

Culture Sculptures: From Cultures to Sculptures

Xitsonga Culture Inspired Furniture design

Design Discipline: Industrial Design

Name: Amukelani Mathebula





ANTI-PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

Assignment: Culture Sculptures Essay
Name: Amukelani Mathebula
Discipline: Industrial Design

1. Plagiarism is to present someone else's ideas as my own.
2. Where material written by other people has been used (either from a printed source or from the internet), this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced. I have used the Harvard Reference System for citation and referencing. Every contribution to and quotation from the work of other people in this assignment has been acknowledged through citation and reference.
3. I know that plagiarism is wrong.
 - 3.1 I know that I would plagiarise if I do not give credit to my sources, or if I copy sentences or paragraphs from a book, article or Internet source without proper citation.
 - 3.2 I know that even if I only change the wording slightly, I still plagiarise when using someone else's words without proper citation.
 - 3.3 I declare that I have written my own sentences and paragraphs throughout my essay and I have credited all ideas I have gained from other people's work.
4. I declare that this assignment is my own original work.
5. I have not allowed, and will not allow, anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work.

SIGNATURE.....

DATE: 15 August 2021

TABLE OF CONTENT

SIGNED ANTI-PLAGARISM DECLARATION	i	CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	
		3.1 Pragmatism	9
LIST OF FIGURES	ii	CHAPTER 4: DESIGN	
ABSTRACT	iii	4.1 Ideation	11
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION		4.2 Development	12
1.1 Introduction to the study	1	4.3 Refinement	13
1.2 Motivation	1	4.4 Final Design	
1.3 Aim	2	CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	16
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW		Sources Consulted	17
2.1 Brief History of the Xitsonga culture	3		
2.2 Traditional Attire	4		
2.3 Music and Dance	6		
2.4 Art décor, Colours & Patterns	8		

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Tsonga Tribe. South African Culture: Tribes of South Africa

Figure 2: Photographer unknown, Tsonga women wearing *xibelani* skirts.

Figure 3: Traditional Tsonga *Ncheka* decorated with floral patterns. Image source: MHC World.

Figure 4: Traditional Tsonga *Ncheka* decorated with floral patterns. MHC World.

Figure 5: Photographer unknown, *Xibelani* skirt in action.

Figure 6: Tsonga women wearing traditional *ncheka* dresses carrying woven baskets on their heads. Pinterest.

Figure 7: Vatsonga men dance. African Ivory Route.

Figure 8: Xizambi Musical Bow instrument. Wikipedia.

Figure 9: Xitende Musical Bow Calabash instrument.

Figure 10: Xitsonga Tutorials. Posts Facebook

Figure 11: (Lin Barie) Xangani Culture. Wine and Wild dogs.

Figure 12: Tsonga hut art decorative painting. Limpopo Information

Figure 13: Ideation of side table. 2021

Figure 14: Ideation of Bow light. 2021

Figure 11: (Lin Barie) Xangani Culture. Wine and Wild dogs.

Figure 12: Tsonga hut art decorative painting. Limpopo Information

Figure 13: Ideation of side table. 2021

Figure 14: Ideation of Bow light. 2021

Figure 15: Side table development sketches, 2021.

Figure 16: Digital renders of the side table, 2021.

Figure 17: Xizambi inspired Side Table Bow light, 2021.

Figure 18: Xitende inspired side table bow light, 2021.

Figure 19: Final design of side table, 2021.

:

Abstract

The context of the study is a semiotic analysis of culture through the lens of a design process that draws inspiration from one of South Africa cultures. South Africa is a culturally diverse country with 11 official languages. The country is often referred to as the Rainbow Nation. This study chose to focus on the Tsonga culture, not only due to the fact that this is my cultural heritage, but also because it is made up of many interesting aspects to learn and draw inspiration from. Through a design process that was steered by research and a visual analysis, the aim was to create furniture that incorporated some of aspects of Tsonga culture. The study also draws upon personal experiences as an individual and a designer of Tsonga origin.

Pronunciation Guide

Xi- “*sh*” as in she

Xi-tsonga is the term used to describe spoken language.

Va - “*ba*” as in bath.

Va-Tsonga is the term used to describe the people from the ethnic group.

Mu- “*moo*” as in Mufasa.

Mu-Tsonga is a term used to describe a person from the Tsonga ethnic group.

