

## **Towards Continuity and Change in African Art: An Adaptation of Mbaïse Art Style into Modern Sculpture using Various Sculpture Media**

**Evarest Onyewuchi Ibe**

Department of Fine and Applied Arts

Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka

[evarestibe4real@gmail.com](mailto:evarestibe4real@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This study explores the ways of adapting Mbaïse art style and history of Mbaïse school of arts. The issue of identity in contemporary African Art still remains a point of controversy. Most western art critics and scholars dismiss the idea of identity and authenticity. To them, African contemporary art is a mere imitation of western art currents. This western opinion is misleading and wrong because there are evidences that contemporary African art is a continuation of African traditional art. This research is on working towards continuity and change in African Art by adapting the Mbaïse art style into modern sculpture using various sculptural media. The purposes of the study include: To explore the ways of adopting Mbaïse art style in this present era, to enlighten contemporary sculptors on the need to adopt indigenous art style, to create more awareness on the Mbaïse art style and document the history of Mbaïse art school. The study employs an explorative method of research. The work also adopted the method of studio art research which is problem solving and art production oriented. Data were sourced from both primary (oral) and secondary (written) sources. The area of the study is Mbaïse in Imo State, of Nigeria. A total of 90 respondents were used for the research which comprised sculptors, painters, graphic designers, ceramists, textile designers, art historians and art critics. The instrument for data collection was a set of structured questionnaire developed by the researcher under the guidance of his supervisor and validated by Dr. F.L. Ulo and Dr. J.N. Anyanwu of the Department of Measurement and Evaluation, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri. The data were analyzed using weighted mean. Creative production processes were also involved in the production of the work for the study. The sculpture media for the productions of art works for this study included wood, metals, plasters, plastics, polyester among others. . The art works produced during this study were qualitatively analyzed while the data collected were quantitatively analyzed. The findings were; Mbaïse Art Style can be adapted using other sculpture media and techniques, social change in Igbo society influenced the continuity of Mbaïse Art Style. This study poses some implications to studio art practice in general which include 1. Much can be achieved in art production by adapting the mbaïse art style. 2. sculptors are now aware of the contribution expected of them in improving and increasing the production of sculpture with various sculpture media.

**Key Words:** African Art, Art Style, Mbaïse, Sculpture

## **Introduction**

Mbaise people of Imo state in Nigeria are known for their unique art style which is suffused with Igbo mythology. This ancient art style has survived in the work of the artists of the Mbaise school of Art which became very popular in the 1980's. These are a group of transitional artists that tried to continue the traditional Mbaise art mainly wood carving. According to Ngumah (2013), the Mbaise artists tried to represent different deities using sculptural pieces which reflect their social– culture and religious belief, they are also makers of different local musical instruments with wood, animal skin and metals.

The gods/deities were symbolized in masks, masquerades and Mbari images. Some of the gods and deities and cultural/social activities represented in their sculpture are Amadioha, Kamalu, Ogwugwu, Ofor na Ogu, Ogadazu, Anyanwu, Ala, Eke, Nguma, Alaukwu, Igwekala, Arusi, Agwu, Edele, Ekpo, Ulaga , Mmanwu, Ojionu, Okorovo, among others. Ngumah further states that each village, town and individual has connection with divinity, culture/ tradition which are symbolized with sculptural effigies. To buttress this, Ekeanyanwu, (1990) states that individuals, families and communities, emanate from the gods controlling them especially in Igbo land that is why their names, villages, communities, families and individuals are connected with their gods. For example, Nwanguma, Nwaala and Nwagwu are different names for individuals while Umuarusi, Alaukwu Ogbe, Umuofor, Umuagwu are names of village and communities. These individuals and communities have deities (sculptural representation) related to their names.

Elekwachi (2005), stated that Mbaise art are conceptualized as influenced by the folklores of the Igbo society where images of both animals, plants, humans and instruments of different functions are combined and used to form sculptural figures for different purposes. This is to say that every motif used in their sculpture has its interpretation and function based on its characteristics. The images are carved either in relief (panel) or in the round (free standing) and mainly with hard woods which are resistant to the effect of termites.

The contemporary Mbaise style of art is known for its uniqueness in composition while the motifs are mythologically related with blends of eclecticism and sculptural synthesis. Indeed Mbaise school is characteristically symbolism and linearity. Some examples of works from Mbaise school of art is shown in appendix.

