

As sculpting for religious purpose is considered a spiritual act, sculptors have to choose the most auspicious day and time to start a project.

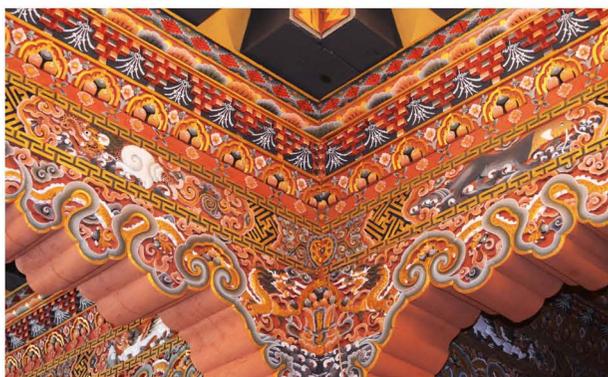
Once completed, an expert (usually a monk) will insert a *zung shing* or *sog shing* (a strut inside the statue as its backbone) and *zung* consisting of written mantras and other precious substances. Then the statue is painted using appropriate colours. Upon completion of all these steps, a *drub* or *rabney* ceremony is conducted by an accomplished lama. The painters and sculptors are highly regarded for their profession.

5.1.3. The Art of Carving

Pazo is the art of carving on wood, stone and slate. This art is evident throughout the country displayed magnificently on wooden structures of fortresses, palaces, stupas, temples, traditional houses and even on furniture. The following section describes some forms of carving.

5.1.3.1. Woodcarving

Wood has been one of the most widely used resources in the country. Some of the masks worn by dancers during the festivals, the altars in the shrine room of any house, containers like bowls and cups, sheaths and handles of knives and swords, xylographic blocks are all carved out of wood.



Choesham, Decorative Items and Furniture

Every house has a *choesham* (altar) entirely made of wood. Generally the altars will have carvings like *choetsi* and other designs such as dragons, flowers, eight lucky signs and mythological animals, on the main structure in accordance with the desires of the owner. On the upper part of the structure called *gu-chag* the altar will have the designs called *pema*, *norbu*, *bagam*, *boh* and *ngangpa*.

Cabinets, *chogdroms*, divans, decorative floral items, religious motifs like dragons, *tashi tagye* and various legendary animals are carved out of wood. The three sides of *chogdrom* (traditional portable table) are carved with dragons, flowers or other legendary animals.

Dramnyen, the traditional Bhutanese guitar is carved from wood in an intricate dragon design. The fingerboard is usually decorated with colourful traditional symbols. The hollowed sound box is covered with goatskin, and attached with either silk or nylon strings.

Masks

The Bhutanese make various shapes and sizes of masks from semi-hardwood, usually blue pine to depict the face of gods, animals and mythological figures. These carved wooden masks are used in the sacred and religious dances. Carved wooden masks are also popular as decorations in houses, dzongs, temples and monasteries.



Xylography

Before the invention of wood carving tradition in Bhutan, all religious texts and official documents were primarily written by hand. With the introduction of woodblock carving and printing technique by Tertön Pema Lingpa (1450-1521), religious texts and images have been carved on woodblocks, thereby reproducing numerous copies, by printing on paper and textiles. Each and every temple and monastery in Bhutan hold a copy of the Buddhist cannons (the teachings) and commentaries on the teachings. Many of the texts from the cannon have been carved on wood, and reproduced by printing on paper.

Woodblock carving is usually carried out on dried birch wood. To make a wooden block for carving, the woodblock is adequately oiled to make it soft and smooth for carving. The wooden block surface is then planed smooth on which the written text is glued. Once the paper has dried, it is removed from the block leaving the image of the scripts on the woodblock. The mirror image of the texts that need to be printed is left on the surface while those parts not required are removed with gouges or chisels. The texts are then carved with the help of chisels.

Images and other *patras* are carved only on to one side of the wooden block, whereas religious texts are carved on both sides of the woodblock.

The carved woodblock is then coated with ink, and a sheet of paper is placed over the inked blocks. The paper is then rubbed and pressed with a roller to get the text printed. It is then left to dry either in shed or sun.

Four different kinds of tools are used for xylography such as *zhogthig*, *yatag*, *segchung*. Round letters are carved using the tip of the *mindrug* with its sharp crescent shape tip. The tip of the *yatag* with its more relaxed crescent shape is used to carve the sub-bending *yatag* script. Similar to the typical Bhutanese knife; the tip of *segchung* is slightly slanted and carves the rest of the letters of the scripts. *Zhogthig*, with its wider and large tip is used to carve the lines in the space on the edge of the text that maintain the outer margin.

5.1.3.2. Stone Carving

In Bhutan, carving on stones is not as diverse or common as wood carving but it existed in Bhutan. One comes across huge water driven grinding stone mills, hollowed-out stones used for pounding and husking grains, troughs for feeding animals, images of deities, gods and religious figures carved onto large rocks.



In Bhutan, stones were also carved to make stone pots and utensils, but today these have become rare because of modern alternatives.

5.1.3.3. Slate Carving

Slate carving is another form of art that is being practiced in Bhutan. Slate, called as *do nag*, is found in abundance in Bhutan, and the artisan is known as *do nag lopen*.

Portraits depicting deities and religious figures, inscriptions of mantras and religious scripts are carved onto slates, and adorned onto the exterior walls of temples, monasteries, dzongs and *choetens*. Apart from carving on wood, stone and slate, the Bhutanese people also carve images of gods and deities on rhino horns and ivory.