Keywords: Xitsonga Culture, Furniture, Sculpture

Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

The study is constructed of research on the Tsonga culture, and experimental aspects through sketching and design of furniture. The study is introduced by a brief history of the Tsonga culture is discussed in order to understand the context. Along with the introduction, follows a motivation behind the study and what the study aims to achieve. The cultural aspect involved analyzing the Tsonga cultural identity, while focusing on the traditional attire, music, dance and art. Experimenting with shape, form and colour was incorporated in the design aspect of the study. The design thinking process is guided by a pragmatic approach, and is discussed in detail further in the study.

1.2 Motivation

In light of being grateful of my cultural heritage, the aim was to design furniture that is inspired by the Tsonga culture. This study presents “Culture Sculptures” by first analysing a culture and exploring different themes. To achieve this objective, I intend to make use of inspiration from traditional fashion, artefacts and history of the *Tsonga* culture. My interpretation of “Culture Sculptures” aims to unpack what it means to be an industrial designer of colour in South Africa as well as learn more about my cultural heritage as a *Tsonga* individual.

I was only exposed to fragments of my cultural heritage, thus through this study I wanted to explore more about my culture and its origins. With the pool of information on the culture I chose to identify mainly music and dance, traditional attire, art décor, colours and artefacts of the Tsonga culture that could be well incorporated into furniture design. The study was followed by exploring mediums such as wood and textiles. Through all of the research conducted I was able to draw inspiration from certain aspects of the Tsonga culture, in order to design, develop and prototype furniture with sculptural elements.

1.3 Aim

The aim is to design furniture that is inspired by *Xitsonga* culture.

The aim is to use wood, textiles and digital media to create furniture that will communicate and showcase my interpretation of *the Tsonga* culture.

1. Explore the culture's traditions and customs through music, dance, art decor, colour, artefacts, and patterns and highlight key aspects relevant to the study.
2. Ideate through sketching, prototyping and design development and refinement of the final concept.
3. Prototype the final design outcome and substantiate the significance, emotionalism and innovation of my product.

Chapter 2

2. Literature review

The literature review elaborates Xitsonga culture in South Africa through an analysis of traditional attire, music, dance, art décor, artefacts and symbols.

2.1 Brief History

The Tsonga are a Bantu speaking ethnic cultural spread throughout South Africa and Southern Mozambique. According to Maluleke (2019:02), The Tsonga people are an ethnic group made up of dispersed, independent clans around the South Eastern part of Africa.” Maluleke (2019) further adds that early tribes of the Tsonga people were already in regions of Mozambique and the Kruger National Park North of Limpopo as early as 697 A.D. (Maluleke 2019). However they are believed to have migrated from East Africa dating back from 200 A.D and 500 A.D. The Tsonga culture is made up of many different tribes that exist through names of forefathers of individual Tsonga clans. This means that “*Xitsonga*” is a unified term used to group many different tribes within the Tsonga people. Although comprised of many different tribes, there are small differences in cultural practices, in terms of rituals and customs. According to Henri A Junod (1912:13) the Tsonga tribe comprised of six groups whom speak various dialects of the language. Junod (1912:13) further explains that the Tsonga people have been referred to by others by many names such as *Ronga*, *Thonga*, *Djonga*, *Shangaan* etc but the preferred and common term used is *Tsonga*. To avoid confusion this study will only use the term *Tsonga* as it is the official and accepted term used in South Africa.



Figure 1: Tsonga Tribe. South African Culture: Tribes of South Africa



Figure 2: Tsonga women wearing *xibelani* skirts.

2.2 Traditional attire

Xitsonga traditional attire reverberate a very bright and colourful palette. The most notable Tsonga traditional attire is seen mostly in women's attire with patterned dresses called *ncheka*, arm and leg beaded bangles called *vhuhlalu* and armbands and gourd leg rattles.

During events and festivals the women's dance is called *xibelani* which can be translated to "hitting to the rhythm", which is a fast-paced and energetic dance style that involves waist shaking and footwork. The *Xibelani* typically refers to the style of dance however sometimes the term is used to refer to the skirt worn to perform the dance. The skirt itself is known as *tinguvu*. The music is very up-tempo which requires the *xibelani* dancers to move rigorously with lots of energy. The design of the *xibelani* skirt is meant to make the hips look big and emphasize the shaking movement.

A *Ncheka* is a brightly coloured cotton cloth usually decorated with colourful beads sewn on to it, as well as flower patterns as shown in figures 3 & 4 on the left. This colour scheme reflects the vibrancy and energy of the people. In an interview with Agnes Mabunda (2021), an elderly in the Tsonga community, she explains that this traditional attire is an age old custom which dates back to when they used to engage in trade with European settlers from the 1400's.



