ball past opponents, or a boxer delivering a knockout punch, these sculptures freeze these iconic moments in time, forever preserving the greatness of these athletes (Telecoming, 2023; Tahiru, 2022).

The process of creating these sculptures is a labour of love, requiring the expertise of skilled artists. They meticulously study photographs, videos, and even live performances to capture the unique characteristics and expressions of sports heroes. Every muscle, every facial expression, and every movement is carefully sculpted to convey the intensity and passion that these athletes brought to their respective sports. These sculptures are often placed in prominent locations, such as sports

stadiums, halls of fame, or public spaces, where they can be admired by fans and passers-by alike (Telecoming, 2023). They serve as a source of inspiration, reminding aspiring athletes of the heights that can be reached through dedication and hard work. They also provide a sense of pride and nostalgia for fans, who can relive the exhilarating moments that these sports heroes brought to their lives.

Beyond their aesthetic appeal, these sculptures also hold symbolic value. They represent the indomitable spirit of human achievement, the pursuit of excellence, and the triumph of the human will. Sports heroes serve as a constant reminder that they are not merely athletes, but rather individuals who have triumphed over challenges, shattered limits, and made an enduring impact on the globe. In a world where sports heroes often become cultural icons, these sculptures play a crucial role in preserving their legacies. They ensure that the impact of these athletes extends beyond their playing careers, allowing their stories to be passed down through generations. They become part of the collective memory, reminding us of the transformative power of sports and the enduring influence of these remarkable individuals (Brassard, 2023).

Sculptures that immortalise the legacies of sports heroes are not mere statues but powerful symbols of human achievement and inspiration. They capture the essence of these athletes, preserving their greatness for future generations to admire and emulate. These sculptures stand as testaments to the indomitable spirit of sports and the enduring impact of these extraordinary individuals. However, in Ghana, much of this immortalisation of sports icons in national or public spaces has not been realised. The few that were once known are individually owned sculptures that were done obscurely or unprofessionally.

Boxing

Azumah Nelson's Statue at KNUST, Kumasi

The statue stands tall and proud, capturing the essence of Azumah Nelson's boxing career. The muscles of his arms and torso are meticulously carved, showcasing the strength and power he possessed in the ring. The veins on his arms are intricately detailed, adding a sense of realism to the sculpture. As illustrated in Figure 1a., the bust as part of the statue is positioned in a dynamic stance, with one foot slightly forward and his fists clenched, ready to strike. This pose perfectly captures the intensity and determination that Azumah Nelson displayed during his fights. The folds and creases of his boxing shorts are expertly carved, adding

to the lifelike quality of the sculpture. The statue is placed on a sturdy marble pedestal, elevating it to a position of honour and reverence.

The pedestal is engraved with Azumah Nelson's name and notable achievements, serving as a reminder of his incredible boxing career. Visitors to the Museum of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) are often in awe of the statue, marvelling at the skill and artistry that went into its creation (Ankrah, 2018). The statue serves as a testament to the talent and dedication of both Mr. Emmanuel Bonsoo (Research Fellow) and Kwame Opoku Bonsu (Zin) (Lecturer) (Personal communication, June 11, 2024) at the sculpture department of KNUST, respectively, as well as the growing appreciation for stone carving in Ghana. The statue of Azumah Nelson has become a symbol of inspiration for aspiring boxers and sports enthusiasts alike. It serves as a reminder of the hard work, discipline, and determination required to achieve greatness in any field. The statue stands as a tribute to Azumah Nelson's legacy and his contribution to the world of boxing (Tahiru, 2022; Botchway, 2019).

The sculpture of Azumah Nelson is presented in its natural marble colours, enhancing its aesthetic appeal. The artist skillfully extends the shoulders of the sculpture to seamlessly merge with the background of the solid marble block. This deliberate choice emphasizes that the sculpture was born out of a single block of marble, symbolising the strength and resilience of Azumah Nelson himself. Just as the marble block signifies the unyielding nature of the person carved, Azumah's integrity and honesty are likened to the calmness and tranquillity that the marble exudes when it is in its rightful place. Similar to the marble, the sculpture remains stationary unless it is picked up and utilised, much like how the artist picked and carved the unstoppable Azumah Nelson from the marble (Ankrah, 2018).