The Mbaise school of Art was very much in vogue between the 1960's and 1980's with the pioneer members like Duru Omenka S. A.O. Chukwuegu, Omenka Long John Mbazuigwe, Gogo Anyanwu, Omenka Geoffrey Nwogu, Omenka Josiah Nwogu Anyanwu (the father of Geoffrey Nwogu) and later, Omenka C.C. Chukwuegu and Sylver Chukwuegu (the sons of Duru Omenka A.O. Chukwuegu).; and H.C. Ngumah Joined as apprentices. This was in the early 1970's and their workshop/studio was at Nkwogwu in Aboh – Mbaise, Imo State.

All the above mentioned artists were indigenes of Mbaise, but there were other members who were not from Mbaise like Evans Osuchukwu, Vincent Onwuanaku among others. They all as at then had no formal education in art.

In 1971, Uche Okeke visited their studio and introduced them to Obiora Udechukwu who gave them wider exposure and encouraged them to join the Nsukka Art School. The regime of Ukpabi Asika in 1972 as the then East-Central state Governor gave them an opportunity to participate in an exhibition and art competition

in which some of their members won prizes. Though some of the pioneer members are late, some are still alive and are practicing in different areas and levels. For instance, Professor C.C. Chukwuegu is a Professor of Arts in the University of Port Harcourt, Dr. H.C. Ngumah, a Reader at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Owerri, Evans Osuchukwu is still an active sculptor till date and Geoffrey Nwogu among others is also practicing art in the United States of America where he has built Mbari for different institutions. The members of Mbaise Art School participated in the propagation of the Modern Mbari center at Imo State Art and Cultural Council, Ikenegbu Owerri. They also participated actively in the 1977 FESTAC (Ngumah, 2017).

The researcher adapted the Mbaise Art style into modern sculpture using different sculpture media, modern motifs, modern techniques and improved ideology since we are in the digital era. Some of the preferred media are metals, fiberglass, plastic, rubber, synthetic materials and other found materials. The techniques involved were recycling, welding, gluing, riveting, modelling and casting, carving, polymerization and other techniques. This brings about the “Neo-Mbaise” Art School.

The world today is experiencing technological, scientific, cultural, religious and social breakthrough in almost all the spheres of life including sculpture. This is to say that modernity has taken over every aspect of human endeavour. The Mbaise Art school has become extinct while there are many Mbaise practicing Artists both at home and in the diasporas who must have been in one way or the other mentored or influenced by the members of Mbaise Art school. There are also many upcoming professional artists of Mbaise extraction who are undergoing tutelage through academics or apprenticeship and are exposed to other sculpture media and modern styles. Unfortunately, they have not made much effort towards reinventing the Mbaise art style into modern art form in order to ascribe contemporary relevance to it. Obviously, the Mbaise art style would go extinction if there is no continuity and reinvention of this practice.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To ascertain whether other media and techniques could be used to achieve Mbaise art style apart from wood
- To determine whether the change in African art influence the continuity of Mbaise art.
- To find out whether the adaptation the adaptation of the Mbaise art style and the use of other art media serve the socio-cultural functionalities of Mbaise art.
- To examine the conditions for achieving aesthetic values in the modern Mbaise art-style.

### **Literature Review**

Udeji (2002), sees continuity as a progressive and non-stopping movement of an established action with the aim of improving the existing activities. This is to say that there is a persistence of activities, practices and productivities. Continuity means lack of interruption or disconnection. This is the ability to transfer identifiable characteristics, habit and style from generation to generation

According to Hornby (2000), change is the process of becoming different. Change is either positive or negative. It is positive when its influence improves the

original state of a thing. Obiora (2012), states that change is a drive that moves a body from its original position and condition to a directed or destined position and condition. A change occurs when a body, system, style comes in contact with another, receiving influential effect as a result of emulation, compulsion, innovation and generation. To buttress this, Egeonu (2008), affirms that change is a power that makes a body to reposition or recondition. Everything is subject to change where change is the only permanent thing. In the researcher's own view, change is the effect on anything which leads to improvement or deterioration. It simply means to alter or make different. It is the process of causing. Therefore change is the process of causing a function, practice or thing to become different from its former state.

