

THREE-DIMENSIONAL TOTEM INSPIRED BY OPRIPA MMAONWU, A PATHFINDER, HARBINGER, MUSICAL HIGH ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL BEAUTIFICATION

Ephraim Ugochukwu ¹, Folorunsho David Jayeola ², Chukwu Ifeanyi Nicolas ³, Nnodi Chiaka Adaure ⁴, Olusola Samuel Akintunde ⁵, Otuu Ogobuchi Idam ⁶, Francisca Anuli Ugwu ⁷, Chinatu Regina Obiukwu ⁸

¹ PhD Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Faculty of Environmental Science Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

² Department of Music, Faculty of Humanities Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

³ Department of Architecture, Faculty of Environmental Sciences Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

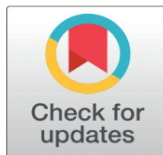
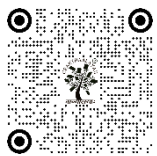
⁴ Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Faculty of Environmental Sciences Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

⁵ Department of Music, Faculty of Humanities Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

⁶ Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Faculty of Environmental Sciences Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

⁷ Department of Music, Faculty of Humanities, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

⁸ Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, Faculty of Humanities Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria



Received 28 March 2026

Accepted 29 April 2026

Published 18 May 2026

Corresponding Author

Ephraim Ugochukwu,
ephraim.ugochukwu@funai.edu.ng

DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v7.i7s.2026.7814](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v7.i7s.2026.7814)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2026 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.

ABSTRACT

The research focused on the Opripa, shaped in a canoe-like paddler form, which inspired the creation of a totem pole, for the appreciation of art. The primary function of the Opripa is to open up the ant hole for a new or old revived mmaonwu spirit, to enter the world of the living through an ant hole, as it is slammed on the earth by those who lead the mmaonwu spirit. The musical group and the prominent role of the Onye oja added pep and attraction to the activity. During the process of the mmaonwu spirits' entry to the world of the living, there were inclinations of political play and gimmickry. The problem of the study is documentation, cultural decay and lack of sustainability. There are already noticeable signs prevalent among youths in continuity, cultural preservation and advancement. Pertinent questions were asked and generated to drive the creative work in the studio. Data obtained from primary and secondary sources were deployed to carry out the study in a narrative historical method. Artworks were created from the data gathered using those questions. The research also focused on replicating and producing the Opripa in a totem form. The paper thought that our cultural values of masquerade activity have depleted because of Western infiltration, greed, selfishness and political tendencies. The research concludes that totems should be identified by the indigenous people and positioned as one of the landmarks and dots for environmental beautification, and a veritable tool in the reconstruction of local history for posterity and relations among and between groups.

Keywords: Opripa, Pathfinder, Revived Mmaonwu, Fine Arts, 3-Dimensional, Representation, Musical, Environmental Beautification



1. INTRODUCTION

The process of using the Opripa to open up the part for the mmaonwu spirit is also known as watering the ground for the possible emergence of the masquerade. Each time the carriers of the Opripa strike the earth, the masquerade's emergence draws nearer. Opripa is gotten from the coconut tree leaves called fronds, see plate I. The botanical name for coconut is *Cocos nucifera*; its structure is large and pinnately divided, featuring around 200 to 250 tapering leaflets attached to the central rachis. It is used to make brooms, thatching roofs, baskets, weaving and handicrafts. Its usage cannot be overemphasised; the coconut is widely used in both modern and traditional medicine and is ascribed a very wide range of applications. For use as Opripa, this branch is cut down, the fronds are cut off, trimmed and ready for use. It is an apparatus used in inviting the dead to coexist among the living. See Plate II. The relationship between the dead and living is that the dead do not overwhelm the living with the activities of metaphysical excess; they are meant to insist through minor consistencies. There is a triangular formation between the Opripa, the mmaonwu spirit and the living. The symbol of a triangle can never be overemphasised. The triangle represents stability, strength, and the number three. It also symbolises balance, stability, and harmony through concepts like mind-body-spirit, past-present-future, or birth-life-death. The triangle is an ancient symbol of deity and the divine.