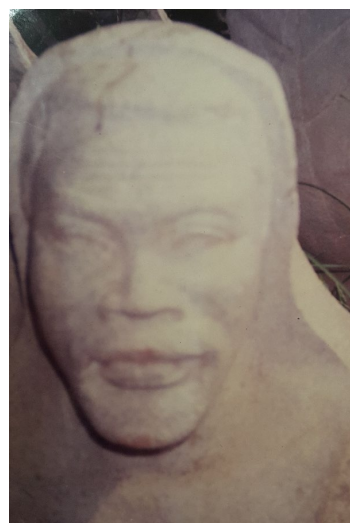
The weight of the marble lends an air of authority to the sculpture, making it impossible for just one person to lift or handle it. This necessitates the involvement of multiple hands, fostering unity, and emphasizing the importance of collaboration. In such situations, the sculpture serves as a symbol of unity and underscores the significance of working together harmoniously. The sculpture stands as a remarkable piece of art that not only captures the essence of Azumah Nelson but also carries the historical significance of his unparalleled achievements as one of the greatest boxers of all time (Tahiru, 2022). This is

evident in Figure 2, which showcases the sculpture and its representation of Azumah Nelson's legacy. This clever manipulation of perspective creates a dynamic and engaging experience for the viewer, as they are invited to explore the artwork from different angles and discover new details with each shift in position.

One participant claimed that:

The carve of marble added another layer of complexity to the statue. Azumah Nelson's statue at KNUST is powerful tributes to the boxing legend, embodying his spirit of determination and resilience. It's a reminder of his remarkable achievements and a source of inspiration for aspiring athletes (Response 1, 2024).

According to another participant, these sculptures are a sense of pride and admiration for Azumah Nelson's boxing legacy, with the statue symbolising resilience and achievement. By repurposing discarded materials, these responses align with Ankrah's (2018) argument that not only does sculpture pay homage to Nelson's humble beginnings but also highlights the transformative power of art. The rough and jagged edges of the material contrast with the smoothness of Nelson's form, symbolising the challenges he faced and overcame throughout his career (Botchway, 2019). This juxtaposition of materials adds depth and texture to the sculpture, further enhancing its visual impact. In essence, the statue of Azumah Nelson is a powerful representation that transcends the boundaries of traditional sculpture. It combines the art of mimesis, faithfully capturing the boxer's likeness, with the illusionistic techniques that challenge our perception of reality (Ankrah et al., 2021).



Figures 2. Azumah Nelson's Bust at KNUST Artist: Emmanuel Bonsoo and Kwame Opoku Bonsu; Medium: Marble, Size: Life-size, Location: Kumasi, Ghana and Year: Unknown.

Long Tennis

Tennis Player at University of Education, Winneba

The sculpture, located at the Sports College in Winneba tennis court, remains unidentified, leaving its creator a mystery. However, its artistic qualities are undeniable. The sculpture depicts a female figure, capturing the essence of grace and athleticism, adorned in tennis attire and poised to receive a ball (See Figures 3a and 3b). The attention to detail is remarkable, as the figure squats with her left foot positioned forward, ready to spring into action. One striking aspect of the sculpture is the severed racket that the figure holds. It is a poignant symbol, perhaps representing the challenges and setbacks that athletes face in their pursuit of excellence. Despite this, the figure remains resolute and determined, showcasing the indomitable spirit of athletes. The choice of attire adds to the overall impact of the sculpture. The faded red vest over a white dress and trainers not only reflects the fashion of the time but also adds a touch of nostalgia. It transports viewers back to a bygone era; evoking memories of tennis matches and the passion that surrounds the sport (National Sports Authority (NSA), 2023). The inscription on the pedestal, 'For sports development', provides insight into the purpose behind the creation of this sculpture. Another participant shared, "The tennis player sculpture at the

University of Education, Winneba, captures the grace and intensity of the sport. It's a striking addition to the campus, evoking a sense of passion and dedication among students and sports enthusiasts alike (Response 2, 2024)."