African Arts however is a vast concept that can only be easily handled when focused on several racial and linguistic groups. According to Gardner, (1980), nearly all African peoples have produced artists, dancers, musicians, story tellers, rock painters, architects. He further stated that only those peoples dwelling in the vast area drained by the great Niger and Congo rivers, and tropical Africa produced the great number of sculptures as "African art". Ngumah (2001), states that before the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Africa traditional art particularly sculpture was functioning very dynamically in full force and with power over the people's socio-cultural experiences. He further says that sculpture was the most respected of all art performed as at that time. Africa is as widely varied artistically as it is socio-politically, geographically, ecologically, linguistically, religiously and racially. All these attributes have great contributions to the decoration of utilitarian objects, which is mainly non-religious, and the representation of living figures, which is mainly religious character. According to Oxford Junior Encyclopedia Vol. XII, "The arts", the former African art was purposely to please the eye. The later was in the other hand closely connected with spiritual beliefs, and plays an important part in ceremonial life. To buttress this, Ngumah (2001), affirms that African traditional sculptures are authoritative images whose cultural paramountly embodied people's cultural and spiritual continuity. He further says that among the people, art was the most conceptually beautiful object to life existence. Like North America, Africa has hundreds of Neolithic rock paintings sites that contain the earliest examples of its art. From a number of archeological sites collectively labeled "Nok", "Igboukwu and "Ife" evidenced the early Art of Nigeria in Africa.

Adaptation simply means adjustment to extant condition. This is the variation of a life style to fit in under the conditions of a current environment. It is a way of embracing or borrow features for persistent existence as subject to change.

Art styles describe the way the art work looks. Style is basically the manner in which the artist portrays his or her subject matter and how the artist expresses his or her vision. This is determined by the characteristics that describe the artwork, such as the way the artist employ forms, colour and composition to name just a few. Another important factor in determining the style of an artwork is to examine the way the artist handles the medium, taking into account the method or technique that the artist uses. An additional aspect of art styles is the philosophy or driving force behind the artwork. All of these stylistic elements are defined by the choices artists make as they compose their artwork. Ikekwe (2010), in his words confirms that art style is the method the artist used to produce finished works. He continued by saying "the Ifes practiced *cire-perdua* (lost wax process) in bronze casting; the major characteristics of

their works is naturalism (or realism) that their figures looked like the real people one can recognize in real life. This profused realism is based on their humanistic value of art. In other words, they had a firm belief in representing real human beings as naturally and realistically as they see them in order to immortalize the human figure". The Ife's just like the Greek artists adopted some peculiar methods in their works: (i) They made use of the principle of overlay. This principle, means to impose on the sculpted piece a different material after casting in order to heighten their idea of the natural human being, for example bears, heirs, head covers among other things were different materials imposed on the original sculpted pieces (ii) They also made use of scarifications and perforation to represent the real tribal marks as well as skin pores on a human skin. Artworks that have certain features in common are considered to have the same style. Sometimes this means that they are part of the same movement, but not always. The concept of movement in art is usually linked to a specific time (and sometimes place) in history. For instance, there are painters today who still paint in an impressionistic manner, embracing the concepts that first defined impressionism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, because they are not really part of the original Impressionist movement" as it exists in historical terms. Although art styles can be resurrected from the past, the movement itself is still anchored in its original position on the art history timeline.

With all these, each artist has his or her own personal art style which is developed throughout his or her lifetime. An artist's style can change and adapt as the artist grows both as an artist and as a person. Beginning artists often emulate (copy) the styles of artists that they admire. At first this can be beneficial in order to get one's feet wet and will help develop an understanding of how to create different types of art. However, it is very important that beginning artists focus on developing their own style and find their own unique ways of expression. An Artist's personal style usually progresses as the artist gains more confidence through experience, expands his or her database of knowledge and acquires more skill with the materials. Meanwhile, there are many art styles namely impressionism, naturalism/realism, ulism, abstrastism, cubism, hyper-realism, photorealism, among many others (Wikipedia, 2017).