Figure 3 & 4: Traditional Tsonga *Ncheka* decorated with floral patterns. Image source: MHC World.



Figure 5: *Xibelani* skirt in action. Source Unknown

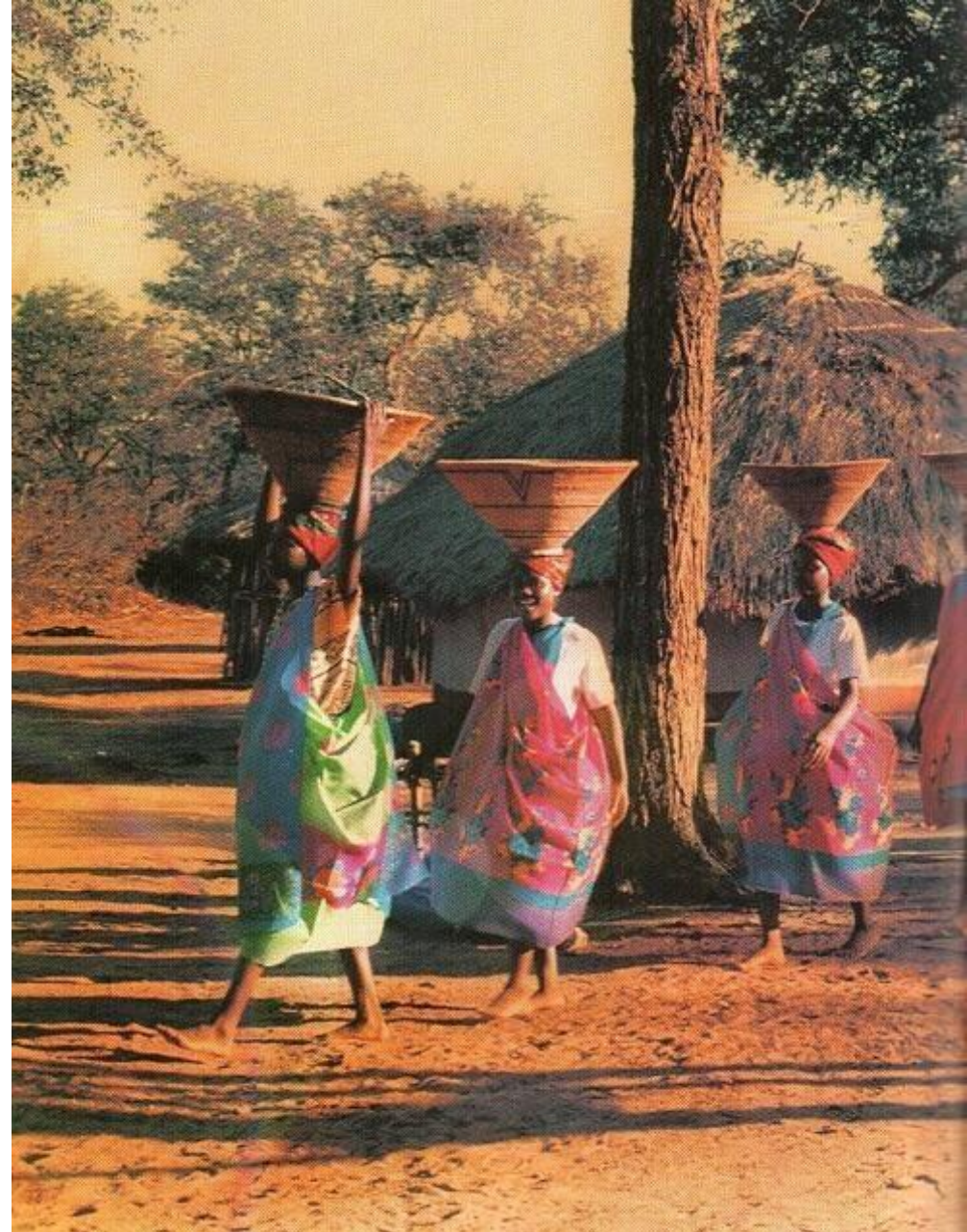


Figure 6: Tsonga women wearing *ncheka* dresses carrying woven baskets on their heads. Pinterest



Figure 7: Vatsonga men dance. African Ivory Route

2.3 Music and Dance

This section focused on elements such as shape, form texture and colour of musical instruments and dance style and attire.

