

Traditional Ethics and A People's Culture: Igbo Kola Nut as A Source of Inspiration For 3d Sculpture and Theatrical Performance

Ephraim Ugochukwu

Department of Fine and Applied Arts,
Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Alex Ekwueme Federal University
Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.
email: ephraim.ugochukwu@funai.edu.ng

Stella, I Awoh Mofunanya

Department of Fashion
School of Arts, Design & Printing, Yaba College of Technology, Lagos State.
email: ifyawoh@yahoo.com

Bolaji Ogunwo

Department of Fine and Applied Arts
Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, Akoka
email: bogunwo@unilag.edu.ng

Egwu, Ifeanyi Ogbonnia

Department of Fine and Applied Arts,
Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Alex Ekwueme Federal University
Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.
email: ifeanyiegwu68@gmail.com

Nefertiti Nneoma Emezue

Department of Fine and Applied Arts,
Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Alex Ekwueme Federal University
Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.
email: nefertitinne@gmail.com

Lawal Abdulahi

Department of Theatre Arts
Faculty of Humanities, Alex Ekwueme Federal University
Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.
email: lawalabdullahib@gmail.com

Christopher Odey Akpa

Department of Theatre Arts
Faculty of Humanities, Alex Ekwueme Federal University
Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.
email: krisodey4ll@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper talked about the kola nut celebration in Nigeria and was particular about how the kola nut was celebrated at Umunze, in Orumba South local government area, Anambra State. It is an accepted traditional cultural practice and one of Igbo's most cherished and sacred practices. The activity is unified and of the same pattern. The research explored, concretized and created an art piece, holding strongly to the various areas of visual arts and performance art. It also hinges on practice based resrech method, using materials like polyester resin to

create 3-dimensional sculpture, which has proven to last over time and also withstood harsh weathering conditions, even though the said art piece was not meant to be displayed outdoor. The problem of the study is the lack of documentation and preservation, cultural practices that are widely accepted or recognised. The paper highlights and asks pertinent questions as to how this 3-dimensional art piece could be achieved when armed with the basic creative knowledge and concept. The findings highlighted how important the numerical strength, the number 'seven' is to an Umunze person and how it is cherished even though the significance of other numbers was also mentioned, taking into account the symbolic meanings of the said numbers, notwithstanding that the study centered on how the artistic creation shaped, directed and enriched the rich culture of a people, the creative piece could also generate revenue if properly appropriated.

Keywords: Culture, 3D Sculpture, Igbo, Kola nut, Philosophy, Traditional Ethics, Performance

Introduction

History has it that the Igbo originated from a location about 100 miles north of their present vicinity at the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers. They share linguistic ties with their neighbors, the Bini, Igala, Yoruba, and Idoma, with the split between them probably going on between five and six thousand years ago. The first Igbo in the vicinity may have moved onto the Awka-Orlu plateau between four and five thousand years ago, earlier than the emergence of sedentary agricultural practices. Igbo-land is the home of the Igbo people and covers most of Southeast Nigeria. This present location is divided by the Niger River into two unequal sections. The river has not acted as a barrier to cultural unity; instead, it has supplied a convenient means for verbal exchange from place to place and many settlements declare distinct origins. The Igbos are additionally surrounded by different tribes like the Bini, Ijaw, Ogoni, Igala, Tiv, Yako, and Ibibio (Slattery, 2020, & Iowa, 2022).

According to Maduagwu (2013), *the Igbo are a tribe in Israel who left the area for North Africa-Egypt, Sudan, and later to the Niger Benue confluence, before they left for the place they found as their present home.* He further enumerated, in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 33: 20-21, Moses said concerning Gad and his descendants, "A blessing upon those who help Gad. He crouches like a lion with savage arms and face and head. He chose the best of the land for himself. This is reserved for a leader. He led the people because he carried God's penalty for Israel." The same is the blessing of the Igbo among Nigerian tribes. The Igbos are blessed with cultural activities and notable ones are the new yam festival, which is always accompanied by masquerade activity, dance and wrestling competitions, marriage celebrations, house warming, burial and taking of various chieftaincy titles. Before the commencement of any of these activities, the breaking of the kola nut takes center stage. It is also worthy of note that the Igbos are blessed with diverse cultures and there are slight modifications to soothe one's culture or tradition. Umunze is not an exception; her kola nut traditional practices are slightly different. This is because most writers claim that the Igbos' cultural practices are different, but they also appear to be slightly similar. Studies have revealed that no particular group or tribe owns in totality a certain traditional practice; they are borrowed and modified to

suit one's culture. This was why Obiefuna (1978) testified, "*In traditional Igbo life, no distinctions were made between the sacred and profane, fact and fiction, history and poetry, all served the same purpose in a world where the natural and the supernatural interchanged hands*".