Rich in Uwakaneme (2005), explains that, sculpture is concerned with the organization of mass or volume. In a similar line of idea, Master and Smith in Uwakaneme (2005), concerned primarily with mass or volume of the work related to the space around it. The three-dimensionality of sculpture makes its material (medium) to be in tangible forms. Generally, most sculptural pieces are in solid and it makes it to stand out, taking space and breaking spaces Ekeada (1988), specifically affirms that, sculpture is a three-dimensional form of art that is modeled, cast, carved or constructed. For any work of sculpture to exist, it must undergo through any or all these processes mentioned by Ekeada. The process which enhances the making of sculptural work to be in existence of the volume of its medium is sculpture production. Sculpture works produced considering the effects of current time and style are said to be modern sculptures. As a sculptural piece is influenced by time and style, mediums with which it is produced determine the quality and method of production. There are difference materials/media sculptures can be produced with. Some of them are wood, stone, metals, clay/ware and plastics, found objects among others.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Modernization Theory**

This theory was developed by American social scientist in 1950s. Modernization refers to model of a progressive transition from a “pre— modern” or traditional to a modern society. Wikipedia (2013), on modernization theory states that the idea of modernization comes from a view of societies as having a standard evolutionary pattern as described in the social evolutionism theories. This theory states that each society would evolve inexorably from barbarism to ever greater levels of development and civilization. Modernity simply refers to the present, and any society still in existence is therefore modern. This definition runs contrary to the view of some proponents of modernization that see only western society as being truly modern arguing that others are primitive or unevolved by comparison. They view unmodernized societies as inferior even if they have the same standard of living as western societies. Opponents of this view argued that modernity is dependent on culture and can be adapted to any society. In addition, this view is accused of being Eurocentric as modernization began in Europe and has long been regarded as reaching its most advanced stage in Europe by the Europeans and other countries like the USA, Canada and Australia. This study aligns itself with the second group that says that modernization is relatively dependent on culture and not on Eurocentric affair. The modernization theory is relevant to this study because modernization brings changes and this research work emphasized on change and continuity in Mbaïse art style. This change brings progressive transition of Mbaïse art style from its traditional form to modern art style.

### **Empirical Studies**

Apart from changes we have in sculpture in our time, the Igbo sculpture is all embracing because it includes what may be described as “centripetal” by borrowing this concept from Ferber (1954), since sculpture was tied to its own centre. Ferber argues that in our time however, this canon of tradition and taste has been over thrown and sculpture has now become an art of extension. It has become “centrifugal” and in the work that he admires, its sculpture violates the centre. The revolution, as Ferber noted, has brought new life to an art which has been mired in tradition.

The Igbo monolithic sculptures express a representation of animate world, man and animals, and however transformed and transcended, they present the closed forms of biological life as a source of sculpture forms. Igbo sculptures like other African sculptures represent art for life more than art for art sake because the art for art sake begins where art for life stops. Igbo sculptures, like architecture, certainly organize space as well as details of organization of space used daily by people in their social environment. Aniakor (1989), has noted that, in this sense, the built-up environment whether it refers to the village or town structure/settlement is a product of the skillful organization of space in order to express in one instance a people’s social ideals. In another line, Ikwuegbu (2013), noted that Igbo sculptural expression in the round is the making of a concrete representation of the spirit deity popularly known as “Alusi”. Wood is popularly used for this particular type of visual expression for easy change, if not far – fetched when we recall Geoffrey Parrinders explanation of Igbo cosmology of the triangle where God stays at the apex to control all activities of men and spirits, receive supplications and ordains or blesses the wishes and expectations of men through the intercession of the spirits and deities who reside at both sides of the triangle. Then magic and medicine at the base of triangle were used by gods and spirits

for his blessings. The concept of an esoteric and sacred art is synonymous with Igbo arts or any other African art, because of myth surrounding the making or producing of Igbo arts starting with the makers of Art (Nka), the artist, seen as “Omenka, Dinka or Okwamka as the case may be. Most Igbo believe that alusi or deity taught them “Aghugho”, etymologically known to be the right word for the word creativity. An example of Igbo art is the Mbari art.

Mbari means an enclosure where one god or series of them are worshipped. It is a shrine, a wide palace built for the gods. It is a common feature in Igbo land especially around Imo state of Nigeria and in particular Mbaise and Owerri. The Mbari is erected under the supervision of the chief priest. In some other parts of Igbo land, Mbari is called “Okwu-Alusi. Before Mbari is erected, often, an oracle foresees its establishment in a community. It is erected when trouble occurs for example, infact mortality, famine, high death rate, poor farm harvest; then the elders meet to consult an oracle or divers who might say that some gods were displeased and needs community attention to the gods. This means erecting an Mbari for the god. The work demands that every bodied male and female submits himself or herself for the selection of the work. The chief priest does the selection. Those selected undergo purification and sanctification ceremony.