Mma Onwu (masquerade) connotes the beauty of death, because death is a beautiful phenomenon; it gives life meaning and purpose to one's existence. Njoku (2020), in the words of Aristotle, who observed that humanity's imaginings of the gods, their physical attributes and their mannerisms tend to align with human ideas and physical shapes of earthly things. This explains why cosmologies are produced after the peculiar experiences of those societies that behold them. This was why Campbell (2008) opines: "The cosmos in African setting is visualised as a spherical ground with its upper and lower hemispheres fitting tightly together or as a divination tray with a raised figurate border enclosing its flat central surface. It consists of two distinct, inseparable realms: *Ile aye* (the visible, tangible world of the living) or *ode orun* (the invisible, spiritual realm of the departed), which includes *ara/oku orun* (primordial and deified ancestors), *orisa* (gods and goddesses), and *ajogun* and *ebora* (spiritual entities), both benevolent and malevolent". Nwoye (2011) corroborates this statement; the Igbos have a religious conception of the universe by mental contemplation. They believe that the world is made up of two planes: the physical and the spiritual. It abhors the tendency to a digital categorisation of things. They believe that there is a dual traffic and interaction between the inhabitants of the two worlds. In this way, the understanding among the Igbo is that spiritual beings and cosmic forces are highly intermingled, especially when one transcends to the other world. The activities of spiritual beings and forces often directly impinge on the affairs of humans in the human world. Falola (2025), in a recent study of Culture and Customs of Nigeria, informs us that the masquerades of the various Nigerian ethnic groups, including the Yoruba, Efik, Kalabari and Igbo, communicate with the gods and the ancestors, relaying people's wishes to the gods and dramatising for the worshippers the gods' assumed habits and behaviour. One way through which the Igbo and their neighbours honoured and depicted the gods and ancestors was by commemorating through masquerade activities. Culture is the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenges of living in the environment Asiawaju (1997). It is what gives order and meaning to the linguistic, social, political, economic, aesthetic, religious and philosophical modes and organisation of a people, nation or ethnic group. This is to say that culture to a large extent is the total of all things that refer to people's mode of dressing, creativity, social etiquette, eating habit and choice of food and roots of people, symbols, languages, songs, stories, festival celebrations and all expressions of our way of life (Obioha, 2010). Culture, therefore, distinguishes one human group from others and humans from other animals. In the traditional culture of mmaonwu spirit and the use of the stick apparatus are not a new concept in the Igbo long-standing tradition.

An Igbo mmaonwu's staff, stick, or cane is more than just a prop; it is an essential part of their performance and wardrobe. It represents social discipline, spiritual strength and ancestral authority. The staff is seen as an extension of the spiritual force of the mask. The staff or broom in the masquerade's hand symbolises purification, cleansing and the defence of truth in some traditions. The stick is used both physically and symbolically to clear the path like the "Opripa" (a notion known as *Iza Uzo*), guaranteeing the spirit's safe passage between the material and spiritual realms to interact with the living. The stick is the instrument used to enforce discipline, especially among young people, for social policing. In order to reinforce respect for tradition, the stick is employed for dramatic beating or chasing of onlookers who defy cultural standards, make fun of the masquerade, or disobey authority. Sticks are used by masquerades like the Ekpo to uphold local regulations. The stick is utilised to keep viewers at a respectful distance while enhancing the dramatic impact of the performance, adding rhythm and exaggerating movements. The weapon (stick, machete, or staff) represents strength, bravery and the capacity to protect the community from warrior masquerades like Mgbadike or

Agaba, popular among the people of Anambra. It emphasises that the masquerade is a divine messenger rather than just a man in costume and acts as a symbolic link to the ancestors. The stick symbolises the masquerade's dual roles as a revered protector of Igbo culture and ancient rules and a dreaded punisher (Personal communication, Godwin Ugochukwu and Okwudiri Uzuakor, 2026). However, the Opripa is a stick, this time not wielded by the masquerade, but by some initiates who are grown men, younger people and members of that mmaonwu spirit cult. Aged people are not allowed to carry the Opripa, because the exercise involves the use of energy. The function of the Opripa is to draw out, call out, or seek out the mmaonwu spirit by opening the ant hole for the emergence of the mmaonwu spirit into the world of the living, see plates III and IV. During this display, the initiates are usually in very high spirit, because there is so much expectation. The excitement of encountering people of like minds, who are willing to support the course of seeing that masquerade come back to life, especially when the masquerade is being revived. In modern times, one can say that European civilisation has crept in and relegated some of the traditional practices, yet one has a strong feeling that something can be done to revive the culture.

Figure 1



Figure 1 Coconut Tree Year: 2026

Source: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 2



Figure 2 Opripa (Coconut Fronds) Year: 2026

Source: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 3



Figure 3 Opripa Carriers Trying to Open Up the Ant Hole for the Mmaonwu (Onye Mee Onweya) To Emmerge Year: 2026
Source: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 4



Figure 4 Mmaonwu (Onye Mee Onweya) Emerged from the Ant Hole as the Spirit Advances Year: 2026
Source: Ephraim Ugochukwu

2. THE PROCESS AND STAGES OF CREATING THE MMAONWU SPIRIT

In many Igbo cultures, masquerade activity was not part of the people's cultural activity. According to Jovey (2013), "from the beginning of our history, masquerades were not part of our culture, but development and acculturation infused this into our way of life". In the words of Maduagwu (2013), it was noted that the first area in Orumba North and South Local Governments to witness masquerades was Ndikelionwu in Orumba North. It was brought from Arochukwu, the home origin of all Aros, by one Okoli Ijeoma (late), who was a well-known slave dealer from Ndikelionwu. Okoli and his cohorts used a masquerade to intimidate their victims; as a result, they caught them as slaves and sold them into slavery. It was one Mr Okoronkwo Amulike (late) of Ugwuaro in Orumba South Local Government who was the first man to introduce masquerades to the people of Umuze.