Igbos are mercantile and competitive. Most do not live in large cities or urbanized political socialization. They are a cephalous individualistic person, devoid of central headship or concentrated authority to stir thoughts or philosophy. Rather, the Umunna, a family or clan central body, headed by a system of controls involving men, women, and youths, operates the balance of power as seen in the tradition of the Umunze people in Anambra State, Nigeria (Olanegan, 2022).

The problem of documentation is the greatest challenge facing Africa, especially in preserving and documenting its cultural heritage. Various traditional practices abound and without documentation, be it oral or written, if not preserved and passed on to the younger generation, that tradition might fade away forever. Documentation and preservation of artifacts are two of the surest and most accurate means of preserving history. This research has also not seen or encountered where the kola nut has been represented or used as a source of ideas to create sculpture in three dimensions.

Brief history of Umunze

Umunze is a large town in Igbo land, situated in the old Aguata, Orumba North, and Orumba South Local Government Area. Its town lies approximately 6.1° North and 7.2° East, some 33km South of Awka, the capital of Anambra State and 84km East of the great commercial city of Onitsha. Its territory is delimited by Ezianya/Nneato (Abia State) and Ihite town in the East, Ezira, and Umuomaku in the West, Eziagu and Ogbunka in the North and Abuala-Ndialaike (Imo State) in the South. The name Umunze was derived from the identity of the originator, "Nze." He wandered the forest and throughout his hunting day trip, he located a very fertile land. He settled there and was very comfortable regardless of the climate and different climatic conditions. He later went back to his father and advised him about his newly observed domestic land and he also requested better halves and different things one would want to run a family and a home. His father saw and observed his exact intention; he was mobilized and he proceeded with his journey. His father handed over to him a mother shrine recognized as Izommiri (the existing Izo in the eke Izo square) with two wives (Lolo and Ijendu) and a slave. He settled first at Akpu Mgbatiri Okpa, situated in a vicinity recognized as Umuizo, as it is known today. Lolo gave birth to seven sons and one daughter, while Ijendu had one son. War separated the two wives after the death of Nze. This led Dara (the first son of Nze) to demand his rightful possession and absolute control of his father's empire. His half-brothers and siblings waged war and combined forces against him. He moved out of the empire and settled at Agu, known as *ikpa* (farmland) in Umunze dialect. He (Dara) was blessed with many children. They were known as Eziagu, which is situated in the western part of the area. The slave that came with Nze was blessed by Nze before he passed on and he was seen to play the role of a father figure to the Nze family and he took care of the entire kingdom after the death

of Nze Izo Ezema. He became the custodian of the present Umuizo, where the entire Umunze gathers for meetings and other activities. These seven sons settled at different locations, which today are known as the seven villages that make up Umunze. The kingship rotates among the villages and every male is eligible to contest. Umunze is the largest community of all the old Aguata local government areas, comprising Aguata, Orumba North, and Orumba South local government areas (Maduagwu, 2013, & Wikipedia, 2021).

Igbo people are known for bluntness and bravery and dare anyone who crosses their path, especially the Umunze people, this explains why Chukwu (2022) thought that "*A typical Igbo statesman, doesn't murmur and mumble or speak at someone's back, but do so openly and bluntly*" For the Umunze man believes that one should be upright and truthful in dealing with others to enjoy the favour of the gods. The elders are believed to be the physical *ndichie* (dead ancestors interceding on behalf of the living). Offering prayers is very necessary and equally important, especially in the kola nut business. When the kola nut is broken and eventually appears in seven cotyledons, is usually a veneration in Umunze and calls for an overwhelming celebration. In the words of Ifemkpa *et al* (2022), there is always an exceptional celebration when such occurs, the lucky person receives blessings from our forefathers through the presence of the *ndichie*. For the record, Ogbuehi Stephen Ifemkpa was fortunate to have experienced and taken part in the breaking and celebration of the kola nut that appeared in seven cotyledons. According to Attah (2016), the reason for a different view in cultural perspective is probably because the Igbos believe in customizing and personalizing their culture. That explains the varied ways, the various communities handle their events and ceremony of which Umunze is not an exception.