It becomes evident that the statue was specifically crafted to promote sports and inspire athletes. The sculptor aimed to capture the essence of athleticism and convey the importance of sports in society. Despite the sculptor's successful achievement of their intended objective, the sculpture has not been immune to the unfortunate impact of Ghana's lack of maintenance culture. Over time, parts of the sculpture have been damaged, detracting from its original splendour. However, even in its current state, the sculpture remains a testament to the skill and artistry of its creator. This unidentified sculpture at the Sports College in Winneba tennis court is a captivating piece of art (Ankrah, 2018). Its portrayal of a female figure in tennis attire exudes elegance and athleticism. The severed racket (Figure 3b) and faded attire add depth and symbolism to the sculpture, while the inscription on the pedestal highlights its purpose in promoting sports development (Telecoming, 2023). Despite the effects of neglect, the sculpture continues to inspire and captivate viewers, serving as a reminder of the importance of preserving and appreciating art.



3a



3b

Figures 3a and 3b. Tennis Player. Artist: Unknown; Medium: Cement, Size: Life-size, Location: Winneba, Ghana and Year: Unknown.

Gymnastic

A Gymnastic at University of Education, Winneba

The University of Education, Winneba, is a renowned institution located in Ghana, known for its dedication to providing quality education in various fields. It is within the premises of this esteemed university that the unidentified gymnast sculpture can be found (See Figures 4a and 4b). Despite the artist's anonymity, diligent researchers were able to uncover that a talented student from the Physical Education Department was responsible for the creation of this captivating artwork. The sculpture itself is a true testament to the artist's skill and creativity. Upon first glance, the sculpture immediately captures the viewer's attention with its visually appealing composition. It portrays a female athlete, her features suggesting an energetic woman, dressed in the vibrant attire of a gymnast. The artist has skillfully captured the essence of the gymnast's movement, freezing her in the midst of attempting a front flip.

A participant highlighted that:

Located at the University of Education, Winneba, the gymnastic sculpture is a tribute to the athleticism and agility of gymnasts. The dynamic form injects vigour into the campus landscape and elicits admiration for the sport. The University community

appreciates UEW's representation of various sports and recognises that the university also values holistic education, including athletics (Response 3, 2024).

The gymnast's hands are firmly planted on the ground, showcasing her strength and determination. Her legs are spread apart, with the left leg gracefully flipped over her head and touching the ground, while the right leg hangs in the air, poised to make contact with the floor (Ankrah, 2018). This position conveys the gymnast's readiness and preparedness to execute her routine flawlessly. The sculpture's weight is expertly balanced and supported by the acrobatically positioned arms, which are firmly planted on the pedestal. This not only adds to the overall aesthetic appeal but also symbolises the strength and resilience of the gymnast. Crafted entirely from cement, the sculpture and its pedestal form a cohesive whole (Telecoming, 2023). The choice of white paint for the entire artwork adds a sense of purity and elegance, enhancing the sculpture's visual impact. The unidentified gymnast sculpture at the University of Education, Winneba, is a remarkable piece of art that not only showcases the talent of the anonymous artist but also celebrates the beauty and grace of gymnastics. It serves as a testament to the university's commitment to promoting creativity and artistic expression within its student body.



4a



4b

Figures 4a and 4b. Gymnast. Artist: Unknown; Medium: Cement, Size: Life-size, Location: Winneba, Ghana and Year: Unknown.