The process of preparing African masquerades, particularly in West African traditions, is a highly sacred, secretive and elaborate ritual process that merges artistic creation with spiritual invocation. Masquerades are not viewed as mere costumes but as the reincarnation of ancestors or nature spirits, requiring strict adherence to customary rites.

During initiation and secrecy, only initiated men and elders are involved in the preparation. The process is kept secret from non-initiates and women. The spiritual rites and rituals, preparation often begins with sacrifices of a live animal to specific deities, announced by a priest. Libations are poured to invoke the ancestral spirits to occupy the mask. (Personal communication; Okudiri Uzuakor and Godwin Ugochukwu, 2026). However, female scholars were part of the team that executed this research. The researchers were careful not to venture into areas that excluded women from getting too attached.

Mask constructions are typically carved from wood, though they may replicate, copy and incorporate elements like animal skulls, horns, or raffia. Some mask forms are revealed to the carver through dreams or spiritual visitation. Carvers who are often specialised initiate members, create or repair the mask, often involving a ritual to infuse it with spiritual power. In some cases, people go as far as contacting artists from other communities to engage and contract them to create a mask of their choice. According to Ugochukwu (2017), the role of the artist as intermediary between the divine and the human is clearly evident in traditional African society. The work of art was often described as the self-expression of the Supreme Being himself, relying on human instruments. Mitchell (2011: 313) recounts that the artist who produced ritual objects was regarded as a kind of priest. He was steeped in the metaphysics of his people and possessed the skill to concretise it in his creations... the African artist at the peak of his work enters into a trance-like condition and becomes oblivious of the public and its doings.

It is after the head of the mask is ready that those who are marrying or acquiring the new *mmaonwu* spirit begin to make arrangements for a costume that would match the head. Costuming and ritual materials are designed to completely conceal the wearer's human form. They are constructed from local materials, including fabric, leather, or special leaves. Rehearsal and training, the masquerader (mask player) undergoes rigorous training in dancing, drumming, and specific movement styles to reflect the spirit's character. In every culture, there are certain ideas explicit in the interaction of different elements, which in turn sometimes act as an instrument of social control with which different cultural segments are held together. Thus, before the spread of Islamic and Christian influences, most societies in Africa believed in a complex structure of spirits and ancestors who influenced the living. This was contained in the traditional belief, which reflects the wholeness of the universe, i.e., the various elements of which constituted not only the living, but also the dead. As far as the people are concerned, they are ancestral spirits who periodically visit their living forebears in masquerade forms. Their visits are regarded as spiritual interventions to the world of the living and, as a result, are highly venerated. It is believed that the practice is the same, even though there are slight differences. In this study, the focus is on a particular culture (*Umunze*) in Anambra State, Nigeria, which has been mentioned earlier here. However, the emphasis was also to highlight the experience garnered, promote knowledge and document a people's culture.

3. IDEOLOGICAL, METAPHYSICAL AND POLITICAL GIMMICKRY

The experience garnered during the period and process of launching the revived *Onyeme onweya* masquerade, which took place at *Umunze*, in *Orumba South Local Government Area*, in the month of January 2026. Before embarking on house-to-house visitation, a prior notice was given to some handpicked individuals, and a decision was reached that the newly revived masquerade (*Onyeme onweya*) must aesthetically be pleasant, elegant and outstanding among every other when gathered. Candidates were screened and the two most qualified individuals were picked to carry and launch the community masquerade; each man was measured to be about seven feet in height. Some group of people, teamed up, because they were greater in number, decided that the person they had preferred to carry the *Onyeme onweya* masquerade would be their own candidate, who was five feet in height and by every standard did not match the chosen candidates that were initially screened and accepted. These people were in the majority, and any attempt to insist would derail the entire activity; the show must go on. The ganged-up majority were allowed to display the masquerade. People living outside the country were following the event, snapshots were taken, video coverages, among others, were sent and uploaded to the platform. Everyone complained that the masquerade displayed was indeed "short in supply"; the height and physique were below expectations and standards. That expected aesthetic beauty and elegance were missing and lost. The current situation at hand did not shift the team of researchers' focus away from the target. Even though the lapses were obvious, the investigators saw the entire scenario as a people's agenda and cosmos. This was why *Njoku (2020)* described cosmology as how societies conceive the world and the order of things around them. In the framework of this study, philosophy connotes the application of reason, thought and vision to human challenges and the interrelationship of human existentialism, religion, politics and moral order. African philosophy is not a mere objective,

abstract science, but a practical science, a lived philosophy such that whatever is conceptualised metaphysically is translated into action. Through an action-oriented approach to metaphysical ideas, the indigenous religion helps the believer comprehend and embrace a style of life and the forces that regulate everyday practical living. Reviving the Onyemee onweya masquerade activity was purely politically motivated by a group of people.