The symbolic meaning of the seven cotyledons of the kola nut in Umunze

Scientifically, the kola nut is known as *Cola acuminata*. The Hausa name it Gworo, the Yoruba call it Obi while the Igbos call it Oji or usually OjiIgbo (Widjaja, 2000). Such kolas are not used for any regular or cultural ceremony in Igbo land, neither is it used for any typical or cultural ceremony in Igbo land. *Cola acuminata* and *cola nitida* are both considered to have the same symbolism in widespread and non-public cases, barring events like serious traditional ceremonies like marriage and sacrifices, where only the Igbo Kola is used. In many West African cultures, particularly among the Igbo and Yoruba in Nigeria, offering kola nuts is a mandatory gesture of hospitality, friendship and respect for guests. The kola nut is used in social, traditional and religious ceremonies, including marriage, funerals and for the Yoruba, in divination (Sciencedirect, 2026).

The Igbos believe that "kola is life"; kola symbolizes peace. This explains why an Igbo man would welcome you with kola nuts when you go to his home, saying "onyewetereoji, wetereudo", which translates to "he who brings kola, brings peace or life. "The kola nut subculture is used for welcoming site visitors and a variety of occasions.

This was why Wikipedia (2022), reports that kola is the first component served in every feature or ceremony, personal or communal agreements, welcoming of a traveler to an Igbo home, and settlement of family disputes. The Igbos' welcome is incomplete without the presentation of

the kola nut. In the case where the host in a social gathering fails to present kola to his guests, he would have to make an explanatory apology as to why kola was not provided.

It is a commonplace trust and practice among the Igbo that when the kola nut is blessed with incantations, the tourist is certain and welcomed. Ukaegbu (2003) supports that there is a common understanding of the traditional way of breaking the kola nut. Obiefuna (1978: 27) also attests to this fact; Not only do the Igbo say prayers before the breaking of the kola nut, but no traditional Igbo would drink or eat without sharing at least with the ancestors.

An interview with Ogbuehi Ifemkpa Stephen Illo (1920-2024), Ogbuehi Innocent Asuzu (b.1922), Mazi Charles Onyebuchi (b.1921), and Ogbuehi Ifeadijo Godwin Ugochukwu (b.1972), on 3rd June 2022, revealed that;

The Oji Igbo is very significant among the Igbo tribes. When the oji is presented, the most senior member or the eldest person in the family is expected to pray and break the kola nut. Ukaegbu (2003: 24) states, "The eldest man blesses the kola; he must hold the *Ofo* and represents the authority of the ancestors. One of the strongest reasons for spiritual activities, such as the advantages by way of the eldest man or woman, is that in Igbo regular society, the firstborn or eldest man in a household or *umunna* (kindred) assumes some priestly functions ipso facto. It is more by way of the motive of his priesthood and not necessarily due to the fact of his age that the eldest man is preferred; and this is why today, the eldest man offers an ordained minister the kola to bless as a privilege".

When he finishes, the youngest within the circle is called upon to distribute the kola nut for everyone present to consume. Among other tribes like the Idoma, it is an activity where both genders are expected to play major roles. Before the kola is presented to the guests, the preparation starts with the women, who wash the kola nut before handing it over for it to be presented to the eldest or most senior.

The ceremony and rights observed in the celebration of the kola nut in Umunze have a unified culture and it is treated like scripture. When the kola nut cotyledons appear from one to seven, they have philosophical meaning and symbolism.

1. When the kola nut appears in one cotyledon, the capacity is a dumb kola. It is called *ojimmuo*, that is, kola of the spirits. It is no longer eaten, in like manner, kola with one cotyledon is not eaten by human beings, the capability that it is no longer broken throughout any ceremony because it belongs to the ancestors, a mindset reminiscent of the direct hyperlink between the dwelling and the lifeless in Igboland



Fig. 1: Igbo Kola nut.
Source: Artist collection

2. When it appears in two cotyledons, it is equally a dumb kola and it is no longer eaten. This is the foremost cause why the Igbo do not use the word kola nitida for rituals or in serious, regular celebrations.



Fig. II: Igbo Kola nut. 2 cotyledons
Medium: Pen on paper
Source: Artist collection

3. When it appears in three cotyledons, it is comprehended as oji ikenga; the essential phase is no longer thrown out to the gods, a little section is thrown out, and the important components are eaten by way of those present. Kola with three cotyledons is known as Kola of the Valiant. Only warriors or courageous men, consecrated or ordained individuals, are accepted to consume this kola, as a matter of principle.