Tsonga music has seasonal applications and discrete social functions with a variety of musical styles which reflect a particular event (Johnston (1971:14). Discrete events such as girls' puberty schools and boys' initiation schools have sacred songs which are performed during such said functions/events. This illustrates that although there are newly popularized genres; tradition is still upheld to the old and ancestral customs.

Mancomane are tambourine shaped drums, Johnston (1971:10) explains how the dzwavi plays exorcism songs with a set of *mancomane* during exorcism rites to show his authority. These are often played with drums called *swigubu* (fig 7).

Another interesting musical instrument used by the Tsonga people is the *mhalamhla* (kudu horn). This musical instrument is often treasured as the lead musical instrument during certain event and festivals.

The Xizambi is an instrument bow that's played by rubbing its notched arch called *mphowani*, cut from a *mphata* tree and finger-stopping the string, a strip from a palm leaf along with mouth resonance and vocal versions (fig 8). Depending on the type of performance, Xizambi players may sometimes accompany grouping singing or play in duet with another Xizambi player.



Figure 8: Xizambi Musical Bow. Wikipedia



Figure 9: Xitende instrument

The Xitende (fig 9) is described by Johnston (1971:31) as a gourd braced bow, the earliest mentioned stringed instrument of the Tsonga. The arch of the bow is cut from the *maloha* tree, with a copper string that's divided by a movable wire loop attached to a calabash.

From analyzing the instruments mentioned, one can almost imagine how it's used/played in relation to its shape and form. There are geometric elements of intention in how the instruments were designed or made. It can be said that the instrument's form follows function.



Figure 10: Xitsonga Tutorials. Posts Facebook



Figure 11: (Lin Barie) Xangani Culture. Wine and Wild dogs.

2.4 Art décor, colours & patterns

Xitsonga art décor can be seen painted on the walls of the round huts (fig 10-12). They make use of line geometry and shape to create psychedelic patterns. The Tsonga people usually use bright primary and secondary colours such as yellow, blue and red, purple, orange and green. Tsonga people are involved in pottery, bead making, and sculpturing. When I would visit my grandmother in Limpopo, as a young boy, my cousins, friends and I would go dig for clay in a nearby gorge then come back to make all sort of things, from cars to cattle, to houses. Basically we made our own toys to play with. Reflecting back I think that's when I fell in love with making things. Recalling from personal experiences, young boys would partake in activities that involved hand crafting, herding cattle, hunting and fishing in nearby rivers. The girls would partake in playing house by imitating women adulthood for example cooking cleaning and other house chores.



Figure 12: Tsonga Hut art decor painting. Limpopo Information

Research Methodology

3.1. Pragmatism

According to Peter Dalsgaard's extract of *In Designerly Ways of Knowing*, Cross (2007), he outlines a "selection of the most salient and recurring issues treated in recent contributions to the field as the theory-practice relation, emergence, interaction, situation, inquiry, transformation and technology" (Dalsgaard 2014:02).

Dalsgaard (2014:01) maintains that "pragmatism offers a set of cohesive concepts and articulations for addressing key issues in design." He further discussed the core concepts of pragmatism that resonate with the issues in design thinking through drawing on the work of Deweyan pragmatism (Dalsgaard 2014). The theory-practice relation in the "pragmatic maxim", a theory stems from practice and requires constant and continuous evaluation (Dalsgaard 2014).

The emergence and interaction in pragmatism realizes that the external world is never fixed, emergences and interactions happen through natural changes, habits, experiences, information, social and economic structures (Dalsgaard 2014:04). The situation is presented that "all human activity is situated" meaning that a situation is constituted by a subject and its surroundings, and neither the subject and surroundings can exist without the other.

Inquiry is described as the mode of thinking and doing by a subject to bring about transformation within a problematic situation (Dalsgaard 2014:05). Transformation is brought about through inquiry to resolve the latter, and this transformation process may involve transforming the inquirer, the environment,

and sometimes both. This is due to the reason that as the inquirer gains better understanding, the problematic situation may change.

Experimentation

A pragmatic approach implies a systemic understanding of situations and how they can correlate in a much broader perspective. This perspective enables the use of integral technologies to aid in considering how the conditions for use will affect and be part of other systems (Dalsgaard 2014:06). Experimentation may be facilitated using physical tools, software, and semantic constructs.

Technology is regarded as “the use of instruments or means to reach an intended outcome. Thus it is central to the transformation of a situation through inquiry” (Dalsgaard 2014:05). These instruments and are essential in developing experiments, mock ups, prototyping and externalizing design concepts. Dalsgaard (2014).