One can easily conclude that there was a gang-up by some members of the age grade as to who should be the carrier of Onyemee onweya masquerade, because of the financial reward gained that would be realised at the end of the three-day activity. Secondly, there is an entitlement to the lion's share, as the carrier of the masquerade (Onyemee onweya). Whatever is realised would be divided into two parts; the carrier or performer would be given one part and also gets a share from the second part that would be divided among other members. This also applies to food, especially the meat. Assuming also that a cow was slaughtered, the performer is expected to get the neck of the cow. The same is applicable if it is also a goat, ram, fowl, or any animal in particular that is to be shared as food; he gets the neck part.

4. MUSICAL HIGH ENERGY

Instrument accompaniment is a cornerstone of Nigerian masquerade performances, providing the rhythmic and melodic foundation upon which the spectacle unfolds. The choice of instruments, their playing techniques and their cultural significance vary considerably among different ethnic groups, yet all share the common purpose of invoking spirits, guiding movements and enriching the narrative of the masquerade. According to Jayeola (2022:136), Nigerian traditional musical instruments abound in their hundreds and vary from one locality to another. However, they perform the same function in their different areas. This is why the gangan (hourglass drum), which is very integral to music in parts of southern Nigeria, is like the kalangu of the northern parts, as well as igba, the membrane drum, of the South East. Both are referred to generally as "talking drums". The ekwe (slit drum) of the South East is also a talking drum made of wood. Again, the kaakaki (Yoruba horn) of the north and the opi (Igbo flute) ogba or obu-kpong of parts of the south all herald the arrival or departure of the emir, igwe, obi, oba, amayanabo, etc. and traditional rulers in their domains. An ensemble of these instruments showcases Nigeria's instruments of unity as they all come together to produce harmonious tunes and melodies.

The musical accompaniment of Onye mee onweya masquerade, as seen on plates V and VI, is both vocal and instrumental. The instrument provides the rhythmic support through the specific traditional musical instruments such as igba, okpokoro, ogene, ekwe, ichaka, and ekwe-ubo for the masquerade's movement. Also, these instruments are used to create a musical narrative, reflecting the emotions and actions of the masquerade. These instruments are not merely background elements; rather, they are active participants in the ritual, believed to communicate with the spirits embodied by the masquerades.

The ogene, a metal gong, provides sharp, penetrating tones that punctuate the rhythms and signal transitions within the performance.

Okpokoro - Often signals initiation or takes the ostinato role during the performances, while ekwe and ekwe-ubo serve as call and response or signalling instruments, enhancing the spiritual and communal atmosphere. It's a hand-held metal gong.

Igba - In Onye mee onweya masquerade performance role extends beyond simple rhythmic accompaniment. It acts as a narrative voice capable of conveying messages and signalling changes in the masquerade's movements or the performance's intensity. Its rhythmic patterns are often complex, mirroring the tonal nature of the Igbo language.

Ichaka - It is a simple yet effective instrument made from calabash adorned with beads or seeds, which produces a distinct rattling sound when shaken. While it does not carry the primary melodic or rhythmic burden in the Onye mee onweya masquerade, yet its crucial for adding texture and enhancing the overall percussive ensemble. The continuous, shimmering sound of the Ichaka provides a foundation layer of rhythm, complementing the more prominent drums and gongs. It often serves to maintain a steady tempo and create an immersive sonic environment, contributing to the trance-like atmosphere that can accompany Onye mee onweya masquerade.

Okpokolo - the Okpokolo, though less frequently detailed in general overviews of Igbo instruments, plays a vital role in contributing to the unique musical style of Onye mee onweya masquerade. Its sound is often described as inspiring movement and dance, suggesting a percussive quality that energises the performance.

Igba – the type of ekwe used in Onye mee onweya masquerade is the medium type. It also provides a robust rhythmic foundation for the masquerade, it deep and resonant beats driving the masquerade’s movements and the overall energy of the performance. It often works in tandem with the Igba to create a rich polyrhythmic texture.

Figure 5



Figure 5 Onye Mee Onweya Musical Group in Performance Year: 2026

Source: Artists Collection

5. TOTEMS IN AFRICA

This originated from ancient animist beliefs, serving as sacred, symbolic representations of clans, lineages, or families. These emblems, usually animals, plants, or natural objects, represent ancestral connections, identity and shared descent. They were established to create unity, define kinship, and foster conservation through prohibitions (taboos) against harming the totemic object. Historians have identified three broad categories of totems. These are as follows: primary or Kinship type, secondary or political type and tertiary or economic totems type Odeh (2021). Animism and Nature, early African communities identified spiritual divinity in the environment. Animals were observed for their behaviours, leading to spiritual connections where animals or plants became representatives of a group’s characteristics. Totem poles and totemic practices in Nigeria are deeply rooted in indigenous spiritual beliefs, ancestral connections and in certain regions, social intelligence gathering. While they differ in form from the monumental cedar poles of the Pacific Northwest, Nigerian totems often manifest as carved wooden figures, sacred animal taboos, or stone monoliths representing ancestral spirits that have been in existence for some time before the emergence of modern art practice.