Some of the Mbari statues seen at Mbari are Ala (the goddess of earth), Amadioha (god of thunder), Omumu (the goddess of fertility) among others. The sculpture pieces there are mainly produced with mud and wood. Apart from the old Mbari which has spiritual, cultural and religious connections; there are now modern Mbari for Tourism. An example of it is the modern Mbari at Ikenegbu Owerri where modern sculpture media are expected to be used for the productions of the art works due to the change in the African art.

### **Sculpture Production Processes**

This section showed and explained the processes involved in the productions of sculptural pieces in this study. In the studio art practice, materials like wood (both the shaft and roots), polyester, metals (both ferrous and nonferrous), plastics, leather, paper, clay, cements, POP, rubber among others are used to produce sculptural pieces.

The techniques involved were documentations (both photographing and filming), editing, audio recording for the literary aspects. Sketching is the first process of the execution, Other processes employed include welding, carving, modeling, casting, construction, cutting, gluing, reverting, nailing among others. The stages and techniques for the productions were documented in this chapter.

### **Stage 1: Conception**

Conception stage is birth of idea of any work as driven by inspiration. There are many sources of inspiration: contemporary issues, great needs, movements in objects, imaginations, nature, among others. Conception matures from simple stage to complex when ideas are put together. Conception is the first stage of a work of art and does not make a complete work hence it is only the generation of ideas.

## Stage 2: Sketching and Drawing

Sketching and drawing enhance conception and make it visual and a bit concrete. This stage is done on paper with pen, pencil, ink and others. It is the representation of ideas using different kinds of line. (Below are drawings and sketching in the creative production processes).

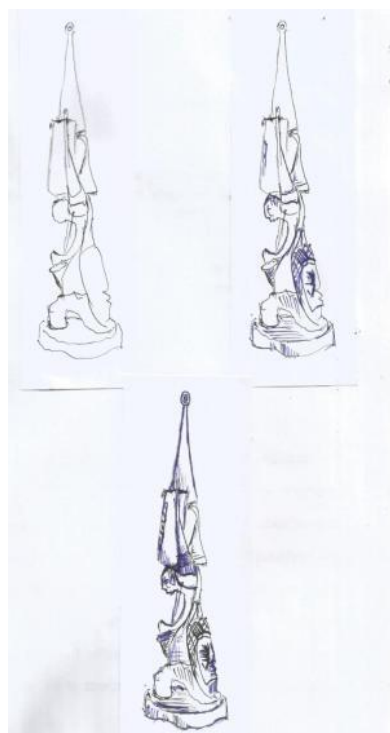


Fig. 1: Preliminary Sketches of *Osankwa*  
(*Music Maker*)

## Stage 3

### Armature Stage:

This is the stage the researcher puts the skeleton of the intended work together to make a framework. This time the researcher puts in consideration proportion, space for forms and bears in mind that the armature is the guide for the finished work. He also considers the strength of the armature based on the material for the work. The major processes here are welding, reverting and nailing in case of wooden armature.

## Stage 4

### Modeling and casting, carving, construction and weaving

This is the forming of the sculpture with details and feature. In modeling and casting which is an additive method, requires the use of plastic materials like clay, cement, plasters, polyester, and paper mache, among others. The “*Omugwo*” for example was produce through the process of modeling and casting.

**Carving** is the subtractive method of sculpture production and forms are gained as a result of reduction of parent material for the sculpture material like wood and stones. The works “*Osankwa*”, “*Echidime*” (Election 2019), “*Ikuku* (Internet)”. “*Okara madu-Okara muo*” and “*Agumba*” are produced through the process of carving.

**Construction/Weaving:** This is the process of assembling different art materials together to create forms in a sculpture. Examples of such product are “*Ada Mbaise*”, made of coils of different metal wires; and “*Okara madu-Okara Muo* made of wood and coil of copper wires.



**Stage 5**

**Sanding:** This involves the use of abrasive to smoothening a work of art either with machine or hand. All the wood works by the researcher underwent this stage.

**Stage 6****Construction of Base**

Wooden bases are form for all the free standing sculptures by the researcher to create a standing balance for the works. It is always fixed underneath the sculptural piece.