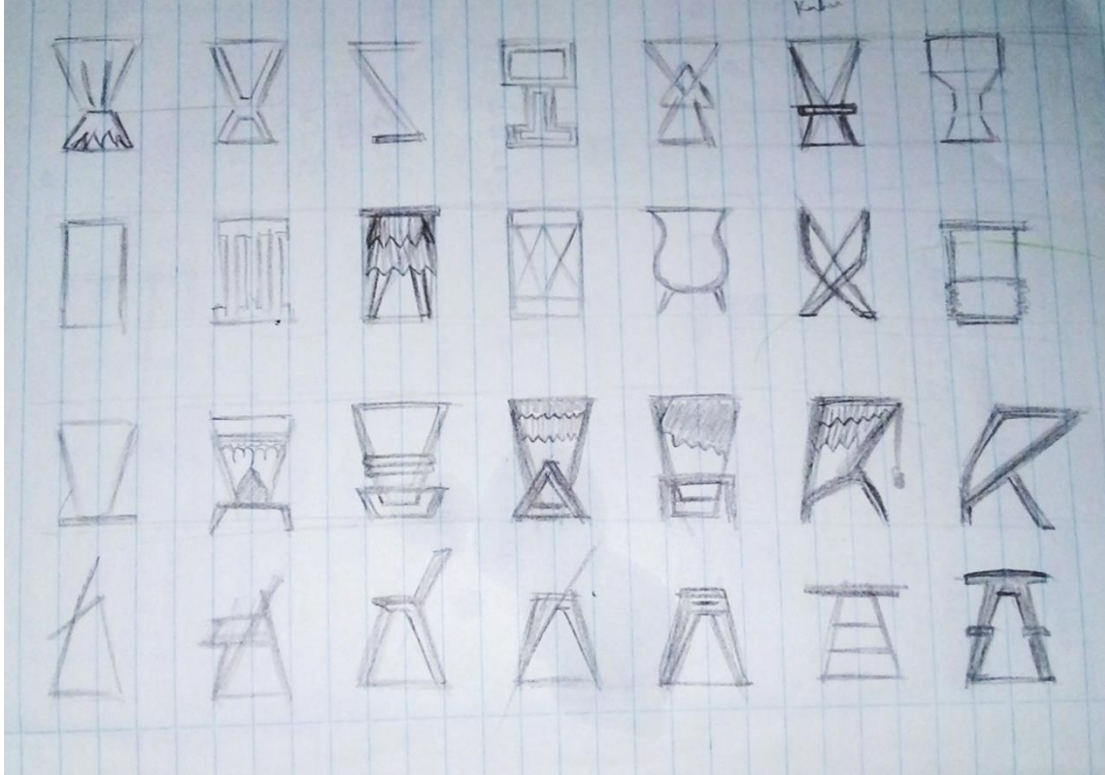


Figure 13: Ideation of side table

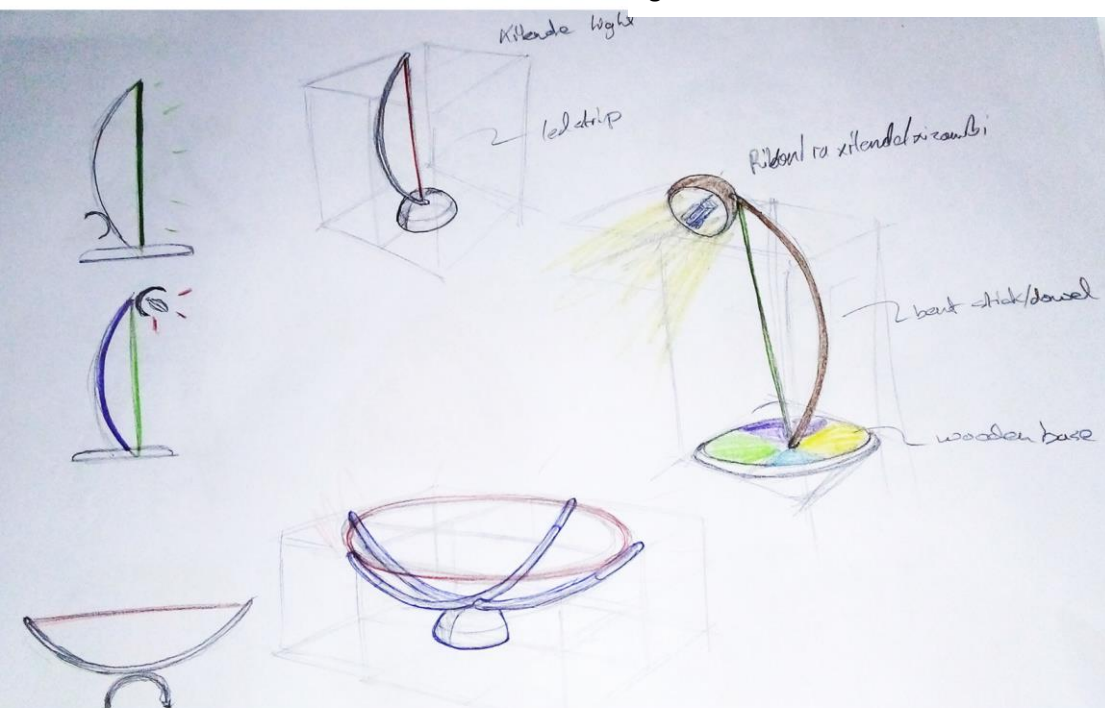


Figure 14: Ideation of Bow light

4.1 Ideation

During the ideation phase the key requirements were to design furniture that drew inspiration from Xitsonga culture by ensuring that certain elements are present parts match the style and aesthetic of *Xitsonga* culture. The keywords during this phase were shape, form and colour.

I leaned toward designing a table that resembled the *Xibelani* dance, because the dance symbolises a very important aspect of the Tsonga culture which is music. Music plays a role in most of the rituals and events in the culture and I wanted to incorporate this in the shaping of the tables in figure 17. I also took inspiration from the shape of the drums (mancomane), and the mortar maize grinder to create side profile of what I envisioned the table would look like.