Football

Asamoah Gyan and Michael Essien's Statues

Statues of Asamoah Gyan (See Figure 5a) and Michael Essien (See Figure 5b) have been erected in their honour privately, showcasing their contributions to Ghanaian football. These life-sized concrete sculptures capture the fanciful presence of both players, immortalising their achievements for generations to come. Standing tall in individual prominent locations, these statues serve as a reminder of their impact on the sport and their status as national heroes. These sculptures depicting Asamoah Gyan and Michael Essien have been crafted by artist who wanted to capture their likeness and essence. These sculptures do not showcase the intricate details of their facial features, their athletic bodies, and their iconic poses on the football field. Made from concrete materials, these sculptures might have come from the national authorities to be erected on a larger scale as a testament to the artistic talent and dedication of the creators, as well as a celebration of the players' remarkable careers.

A participant's view on a football issue is essential for understanding that:

The statues of Asamoah Gyan and Michael Essien in Kumasi celebrate Ghanaian football legends, evoking pride and nostalgia among fans. They serve as iconic landmarks, drawing visitors and locals alike to pay homage to these sporting heroes. It's an expression of excitement and reverence for two of Ghana's most celebrated footballers, with the statues serving as pilgrimage sites for fans (Response 4, 2024).

These views confirm the statues of Asamoah Gyan (See Figure 5a) and Michael Essien (See Figure 5b) that will stand as symbols of inspiration and admiration. These larger-than-life sculptures depict the players in action, capturing their passion, skill, and determination. Positioned in prominent locations, such as stadiums or public squares, these statues serve as gathering points for fans and a source of pride for the local community. The statues also act as a tribute to the players' contributions to Ghanaian football, reminding everyone of their remarkable achievements and the impact they have had on the sport (Charway & Houlihan, 2020).



5a



5b

Figures 5a and 5b. Statues of Asamoah Gyan and Michael Essien. Artist: Dominic Ebo Bismark; Medium: Cement, Size: Life-size, Location: Both sculptures in Kumasi, Ghana and Year: Unknown.

Abedi Ayew Pele's Statue

Abedi Pele's statue and its artistic flaws hold sentimental value for the community (See Figure 6). The people of Tamale see the statue as a symbol of pride and a reminder of the achievements of Abedi Pele and other footballers from the Northern region (Addo Jnr., 2021). Despite its imperfections, the statue still manages to capture the essence of Abedi Pele's playing style and his contribution to Ghanaian football. It serves as a visual representation of his skill, agility, and passion for the game. The pose with the ball at his feet showcases his ability to control and manipulate the ball with finesse, a skill that made him a revered figure in the football world. The choice of yellow for the statue's colour is also significant. It not only represents the old Ghanaian jersey but also symbolises the golden era of Ghanaian football, during which Abedi Pele played a pivotal role. The yellow colour evokes a sense of nostalgia and reminds viewers of the glory days when Ghana's national team was a force to be reckoned with. One participant hinted, "Abedi Ayew Pele's statue in Tamale stands as a symbol of football excellence and national pride. It's a tribute to his illustrious career and enduring legacy, resonating with fans who fondly remember his contributions to Ghanaian football (Response 5, 2024)."

Notwithstanding the flaws in its execution, as indicated in Figure 6, these responses confirm that the statue stands as a testament to the impact Abedi Pele had on Ghanaian football and the pride that the people of Tamale feel for their local hero. It serves as a reminder of the hard work and dedication of a generation of footballers who put Ghana on the map on the international football scene. Abedi Ayew Pele's statue in Tamale may have its artistic flaws, but it holds immense significance for the community (Addo Jnr., 2021). It represents the achievements of Abedi Pele and other footballers from the Northern region and serves as a tribute to their contribution to Ghanaian football. Despite its imperfections, the statue stands as a symbol of pride and a reminder of the golden era of Ghanaian football.