6. THE OPRIPA IS AN INSPIRATION FOR TOTEM POLE ART CREATION.

Every activity of human perception or thinking occurs firstly in the human mind. Parapsychology is a term adapted by Joseph Banks Rhine (1859-1980), a famous German scientist, from Duke University. This describes extraordinary phenomena, including extrasensory perception, telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis, and survival of the personality spirit after bodily death. Parapsychology has embraced other phenomena which science has left behind unexplained: faith or psychic healing, precognition or prediction of the future, the existence of spirits and ghosts. The phenomena are believed to be common within traditional and Western religions, like secret societies, traditional practices, Christianity, and Islam, among others.

Art is perhaps the most inexplicable phenomenon of the human species. Enjoying art and beauty is part of what makes us feel human. We look at a mountain torrent shimmering in the sunshine, stare at the dazzling diversity in a tropical rain forest, gaze at the palm-lined branch or admire the stars sparkling across the black velvet sky. We often feel awed and amazed, the beauty that lies beneath makes our hearts glow, our spirits soar Watchtower and Tract (1998). Using symbolic storytelling, artists are inspired by the way totem poles stack figures to tell a complex narrative or represent a family's history. Stylised animal and mythical figures, common figures such as the eagle (peace/leadership), bear (strength/bravery), raven, frog, and orca, provide a rich library of imagery. Art is not determined by the purpose of

the thing we make, but by its characteristics, qualities, the qualities with which the artist has endowed it, and the pleasure of looking comes from the spectator whose gaze is fixed on the art created Read (2002). In a world shaped by haste, art becomes a training ground for learning to see and learning to reflect. Artists often use the visible world to point toward what lies beyond what we can see. What matters most is frequently what is implied rather than literally shown. Art becomes a doorway to the unseen, a space where absence and presence mix. Looking beyond means perceiving connections between the painted and unpainted form and feeling, reality depicted, and ideas suggested. We think seeing is neutral, but we actually see through filters shaped by experience and culture. Art can shake up these filters, reveal their limits. It teaches humility that our first interpretation may not be the whole story. Africans are increasingly recognising that traditional forms can trigger a new approach to establishing visual arts as a form of knowledge, independent of Immanuel Kant's theories. This calls for a reevaluation of exegesis and the concept of word research in fine arts. (Personal communication, Emmanuel Ikemefuna Irokanulo, 2026). Many creators find inspiration not just in the visual aesthetic, but in the deeper purpose of commemorating history and reinforcing social bonds, a process often described as a new way of seeing. The focus was to create the totem, guided by a people's traditional belief, in this case, the Opripa and how it could inspire art creation for environmental beautification.

7. METHOD

Drawing was a necessary means when executing or creating art forms. This serves as a guide to help the artist plan well, even though, as the process progresses, one begins to make amendments and recreate those areas where there is a need for modifications. Figure 1 and Figure 2 are drawings which helped as a guide for the artist.

Figure 6

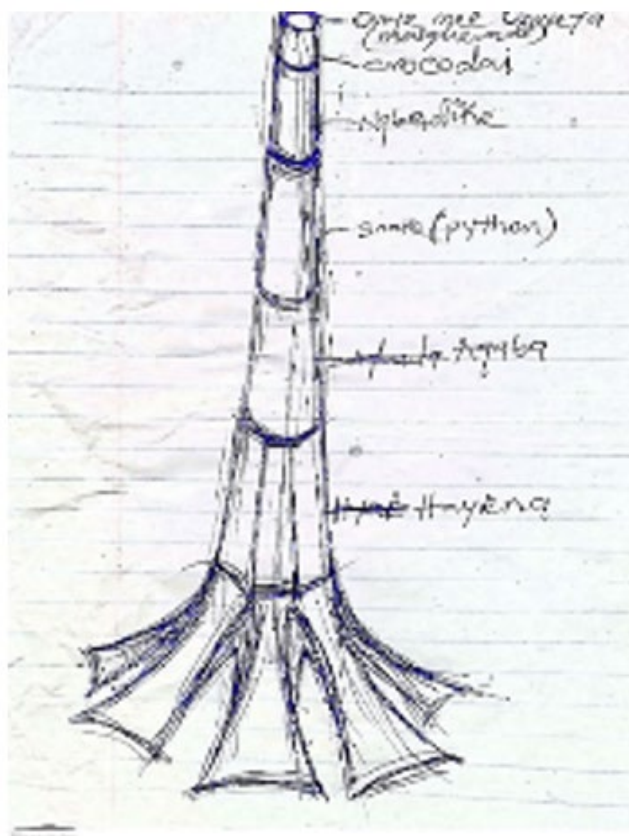


Figure 6 Drawing of Totem Pole with Labelling. Medium: Ink On Paper Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 7