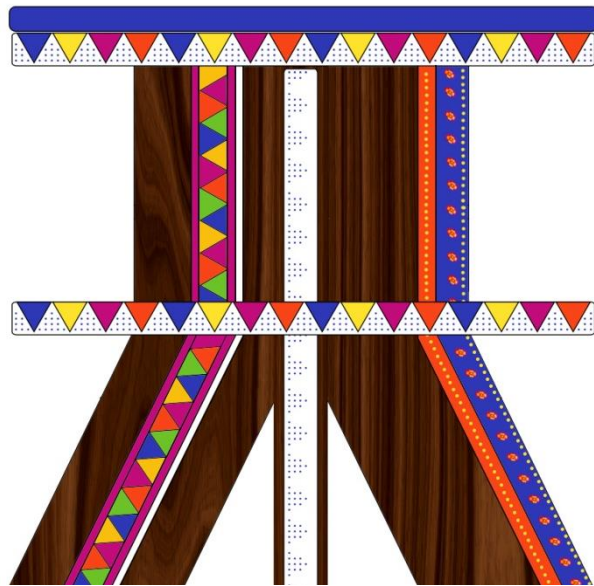
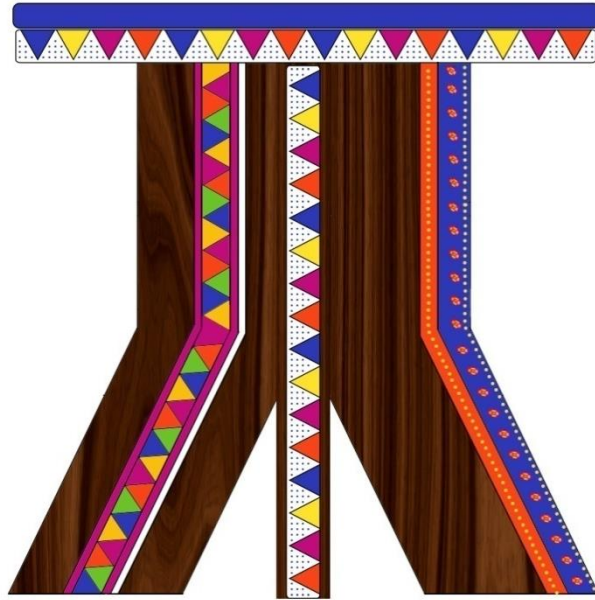
Throughout the ideation stage I wanted to create a supporting feature piece that would tie in with the design of the table. I slowly started to visualise the Xitende and Xizambi instruments as a form of light fixture (fig. This made sense to me, because as mentioned earlier that music is very important in the Tsonga culture, a light fixture would symbolise how the Xitende and Xizambi instruments were a light source or an energy source to which the dancing was born. In turn this musical instrument inspired light fixture I coined as the bow light because it resembles the shape of the bow instrument.