Marcel Desailly's Statue in Accra

Marcel Desailly, a former French captain, is not only celebrated for his exceptional contributions to football but also for his dedication to his home country of Ghana. Despite residing in France and representing the French national team, Desailly has always maintained a strong connection to his

Ghanaian roots. This is evident in his decision to establish a sports complex in Accra, where he provides opportunities for the younger generation to engage in sports and develop their skills. The statue, created by sculptor Dr G.P. Waldron, serves as a visual representation of Desailly's remarkable career and his commitment to giving back to his community (Ghanasoccernet, 2014). The bronze bust captures the essence of Desailly's character, showcasing his determination, resilience, and passion for the sport. It immortalises the significant moments in his life, reminding all who see it of the immense effort he exerted to achieve success. Beyond his achievements on the field, Desailly's philanthropic endeavours further exemplify his commitment to making a positive impact. By establishing the sports complex in Accra, he has provided a safe and accessible space for people to come together and engage in physical activity. This facility not only promotes a healthy lifestyle but also fosters a sense of community and camaraderie among its users.



Figure 6. Abedi Pele's statue in Tamale. Artist: Unknown; Medium: Cement, Size: Life-size, Location: Tamale, Ghana and Year: 2008.

Desailly's decision to decline offers from the Ghana Football Association job demonstrates his desire to contribute to his country in a different way. Rather than taking on a managerial role, he has chosen to focus on creating opportunities for the younger generation through his sports complex and other

philanthropic initiatives. This dedication to giving back is a testament to Desailly's character and his belief in the power of sports to transform lives. Marcel Desailly's statue at his sports complex in Accra serves as a tribute to his exceptional contributions to football and his commitment to his home country of Ghana (Ghanasoccernet, 2014). Another participant's idea resonate with the exceptional contribution of Desailly that:

Marcel Desailly's statue in Accra honours the legendary footballer's impact on the global stage. It's a testament to his leadership and skill, inspiring admiration from football enthusiasts and showcasing Ghana's influence in the sport. This is a recognition of Desailly's dual heritage and his impact on both Ghanaian and French football, fostering cross-cultural appreciation (Response 6, 2024).

These ideas align with Goris' (2023) statement on bringing communities together through shared sports experience, as the sculpture shown in Figure 7, beautifully captures the significant moments in his life and reflects his character and determination. It symbolises his dedication to providing opportunities for the younger generation and his belief in the transformative power of sports. Desailly's legacy will continue to inspire and motivate future generations to pursue their dreams and make a positive impact in their communities.



Figure 7. Marcel Desailly's Bust. Artist: Gerry Waldron; Medium: Bronze, Size: 2ft high, Location: Lizzy Sports Complex, Accra, Ghana and Year: 2014.

The Black Starlet Statue

The cement statue (See Figure 8), with its broken hands, tells a story of triumph and loss. Originally, the statue depicted a young man engaged in a football game, holding a ball on his thigh. This detail added significance to the statue, symbolising the player's skill and success. However, the ball is now absent, leaving a void in the composition. Notwithstanding the missing ball, the statue remains visually striking. The natural grey colour of the cement contrasts with the face, which stands out with closed eyes. The downward gaze suggests that the young man is looking towards the "missing" ball, his focus and determination evident. The open mouth conveys surprise and excitement, capturing the exhilaration of the player who seemingly trapped the ball. Some participants proclaimed that:

The Black Starlet statue represents Ghana's rich footballing heritage, commemorating the achievements of the national youth team. It's a symbol of hope and potential, inspiring young talents to pursue their dreams in football. The moment was filled with nostalgia and reverence for the historic achievements of the Black Starlets, with the statue serving as a reminder of Ghana's rich footballing history (Response 7, 2024).