**Stage7****Patination/Finishing:**

This is the stage where the sculptural piece is polished and coated with paint, vanish or glaze to improve the texture and create protection on the surface of the medium. The researcher prefers wood polish and stain to make his works look like wood. The technique used to apply the finishes are brushing and atomizing with spraying machine and brushes.



Plate 1: A Finished Work

**Analysis**

Art in retrospect defined the historical niche of its time and transformed the milieu in which it was executed. The redefining of aesthetic, religious and socio-cultural experience of the society has been the purpose of sculptural pieces exhibited or which stands in public places or buildings. Ikegwuonu (2011:30) is of the opinion that “Art contributes a lot in projecting the people’s culture as it mirrors the life style of the people”. In Mbaise, Imo State, sculptural pieces have always adored cultural and religious centers, sometimes it draws criticisms or applause from the public, thus evoking aesthetic response and increasing both aesthetic, religious and cultural appreciation. The Neo-Mbaise Art Style brings continuity and reinvention of the old

Mbaise art style. This is a period of art awareness and artistic experimentation. The work produced in the course of this project are analyze as follows:

### OSANKWA

Osankwa (The music maker), is a sculptural piece of a man poised in an enigmatic spirit of rhythm amidst of musical instruments and ceremonial “*ulaga*” behind him. The big “*Ogene*” placed topmost stretched towards heaven as if to invite the goddess “*Euterpe*” (muse of music and musical instrument) to a dance which in the Igbo world view, is called “*Egwu*”. His hands beating the drum between his stylized knees and suspended by a rope round his neck; attached on his head are mass communicative instrument, the Opi (horn), Osha (rattler), *Ogene* (gong) and a little “*Ikoru*” which in Igbo cosmology are used to summon both the living and the dead to a feast or events of both melody and tragedy. His neck bowed to expose his action and movement to the tunes of the music or lyre. Indeed he is lost in the rhythm.

*Osankwa* is a sculpture carved in wood (tap root) measures 42 inches high and finished with wood vanish was produced in 2017 by the researcher. The purpose and function of this *Osankwa* are basically, like every other works of art for aesthetic reawakening of our artistic experience. This extends to the realm of art, science and technology which form the triangle of means of basic tool for survival. Now, outside the aesthetic function, it:

1. Enshrines in the stream of our artistic trajectory.
2. Encourages artistic individualism and style.
3. X-rays the music industry of our time.
4. Serves as a reference and monument.

Plate 2; Osankwa, Wood (Tap root),  
42 Inches, Ibe Evarest, 2017

Ikegwuonu (2011:13) states that “The entertainment aspect music, dancing and drama are areas of art, which we used to exhibit cultural practices. The Art and music are connected in that many artists derive their inspirations from music so also some musicians derive their inspirations from art.



**KARAMADU-OKARAMUO (Half human – half spirit)**

Plate 3: *Okaramadu-Okaramuo*, Mixed Media (Wood and copper wires), 37 x 14”, Ibe Evarest

As the name “*Okaramdu – Okaramuo*” implies, the mask made of combination of wood and metal symbolizes the inter-relationship between humanity and divinity. The work represents an oracle or spokesman for the gods and human. This is a relief work of art measuring 37 inches length and 14 inches of width. Forms on the work were achieved using different sculpture processes ranging from construction, carving, coiling and weaving of wires. *Okaramadu – Okaramuo* has a longitudinal margin that demarcates the two media for its production which divides all the facial organs into halves and makes the face of the mask to be in two parts: the wooden on the left side and the metal on the right side. The two parts harmonized to make a mask indicating that an agreement can be between the gods and human.

**ECHIDIME (Election 2019)**



Plate 4: *Echidime (Election 2019)*, Wood (Root), 27 Inches, 2017, Ibe Everset

*Echidime* is a carved wooden statue of a pregnant woman standing with head and face directed towards the sky, the left hand supporting the back of the head and the distorted right hand begging for strength from above. This statue stands on the three-dimensional wooden map of Nigeria. The texture on the body which makes the carving unique and stylized was achieved by following the movement of the grains of the root using pathing tools. *Echidime*, a prophetic statue portrays the uncertainties in the tomorrow of a pregnant woman; whether the unborn child will be boy or girl, whether the mother and the child will be dead or alive. But certainly something must happen; either baby boy or a girl; death or life. This is exactly the premonition for the Nigerian election come 2019. *Echidime* depicts a serious issue of the moment in our society, Nigeria.