Figure 15: Side table development sketches

4.2 Development

Throughout the development stage I continued sketching concepts of how the design would look like in a 3 dimensional perspective. I looked at the postures of *xibelani* dancers in motion and tried to capture that movement onto the table. The textiles had to be something that would be recognisable as the *xibelani* skirt. I believed this would be where I played around with colours and patterns that matched Tsonga traditional attire and art. The bow light had many variations, with one having the string of the bow as the light source, and the base would be a calabash. The other one had the calabash as the compartment/light bulb housing and it is held upright by a curved wooden dowel stick that slots into an oval shaped base. The placement or arrangement of the bow light and the table would differ in more ways than one. The bow light could be either placed on the floor or on the table; this would be dependent entirely on setting and /or individual taste. For example if the furniture is place in a bedroom setting the light can be placed on top of the table, given that the table is used as a bedside table.



4.3 Refinement

The refinement stage involved taking the development sketches into the digital environment in order to figure out dimensions, proportions and scale. This stage also involved adding texture and enhancing and correcting the colour combinations. Through creating different renders of the product, one was able to determine the possible ways of manufacturing the final product. It also made it easier once the concepts were refined to determine suitable materials and what the final products would look like in different settings or scenes. The key aspects in the refinement phase were to create a unique pattern that resembled Tsonga patterns.

The side table in figure 16 took on a minimalistic style in keeping the form and shapes geometric. The approach looked making the side table flat pack for ease of manufacturability and assembly. While the design embodied straight lines and shapes, the sculptural element was brought about through its resemblance of the *Xibelani* dance. As mentioned in the ideation phase that the shape of the table's legs were inspired by the dancers in stance during the *Xibelani* dance. The round table tops were edged with colourful triangle patterns which incorporated the shape and styling of the *Xibelani* skirt.

Figure 16: Digital renders of the side table

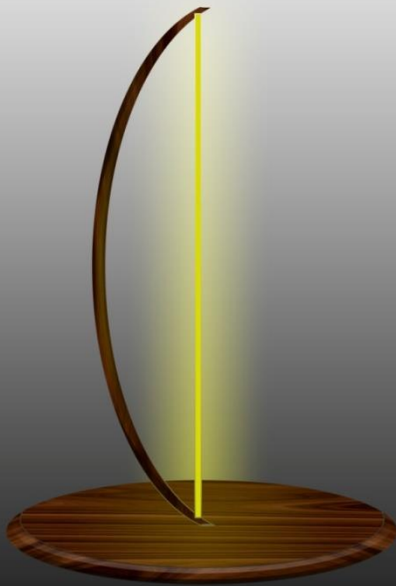


Figure 17: Xizambi inspired Side Table Bow light

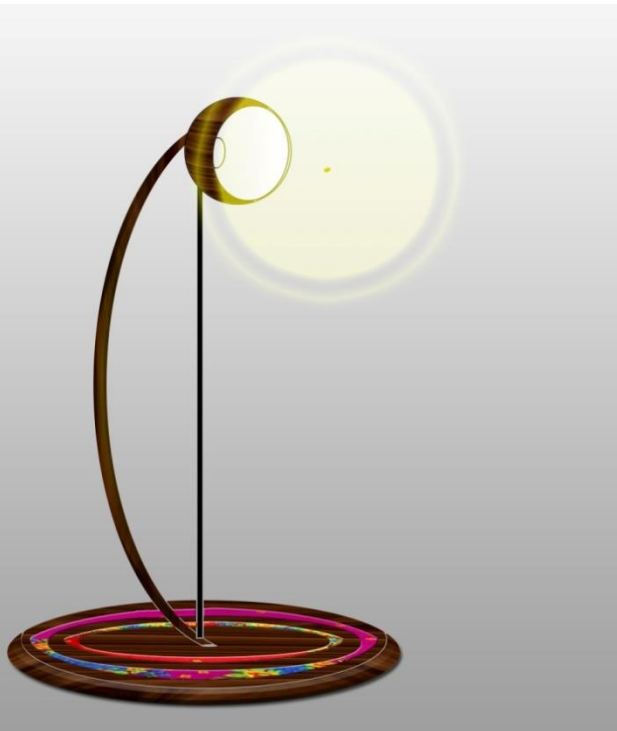


Figure 18: Xitende inspired side table bow light

The bow light in figure 17 & 18 followed the initial inspiration shape and form of the Xizambi and Xitende musical bow instruments. The first concept is sleek and minimal in terms of the design style which also gives it a contemporary look. The light runs perpendicular to the base of the structure in the form of a straight line, adding a clear indication that resembles the Xizambi Bow instrument. The second concept incorporated both the Xitende instruments form as well as the form of a typical lamp design. This gave the second concept a more familiar look of a lamp, which would make it more appealing to a mass market. To add the Tsonga culture's aesthetic, this concept was decorated with Tsonga textile patterning on the surface of the base. The culture's bright ambient colours against the dark wooden surface create some visual contrast that would make the light as a more of a decorative visually attractive piece of furniture. Not only would it create this effect, I believed that it would marry in together with the side table to a cohesive collection of furniture.