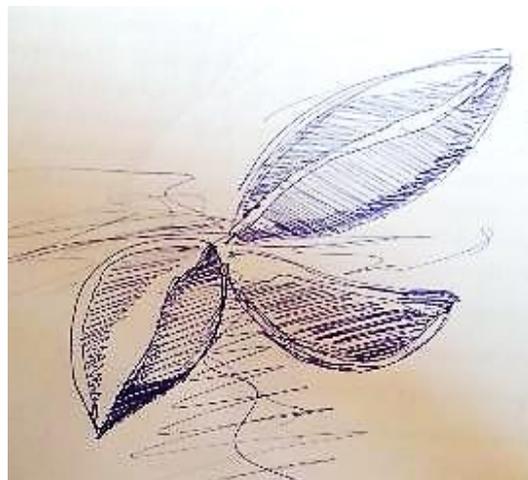


Fig. III: Igbo Kola nut. 3 cotyledons
Medium: Pen on paper
Source: Artist collection

4. When it appears in four cotyledons, it symbolizes the four market calendar days of the Igbo week: Eke, Orie, Afor and Nkwo. Kola with 4 cotyledons is called “oji udonangozi”, that is, “kola of peace and blessing”. It is the regular kola. The wide variety of four is very sacred amongst the Igbos.

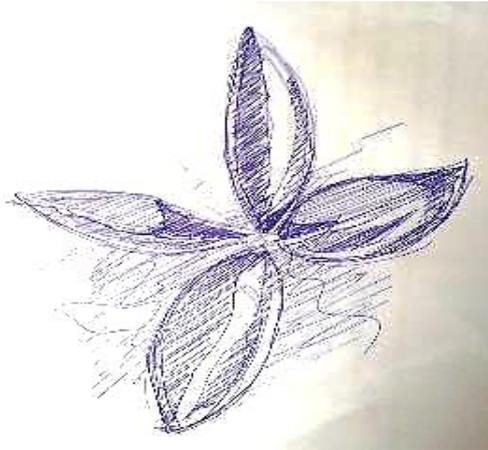


Fig. IV: Igbo Kola nut. 4 cotyledons
Medium: Pen on paper
Source: Artist collection

5. When it appears in five cotyledons, it symbolizes that we are indivisible, no exterior force or forces can come in and no opposition can divide us. Kola with five cotyledons is “*oji ubarammadu, omumu naukwuma*” that symbolizes making bigger in procreation, protection and exact luck.



Fig. V: Igbo Kola nut. 5 cotyledons
Medium: Pen on paper
Source: Artist collection

6. When it appears in six cotyledons, it implies that we are a bold force. Kola with six cotyledons indicates communion with the ancestors, that is, “*oji ndi mmuo nan dimmadu jirigbaa ndu*”. It is a kola nut used for covenant and the smallest phase or cotyledon is not eaten but is thrown away for the ancestors to eat.

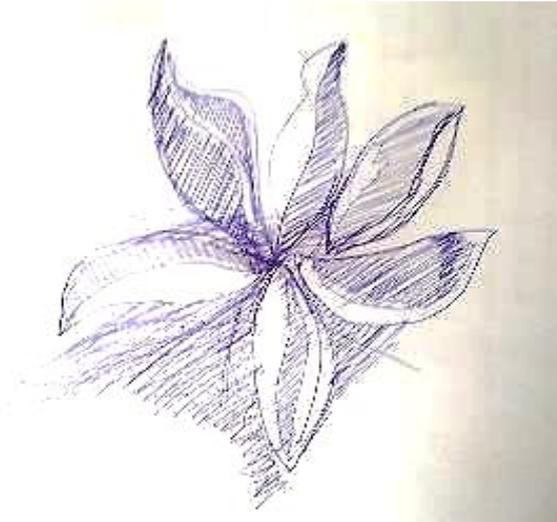


Fig. VI: Igbó Kola nut. 6 cotyledons
Medium: Pen on paper
Source: Artist collection