These ideas reflect on Mahamah's (2021) story as a broader understanding among participants, suggesting that the statue presents a pleasing appearance, capturing a moment of victory frozen in time. The researchers are of the view that if the statue had remained intact as initially sculptured, it would have effectively portrayed the numerous stories of the Black Starlets, Ghana's under-17 football team, who emerged as champions of the world (Addo Jnr., 2021). The inscription (See Figure 9) on the statue boldly declares its purpose, honouring the Black Starlets and their victory in the JVC U-17 World Cup in Italia 1991 (Ankrah, 2018). This inscription represents a courageous gesture by the sculptor, Eric Akator, to pay tribute to a generation of footballers who brought Ghana's name to prominence. The Italia '91 football team brought immense joy and happiness to the people of Ghana, who had endured a prolonged absence of victory in major competitions. During that period, Ghana was in a dull and gloomy state, lacking success in the world of football. However, it was these young players who managed to rescue the nation from its despair. Through their triumph in the under-17 World Cup, they brought glory and honour to Ghana, restoring the nation's pride and inspiring future generations of footballers. The cement statue, as captured in Figure 8, with its broken hands and

missing ball, serves as a reminder of the Black Starlets' remarkable achievement. It stands as a symbol of their resilience and determination, capturing a moment of victory that will forever be etched in Ghana's history.



Figure 8. The Black Starlet Statue. Artist: Eric Akator, Medium: Cement, Size: Life-size, Location: Winneba, Ghana and Year: Unknown.

May 9th disaster statue in Accra

The statue, standing tall at the entrance of the Accra Sports Stadium as shown in Figure 10a, serves as a constant reminder of the tragic events that unfolded on that fateful day. It stands as a solemn tribute to the lives lost and a testament to the resilience of the Ghanaian football community. The sculpture itself is a powerful representation of the pain and anguish

experienced by all those affected. The two figures, frozen in time, capture the raw emotions of despair and grief. The standing figure, with its mouth wide open, seems to be releasing cries of anguish and lamentations, as if unable to contain the overwhelming sorrow. Yet, despite their own pain, this figure supports and carries the injured individual, symbolising the unity and compassion that emerged in the face of tragedy (Ghanasoccernet, 2018).

The injured person, cradled securely on the carrier's shoulders, represents the physical and emotional burden carried by the survivors. Their entire body weight weighs heavily on the carrier's back, causing their right leg to trail behind, a visual representation of the lasting impact of the incident. This depiction serves as a reminder that the scars of that day will forever remain, both physically and emotionally. The choice of materials for the sculpture adds to its significance. Constructed from cement, a durable and enduring material, it symbolises the strength and resilience of the Ghanaian people. The golden finish, shining brightly in the sunlight, represents the hope and unity that emerged from the darkness of that tragic day.

Another participant stated:

The May 9th Disaster Statue in Accra serves as a poignant reminder of a tragic event in Ghanaian football history. It honours the memory of those lost and underscores the importance of safety and unity in sports. Reflection and solemn remembrance of the tragic events of May 9th, 2001, honouring the lives lost and the lessons learned from the disaster. Improved safety measures in sports stadiums and events were spurred by the tragic reminder of the consequences of inadequate infrastructure and crowd control (Response 8, 2024).

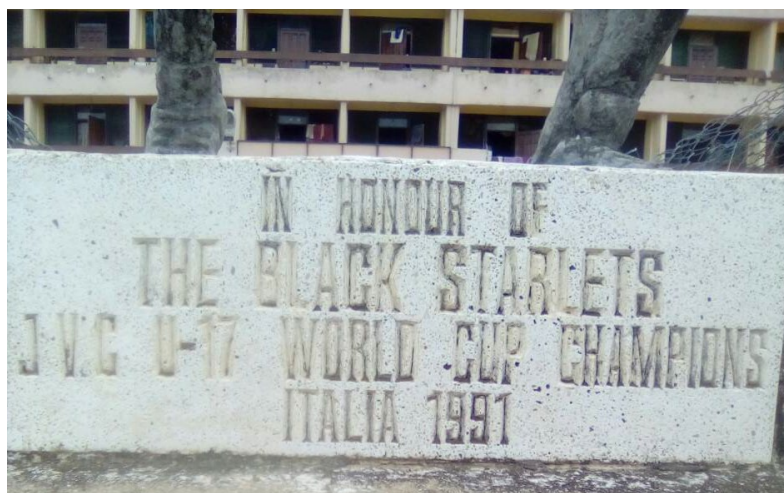


Figure 9. Plaque of the statue.