**ADA MBAISE**

Plate 5: *Ada Mbaise*, Melal (Aluminium coils), 29 inches, Ibe Evarest, 2017

*Ada Mbaise* evokes one's feeling of beauty and responsibility in the maidens of Mbaise. Due to the researcher's characteristic visual phrasing, this work seems intrinsically unsuitable to monothetic interpretations. It condenses visual metaphor which points at all kinds of riches both in beauty, character, wisdom and material which Mbaise maidens are known for. Its strong features on the face, so constructed to over score the grateful appearance of "poetry". These attributes of the Mbaise maidens, is believed by the Mbaise people to be proportional to their bride price; thus the values in the Mbaise maiden makes their bride price high.

*Ada Mbaise* is a burst statue of a young lady with finely braided hair style. This is an experiment with coils of aluminum wires. The work is suspended to the wooden base by the constructed necklace with pendant.

**IKUKU** (*the internet*)



Plate 6: *Ikuku* (*The internet*), Wood (Root), 44 inches, Ibe Evarest

*Ikuku* which means air in Igbo has been from the on go the means of dissemination of information of all type. The ancient African people and traditionalists use to either cure or afflict sickness on people from spiritual distances. Proclamations of curses and blessings were and are made through *Ikuku* using “*Onunu*” blown in the air. These operations, no doubt work and there had been sculptural symbols called “*Ikuku*” which has the power behind that. Nowadays the internet masts and antennae are just the same thing with the “*Ikuku*”. For instance the computer, the mobile telephone, e-mail, and the social network and other satellites work through the air.

The *Ikuku* statue, just like the internet mast/antennae has three horns which are the antennae, three masks which represent the internet masts. The medium for this work is wood (root) carved and vanished.



Plate 8; Ikenga Igbo, likened to the Android BOT. Source; wikipedia.org

Plate 7; *Ikenga Bekee*, Stone, 16 inches, Ibe Evarest, 2018

*Ikenga* in Igbo language “Ike m gaa” meaning let my strength of victory go before me. This is the spirit of determination, destiny and victory which the Ibos believe is the strength behind their success. It has different statues carved by different carvers mainly on wood. *Ikenga Bekee* by the researcher is carved in stone after considering the strength behind the “*Oyibo*” (the westerners) internet, science and technological success. One looking at the pictures below, there is a possibility that indeed the westerners use *Ikenga* in their science and technology.

**OJIONU MBAUKWU**



Plate 9; *Ojionu Mbaukwu*,. Metal (Aluminum), 19x8”, Ibe Evarest

*Ojionu* is a type of music and ceremonial mask use during festive periods by the Igbo especially the Mbaise people. The transitional Mbaise artists produced the masks with wood for the purpose of the dances. The *Ojionu Mbaukwu* produced by the researcher is a relief metal mask fixed on a wooden platform. The sculpture process involved in the production is foundry technique and mainly for aesthetics, history and tourism purposes.



**AGBOMMA MBAISE**

Plate 10; *Agbomma Mbaise*, Mixed Media (Wood and Fibre glass), 40 x 11 inches, 2018

*Agbomma Mbaise* is relief sculptural piece made of fibre and wood. It is a symbol of completeness in the good qualities found in the maidens of Mbaise. The image is a beautiful lady with royal regalia produced in fibreglass and fixed on a combination of seven carved wooden sticks. The number “7” shows perfection and each carved stick represents a quality out of the seven main qualities of an Mbaise maiden. These seven qualities are: (i) beauty, (ii) wisdom, (iii) morality, (iv) patience/ perseverance, (v) industrious, (vi) supportive and (vii) innovative.

**Summary**

This project work was on adaptation of Mbaise art style into modern sculpture using various media due to change in African art in order to achieve continuity. The researcher however employed different techniques and sculpture media for his works considering the style, purposes and functionalities of the Mbaise transitional arts by

their artists. The thesis has broadened the awareness about the Mbaise art style thus bringing an exposition to the history of Mbaise in the direction of art.