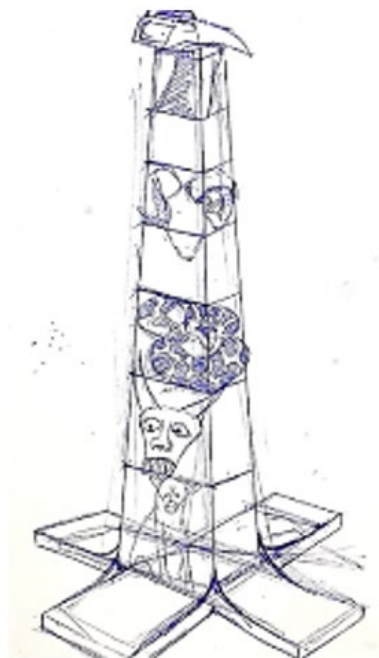


Figure 7 Drawing of pole with images of masks and animals. Medium: Ink on Paper Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 8

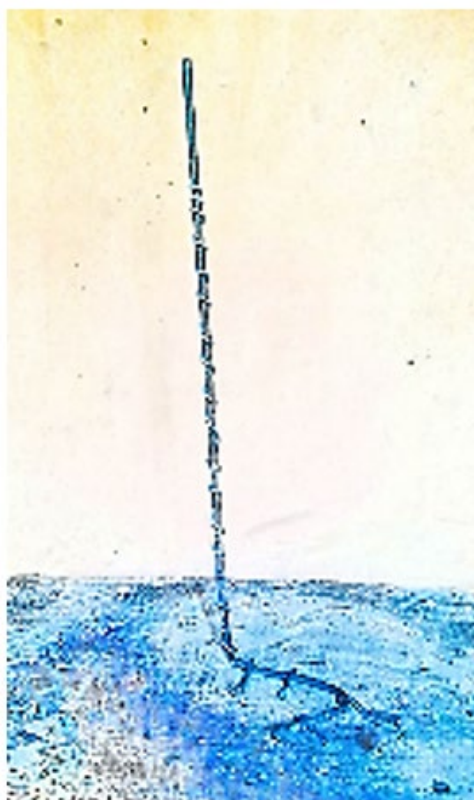


Figure 8 Armature Rod Positioned for Modeling. Medium: Milled Steel Rod and Twisted wire Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 9



Figure 9 Clay Modeling of Totem Pole Commences. Medium: Clay. Milled Steel Rod, and Twisted Wire Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 10



Figure 10 Finished Clay Modeling of Totem Pole with Application of Silicon Rubber. Medium: Silicon, Clay. Milled Steel Rod, And Twisted Wire Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 11



Figure 11 Finished Clay Modeling of Totem Pole with Application of Silicon Rubber. Medium: Silicon, Clay. Milled Steel Rod, And Twisted Wire
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 12



Figure 12 Application of Plaster of Paris on One Side of the Clay Model Medium: POP, Silicon, Clay. Milled Steel Rod, And Twisted Wire
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 13



Figure 13 Application of Plaster of Paris on Two Sides of the Clay Model. Medium: Silicon, Clay. Milled Steel Rod, And Twisted Wire
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 14



Figure 14 Separation of the Mother Mold, Oiled and Ready for Positive Cast Medium: POP, Silicon, Clay. Milled Steel Rod, And Twisted Wire
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 15



Figure 15 The Mother Mold is Coupled Together, and Filled with Polyester Resin Medium: Pop, Silicon, Clay. Milled Steel Rod, and Twisted Wire
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 16



Figure 16 Front View. The Finished Cast Is Patinated with Paint Pigment and Gold Dust Finish.
Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, and Paint Patina Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 17



Figure 17 Back View. The Finished Cast Is Patinated with Paint Pigment and Gold Dust Finish.
Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, And Paint Patina Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 18



Figure 18 Left Side View. The Finished Cast Is Patinated with Paint Pigment and Gold Dust Finish.
Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, And Paint Patina Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 19



Figure 19 Right Side View. The Finished Cast Is Patinated with Paint Pigment and Gold Dust Finish.
Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, And Paint Patina Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 20



Figure 20 Representation of the Parrot Bird on the Totem Pole Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, And Paint Patina
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 21



Figure 21 Representation of the Owl Bird on the Totem Pole Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, and Paint Patina
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 22



Figure 22 Representation of the Eagle Bird on the Totem Pole Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, And Paint Patina
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 23



Figure 23 Representation of the Long Beak Bird on the Totem Pole Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, And Paint Patina
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 24



Figure 24 Representation of an Ancestral Mask on the Totem Pole Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, And Paint Patina
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 25



Figure 25 Representation of an Ancestral Mask on the Totem Pole Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, And Paint Patina
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 26



Figure 26 Representation of an Ancestral Mask on the Totem Pole Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, And Paint Patina
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 27



Figure 27 Representation of an Ancestral Mask on the Totem Pole Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, And Paint Patina
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 28



Figure 28 Representation of Hyena Bellow the Totem Pole Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, And Paint Patina
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 29