7. When it appears in seven cotyledons, it is no longer eaten up immediately; it would be rather tied excellently and saved for a suitable celebration. At that equal moment, another kola is provided so that the intention of that particular day would be accomplished. Kola with seven cotyledons is a signal of a precise omen; it symbolizes prosperity. According to Ifemkpa *et al* (2022), it is rarely seen or broken. On the appointed day for that celebration, Umunze is celebrated and dedicated to the great Chukwuabiana, Chukwuokike and Olisa bi naelu or Olisa bi naigwe. The celebrant is expected to invite and select seven representatives from the seven villages of Umunze. The number seven is unique and symbolic. The celebrant is expected to entertain his guests lavishly. Nothing dedicated to such entertainment is too big or too small. One is expected to cut one's coat according to size and pocket. There are always blessings in disguise that are believed to accompany such personal sacrificial commitment. In some parts of Igboland, when the kola breaks into six, a separate celebration is required, sometimes even including the slaughter of a goat. This is probably the reason why the people of Umunze revere and celebrate the kola nut when it turns out to be in seven pieces and perhaps the reason why Chidume, *et al*, (2015) believe that the kola nut content is not conceptualized ordinarily by the Igbo man, but much in philosophical dimension as the totality of the Igbo culture with psychological providence for him. This is deduced from the Igbo cosmology, which places him higher than other animals. The symbolic seven lobes of the kola nut, therefore plays a large part in shaping man's view, particularly, emphasis is placed on the number of halves.

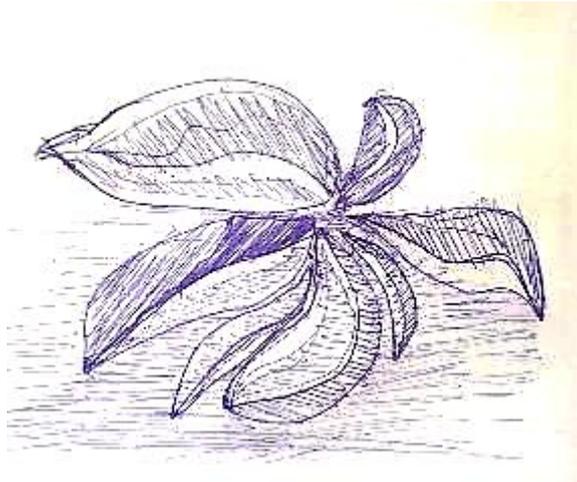


Fig. VII: Igbo Kola nut. 7 cotyledons
Medium: Pen on paper
Source: Artist collection

The number seven is often considered lucky, and it has a definite mystique, perhaps because it is a prime number, meaning that it cannot be obtained by multiplying two smaller numbers together. (Smith, 2022 & Britannica, 2022).

Rights/Prayer offering before the breaking of the Igbo kola nut

The host offers a plate with the seven cotyledons of Kola nuts tied properly. The leader of the delegation will take the plate and show it to the most senior member to confirm that he has viewed the plate. He briefly touches the plate with his proper hand, which is his right hand, before it is shown to much less senior participants and so forth till most contributors have taken a glimpse of the plate. Kola nut has been so emphasised in Igbo land that no marriage ceremonies, set up of regular rulers, resolution of disputes, and cultural festivals, among others, are ever performed without performing the kola nut rituals, which is usually performed in Igbo language, with the most senior, who starts to bless the kola nut with his hand and offers prayer in Igbo language by saying thus;

Onyewetereoji wetara ndu! Egbe bere, Ugo bere; nkesi ibeya ebena, yagosiya osisiozo!
Ndummiri, nduazu; mmiriatana ma azuanwula. Nwammuo emegbula nwammadu, ma
nwammadu emegbula nwammuo. Ijeanyi jawu ijeawe! Kaanyiina-agan'udo, na-abatan'udo.
Iheafoga-erikaanyiina-achọ. Iheanyiiga-eribia, ma nkega-erianyibia. Ihechorosiani, o bia,
yakpuruokpugafeemakanaochunwaokukọ new ada, nwaokukoenwerenwenweoso!

Enutaaoji ala taaoji. Eke naOrie, AfonaNkwotaanujoo! NdiIchiebianutaaoji.

ChukwuOkiketaaoji, ChukwuAbjaamataaoji. Anyanwutaaoji, Onwataaoji, Idemmilitaaoji,
Amadiqhataaoji, Ogwugwutaaoji, izommiri,udo, obibiakutaaoji..

Kaanyijiriofu obi na-aga! Onyeaghananwanneya. Onyesinaihendi Igbo na-emeadihiyamma,
yaburuokukouzonabaaura! Ka chi forotaafotaraanyiiniileiheomaoo! Isee!!! (Attah, 2016).

English translation;

He that brings kola brings life! The hawk should perch, the Eagle should perch and anyone who refuses each other from perching should show the next where to perch.

May the river never run dry and may the fish. May humans never offend the spirits; the spirits never offend humans. Our journey would be safe and secure; we shall always embark and return in peace. We shall always look for what the stomach will eat, may we not experience what will eat us. May evil not befall us. He that runs after the chick shall continue to stumble and fall; the little chick shall always be on the run.