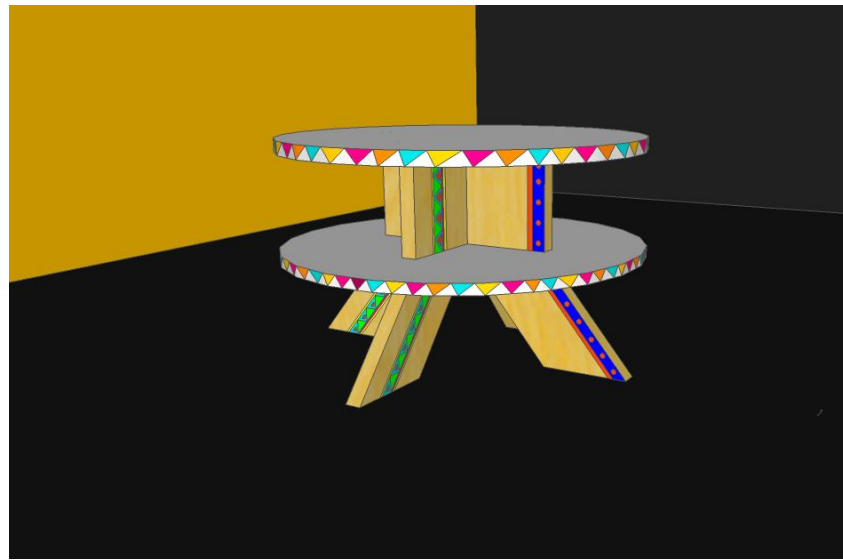


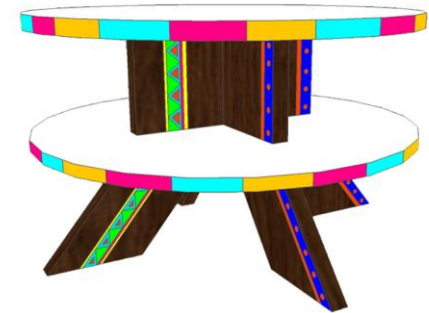
Figure 19: Final Design of Chongola Table

4.4 Final Design

The final design outcome of the side table boasted an array of unique colourful patterning that fully grasps the essence and elements that it drew from. This display or arrangement of colour and shapes was a way of trying to capture the Xibelani dance in entirety, from the actual dance to the attire. The shape and use of colour was a way to retain the truth of which the inspiration comes from. The aim was to create a visual appraisal of all the aspects which were researched and discussed in the study.



Chongola Table



Xigaza Collection

Conclusion

In conclusion, the design outcome followed and became what was intended, and that was to design furniture inspired the Xitsonga. Judging from the topics that were covered in the study and what the brief of Culture Sculptures entailed, I have reason to believe that this unique design is a true reflection of intention guided by a design process.

Sources Consulted

Dalsgaard, P. 2007. Designerly Ways of Knowing, Cross.[O].

Available:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235700918_Designerly_Ways_of_Knowing

Accessed 15 August 2021

Junod, H, A. 1912. The Life of a South African Tribe.[O].

Available:http://webcms.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/183/fhya_library/Junod%2C%20Henri%20Alexandre.%20The%20Life%20of%20a%20South%20African%20Tribe.%20I.%20The%20Social%20Life_Most_compressed.pdf

20Tribe.%20I.%20The%20Social%20Life_Most_compressed.pdf

20Tribe.%20I.%20The%20Social%20Life_Most_compressed.pdf

Accessed 01 August 2020

Johnston, T,F. 1971.The music of the Shangana-Tsonga:Licentiate, Trinity College of

Music,London, 1949.[O].

Available:<https://www.proquest.com/openview/41a0471f97dea0b93005f447fb14816b/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>

pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y

Accessed 15 June 2021

Maluleke, V. History of Xitsonga Speaking Tribes.[O].

Available:https://www.academia.edu/33977463/History_of_Xitsonga_Speaking_Tribes

Accessed 10 June 2021