Materials for sculpture apart from wood and mud which were the conventional media for the ancient Mbaise art works with the production techniques of carving and direct modeling, the researcher was able to use other media which were not common to the transitional Mbaise artists ranging from stones, metals, fiberglass, plastics and other found materials. He used as well different techniques like modeling and casting, foundry, welding, installations/constructions among others to do his art productions. Wider and better documentations were made during the course of this project and a thesis was written for the works.

### **Conclusion**

Adapting Mbaise art style into modern sculpture can contribute to an improved understanding and appreciation of the artists and their efforts in expressing their inner mind. Considering myths, religiosity and socio-cultural attachment to the Mbaise art style, one can have better insight in the richness of culture, skills and creativities of the people. It forms a spring board for the upcoming artists who will be inspired and encouraged to develop their creative abilities. The adaptation indeed modifies the sectors of tourism, skill acquisition, and economy. People can easily indentify where the artists are coming from in all ramification. However, the researcher showcased art movements from generation to generation in the Mbaise School of Art. This adaptation gives room for exploration, creative chances, experimentalities, and diversity in ideology. The researcher created sculptures relating them to the Western Technology and Science like one of his works “Ikuku” which is internet.

### **Recommendation**

This study concentrated on the continuity of Mbaise art style specifically. It is important to replicate this study in other peoples’ art style especially in Igbo land. A comparative study on the people’s art style in other states of the Igbo land and other ethnic groups in Nigeria should also be done to compare their effectiveness in success to learning new strategies to improve Nigerian modern art.

### **Studio Practice Implications of the Study**

Based on the researcher’s findings, this study poses some implications to studio art practice in general. In the first place, studio artists and sculptors in different places have through this study understood that much can be achieved in terms of art production by adapting the Mbaise art style considering the characteristics of the Mbaise art style. Secondly this is a challenge to studio practice in particular. Through this study, partakers in the various strategies of studio art practice especially those in sculpture specialty are now aware of the contributions expected of them in improving and increasing the level of sculpture production with various media.

### **References**

- Aniakor, C. C. (1989). *The State of Igbo Architectural Studies in Uwa Ndi Igbo. Journal of Igbo Life and Culture* Los Angeles. Chunua Achebe Publisher.
- Egeonu, C. O. (2008). *Psychology of learning*. OwerriPoly Publishers, Owerri.

- Ibe Towards Continuity and Change in African Art...*
- Ekeada, F. I. N. (1988). *Art Fundamentals – Theory and Practical for Junior Secondary Schools*. Owerri: New African Publishing.
- Ekeanyanwu, V. C. (1990). *Ucheakonam (A way of Life in the Modern Age)*. Ahiajioku Lecture 1990. Published by Culture Division, Ministry of Information and Culture, Owerri.
- Elekwachi, L. (1974). *The Works of Long John Mbazuigwe II. An Open Space Exhibition of Sculpture in Memory of Long John Mbazuigwe II*. 11<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> June 1974 at Cultural Division Quadrangle.
- Gardener, L. (1980). *Art Through the Ages*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.
- Hornby, A. S. (2000). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. (6<sup>th</sup> ed.) London: Oxford University Press.
- Ikegwonu, R. N. (2011). Art and human endeavours ASA, *Journal of Modern Nigeria Art*, vol. 1, pg. 30.
- Ikekwe, (2010). *A Look into African Art Style*. Aba: P.J. Publishers.
- Ikwuegbu, F. N. & Ngumah, H. C. (2015). *Igbo Wood Sculpture*. *Okpulo Journal of Arts and Cultural Heritages*. Owerri. NCMM, National Museum, Vol. 2 NO. 1, May.
- Ikwuegbu, F. N. (2013). *Logocentrism on Women Creativity in Traditional African Art of the Idemili Igbo*. *Okpulo Journal of Arts and Cultural Heritages*. Maiden Edition, Owerri: NCMM, National Museum.
- Ngumah, H. C. (2001). *Special Research in African Art*. Owerri: Evans Publishers.
- Obiora, M. G. (2012), *Human Development and Learning*. Owerri: Poly Publishers.
- Oxford junior encyclopedia. Volume XIII, *The Arts*. London: Oxford University Press, Amen House, London E.C.4.
- Udeji, N. C. (2002). *Human Learning*. Aba Ukanwa Publishers.
- Uwakaneme, C. (2005). *Sculpture and Media: A Case Study of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts*, An unpublished B.Ed project submitted to the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, AIFCE Owerri.
- Wikipedia, (2013). <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mbaise>.