Figure 29 Representation of the Python Bellow the Totem Pole Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, And Paint Patina
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 30



Figure 30 Representation of the Crocodile Bellow the Totem Pole Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, And Paint Patina
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 31



Figure 31 Representation of the Turtle Bellow the Totem Pole Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, And Paint Patina
Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 32



Figure 32 Right Side View of the Totem Pole Size: 40cm X 20cm X 62cm Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, And Paint Patina

Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Figure 33



Figure 33 Left Side View of the Totem Pole Size: 40cm X 20cm X 62cm Medium: Resin, POP, Milled Steel Rod, And Paint Patina

Year: 2026 Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu

7.1. ANALYSIS

Plates XV, XVI, XVII and XVII, shows an ancestral spirit, a combination of bird and mammal. It is believed that several Egyptian gods are depicted with bird heads, most notably Horus (falcon) and Thoth (ibis). Horus represents the sky and kingship, while Thoth is the god of wisdom, writing, and magic. Other bird-headed deities include Ra (sun god, falcon), Mentu (falcon), and Nekhbet (vulture). One observes the presence of a birdlike beak, a mammal's eye, an ear like that of a goat, and twisted, curved, projected tips of the horn. This is evidence that what inspires the African artists is the natural environment where they exist. They borrow from what they encounter and experience. Onyemee onweya masquerade's head was also what inspired the totem pole, with other parts of the body also showing the Opripa. Notice that the bottom of the totem, where the animals were represented, is wider than the upper part. Four parts of the Opripa were assembled to give one the totem and the head of the birdlike figure with a horn.

7.2. BIRDS

Plates XIX, XX, XXI, and XXII. In all African ethnic groups, the soul is considered immortal, and like body and mind, the bird is regarded as an objective substance. Evil Sorcerers, who have already made a considerable number of enemies through their deeds, hide their soul substance in a box. This Box is hidden within several other boxes, which in turn are inserted into the body of a living animal, preferably a bird. If this Bird dies, the life of the sorcerer is ended as well. In all African Cultures, birds are associated with souls. In many places, it is thought that the soul of a person who has died because of black Magic can fly about in the form of a songbird. They are ritual sacrificial animals, which symbolise honour and wealth. Owls are the birds associated with Witches. Witches either work together with the animals or can even assume their form. In Malawi, owls are consulted in the context of an oracle. In many places, however, the cry of an owl is seen as a Bad omen. The falcon is considered the bearer of light. After the Falcon was freed from imprisonment in the underworld, it rose into the sky and let the sun rise with it. Many tribes revere the wisdom of the vulture, which can gain life from death. They are often also referred to as soul birds since some East African peoples believe that vultures carry within them the souls of the bodies they have consumed. Hence, they are also seen as deliverers of offerings to the gods. Without the vultures, no offering can be successfully carried out.

7.3. ANCESTRAL MASK

Plates XXIII, XXIV, XXV and XXVI. The Ancestral masks shown on these plates came in four different forms. They are contemporary and represent the connecting link between the world of the living and that of the dead. They were represented in oval-shaped form, and some of the eyes were also shown perforated or bulging. Each of these masks carries the story of survival to be connected with one's culture and refusal to be forgotten.

7.4. HYENA

Plate XXVII. Hyenas in Africa are regarded as allies of sorcerers and witches. Some tribes believe that witches use them as a means of transportation. Others recount how sorcerers in the form of hyenas devour their victims and subsequently transform back into human beings. In East Africa, many people claim to see the shining eyes of the dead whom they have eaten in the glowing eyes of the animals. It is believed that the ancestors could ride on the hyenas by night to visit their living relatives Owusu (2000). The Turtle on plate XXX, because of the slow movement, is regarded as intelligent and prudent in its nature to grow very old; it is assuredly given the great respect that is paid to an elder of a tribe. This association is also strengthened by the wrinkly skin of these animals. In legends, the wise turtle always comes victorious. Since it is protected by its shell, no animal is able to kill it. The ability to carry its protective house is also interpreted as intelligence. Turtles can live in water, as well as on land; they are considered to be intimate friends of the god of rain and water spirits.

7.5. THE PYTHON SNAKE

Plate XXVIII shows the Python snake. It is believed that the Python enjoys great admiration and respect in Africa. They are messengers of the ancestors and are regarded as spirit beings. A Zulu king may reappear after his death as a giant Mamba. In many places, it is customary during a ritual for a snake to possess a participant. In this state, the snakes are then either asked to bring rain or to prophesy like an oracle. For many tribes, snakes embody water spirits. Among the Chokwe, pregnant women are believed to have a snake in their womb. It is an ancestral spirit which supports the embryo in its growth and prepares it for life. Snakes are teachers of the art of healing and participate in the initiation ceremonies of future sorcerers and medicine men. Offerings are always brought to snakes.