10a



10b

Figures 10a and 10b. May 9th Statue. Artist: Gladys Adinyira Wuaku, Medium: Cement, Size: Life-size, Location: Ohene Djan Sports Stadium, Accra, Ghana and Year: 2003.

These responses confirm the mounted on a granite pedestal, the sculpture is surrounded by the names of all the deceased individuals, etched into the stone as illustrated in Figure 10b. This serves as a poignant reminder of the lives lost and ensures that their memory will never be forgotten. It also provides a space for visitors to pay their respects and reflect on the impact of the tragedy (Ghanasoccernet, 2018). The statue erected on May 9th stands as a powerful and poignant reminder of one of the most tragic days in Ghanaian football history. It serves as a commemoration of the sorrowful occurrence and a symbol of the multitude of lives lost. Through its depiction of despair, grief, and unity, it honours the memory of those who perished and serves as a reminder of the strength and resilience of the Ghanaian people.

Conclusion

The study on the societal effects of sports hero sculptures in Ghana delves into the intricate relationship between material culture, artistic expression, and societal dynamics. These sculptures, which go beyond mere representations of athletic prowess, play a pivotal role in shaping community identity, fostering a sense of pride, and preserving the rich cultural heritage of Ghana. The research findings shed light on the profound contribution of sports hero sculptures to the social culture of Ghanaian communities.

For the most part, the participants described the statues as symbols of unity during communal celebration, leading to the conclusion that perhaps these monuments meaningfully contribute to the

formation of community identity. Again, the responses suggested that these sculptures are potent symbols that also unite members of the community in their shared reverence for sporting heroes. By prominently displaying these sculptures in public spaces, communities are able to assert their unique identity and celebrate their local sporting legends. This sense of collective identity not only strengthens social cohesion but also promotes a sense of belonging and solidarity among community members.

Moreover, the study highlighted the role of sports hero sculptures in promoting pride within Ghanaian communities. These sculptures serve as tangible representations of the achievements and successes of local athletes, instilling a sense of pride and accomplishment among community members. By showcasing the accomplishments of their sporting heroes, communities are able to bask in their shared glory and feel a sense of collective pride. This pride not only boosts community morale but also inspires younger generations to strive for greatness and contribute to their community's sporting legacy.

Additionally, the research findings emphasized the crucial role of sports hero sculptures in preserving Ghana's cultural heritage. These sculptures often incorporate traditional artistic techniques and materials, reflecting the rich cultural heritage of the country. By displaying these sculptures in public spaces, communities are able to preserve and promote their cultural traditions, ensuring that future generations have a tangible connection to their roots. This preservation of cultural heritage not only furthers a sense of cultural pride but also contributes to the

overall cultural diversity and richness of Ghanaian society. The study on the societal effects of sports hero sculptures in Ghana revealed the profound impact of these sculptures on community identity, pride, and cultural heritage. The study therefore suggests the installation of more permanent artwork in strategic locations in Ghana that would serve as enduring landmarks that celebrate and commemorate the enduring impact of Ghanaian sports heroes. This holistic approach to sports-inspired art not only immortalises athleticism but also underscores the profound social and cultural impacts of these revered figures in Ghana.

Authors' Contribution

Authors contributed equally to the drafting and editing the paper. Owusu-Ansah Ankrah collected data by taking photographs of some sports sculptures, and Evans Kwadwo Donkor, Fredrick Boakye-Yiadom interpreted and analysed the data for saturation purposes.

Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the institutional Research Ethics Board (Takoradi Technical University) and Ghana National Sport Authority (NSA) Council, Takoradi and it was carried out in accordance with the Code of Ethics of the World Medical Association also known as a declaration of Helsinki.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that there was no conflict of interest in conducting this research.

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