7.6. CROCODILE

The ancestral belief and spiritual significance of the crocodile, Plate XXIX, are deeply rooted in many cultures, particularly within Africa and parts of Asia and Oceania, where they are often revered as sacred guardians, representatives of ancestor spirits, or symbols of divine power. They are seen as protectors of the community, and rituals are performed to honour them and seek their protection. Harming a crocodile is thought to bring the wrath of the ancestors, as these animals represent ancestral power. The Egyptian god Sobek, often depicted with a crocodile head, was honoured for fertility, strength, and protection, with sacred crocodiles mummified as offerings. The crocodile is often seen as a symbol of immense patience, emotional depth, and personal growth or transformation.

7.7. TURTLE

Plate XXX depicts a turtle. The ancestral, evolutionary origins of turtles (chelonians) date back over 260 million years, with early ancestors appearing before the dominant age of dinosaurs. The "belief" or scientific consensus regarding their evolution points to a gradual development of the shell from reptile ancestors, rather than a sudden appearance. Turtles were traditionally thought to be "anapsids" (primitive skull with no openings), but they are now believed to be "diapsids" that evolved. Beyond science, many cultures hold the spiritual belief of the "World Turtle" (or Cosmic Turtle), where a giant turtle supports the world. This is a recurring theme in Hindu, Chinese, and various Indigenous American mythologies.

8. CONCLUSION

The totem created was inspired by the Operipa, with the representations of animals' forms that are sacred and respected by the Umunze people as embellishment. The birds also embellished on the totem are what inspire the creation of the masquerade spirits. This explained why there was a prominent positioning of the spirit head at the top of the totem pole, inspired by the Operipa Nmaonwu.

Neglecting masquerade practice in most societies has led to an alarming rise in crime; the present agents of crime control in society have really failed. In most cases, where they acted as reconciliatory agencies, they have ended up creating more conflicts among the people, unlike the situation under the traditional masquerade system, considering that the traditional African practices thrived in the past. Our forefathers lived peacefully; there are instant judgments on those who offend or defile the land.

Masquerade in most traditional festivals of the South-East, Nigeria, is recognised for its hypnotic and amazing character and has been commended for holding spectators spell-bound. The host communities endowed with this cultural heritage should not consider artefacts, cultural treasures like the totem and masquerade festival, as just a source of entertainment, but a means of improving their personal incomes and accruing revenues for their community development. Tourism expert services are necessary in the repackaging of art displays, where totem poles can be used for environmental beautification, and masquerade activity can be repackaged and viewed, enjoyed by tourists in a way that will appeal to both locals and international tourists.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Akubor, E. O. (2016). African Concept of Masquerades and their Role in Societal Control and Stability: Some Notes on the Esan People of Southern Nigeria. ResearchGate.
- Asiwaju, A. I. (1997). Evolution of Nigerian Culture. In A. Osuntokun and A. Olukoju (Eds.), Nigerian Peoples and Cultures. Davidson Press.
- Barora, R. (2023). A Totem Lives Forever, whereas an Idol or Images Last for a Short Time: What is Totem, by the Way? Facebook.
- Birx, H. J. (2026). Totem Pole. In Encyclopedia of Time: Science, Philosophy, Theology, and Culture. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963961.n589>
- Campbell, B. (2008). Painting for the Gods: Art and Aesthetics of Yoruba Religious Murals. African World Press.
- Elkins, J. (2012). The Object Stares Back. Harcourt Brace and Company.
- Greene, M. (2026). Philosophy and Wisdom – Can We Experience the Metaphysical Realm?
- Jovey, D. C. (2013). The Communities in Orumba North and South Local Government Areas and the Customs and Traditions of the Towns in Orumba. Annyco Publishers.
- Lawrencia, I., and Ibeanu, A. M. (2020). Masquerading in Traditional Festivals of the South-East of Nigeria: Aesthetics and Contributions to Cultural Tourism. Journal of Tourism and Heritage Studies.
- Maduagwu, B. O. J. (2013). Revised History of Umunze with the Intelligence Report of 1929. Annyco Publishers.
- Mitchell, H. B. (2011). Roots of Wisdom: A Tapestry of Philosophical Tradition (6th ed.). Wadsworth.
- Obioha, U. P. (2010). Globalisation and the Future of African Culture. Philosophical Papers and Reviews, 2(10), 1–8.
- Odeh, G. O. (2021). Totem in Idoma History. ResearchGate.
- Onyeneke, A. (1987). The Dead Among the Living: Masquerades in Igbo Society. Holy Ghost Congregation.
- Oraegbunam, I. K. E. (2009). The Principles and Practice of Justice in Traditional Igbo Jurisprudence.
- Owusu, H. (2000). African Symbols. Sterling Publishing Company.

- Njoku, R. C. (2020). Aspects of Society and Culture in the Biafra Hinterland. In *West African Masking Traditions and Diaspora Masquerade Carnivals*. Boydell and Brewer.
- Read, H. (2002). *To Hell with Culture*. Routledge.
- Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. (1998). *Is there a Creator Who Cares About You?*
- Wikipedia contributors. (2026). Totem Pole. Wikipedia.