Heaven eats kola, earth eat kola. Eke, Orié, Afor, and Nkwo eat kola! Our ancestors come and eat kola. God the creator eats kola, and the supreme God, the ever-knowing eat kola. The Goddess of sunrise eats kola; the Goddess of the moon eats kola. Goddess of the Idemili River eat kola, Amadioha eat kola, Ogwugwu eat kola. Goddess of Izo Mmiri, Udo, and Obibiaku eat kola.

May we be united with one mind! May we never abandon our brother when he is in need. Whoever says our tradition is not good enough should go to sleep before the rooster. May today's daybreak bring forth good fortune and blessings. So shall it be!!! And the people respond in chorus: Amen!

There are no hard and fast rules; one may pray according to how one is inspired to commune. It is the breaking that is the significant part of the ceremony. The more cotyledon parts the kola breaks up into, the more prosperity it gives to its presenter and visitors.

In Igbo land, the Oji Igbo symbolizes social and ritual bonding between the living and the dead. It is a ceremonial covenant of hosts and friends with benevolent ancestral spirits and deities in the presence of Ani, the Earth goddess. In Chinua Achebe's view; "*The kola nut was once a sacred fruit and had a very wonderful and special position to play in Igbo lifestyles and way of life*" (Achebe 2012:10).

It is after the prayer is offered that the representatives of the seven villages are entertained. Goat is slaughtered, rice, yams, abacha (tapioca), or two drinks or palm wine are served alongside.

Likely bad omen and consequences

There was a certain skit put together by Akams (2025), which trended on the WhatsApp social media platform. It was a gathering of the Igbo elders. The usual Morning Prayer was offered with a kola nut. The person offering the prayer was an old man, who also appeared to be the most senior or oldest person. After saying so many prayers, he was also saying the prayer in both the Igbo language and the English language. It was obvious that he was not enlightened. He finally prayed that the word 'genocide' is a recent language he has just learned, he prayed in earnest that God should bless everyone with genocide, enrich every family with it. As he was about to conclude his prayers and pronouncement, the elders quickly rushed at him, held his hand before he could proceed to break the kola nut. This was also to show how important the breaking of the kola nut is to the Igbo people.

Some other taboos are: if the nut yields solely to two parts, it signifies no excellence, as it indicates that the presenter has a sinister cause behind the kola. Because of that, Kola nuts, which solely appear in two parts, are prohibited from this ceremony, and consequently, the

purple/reddish colour pink nuts and cola acuminate is preferred over its greyish counterpart, the cola nitida, as the latter one breaks up into two.

Only men and not women are allowed to climb and pluck the kola nut fruit tree. The Igbo kola nut tree is usually not climbed by the firstborn male child; if he does that tree dies eventually and it will no longer bear fruit and becomes useless (Ifemkpa, Asuzu, Onyebuchi, and Ugochukwu, 2022).

The high degree of sanctity accorded to the kola nut throughout Igbo land is likened to that of the biblical ‘forbidden fruit of Paradise’ in the experience that women are forbidden from either planting, climbing, plucking, or breaking the Kola nut. This no longer suggests that men are holier than women in Igbo society. It is simply a query of a mentality comparable to the biblical regard for women. The denial of women’s right to destroy Igbo ceremonial Kola is an aspect of social persona and organization and does not in any way suggest inferiority towards women. Women do wreck the Igbo kola when they collect in their regular cultural groupings, where no man has a say. On the contrary, Igbo girls have cultural corporations that are independent of men (Wikipedia, 2022).

In general, the kola nut in Igbo-land represents the terrific social image of accommodation, peace, general well-being, togetherness among the community members, reconciliation and oneness. The kola is the community unifier that brings together the world of the living and the dead.

Mimicry and performance in the art of kola nut breaking

The consistency in rendering prayers and communing with the ancestors could be likened to mimicry in theatre, which is rooted in the concept of mimesis. Mimesis is the artistic imitation, representation, or simulation of life, characters and actions to create believability or convey meaning. It ranges from realistic acting where actors disappear into roles to physical mime, gesture-based performance and satire, serving as a foundational element of dramatic performance and storytelling. It then also means that the concept of having the kola nut created in 3-dimension is an imitation of the real thing. An imitation aimed to concretize this visible form of the kola nut, while it is also represented in performance. It was Socrates (470-469 BC); who defended that art imitating the material objects, which themselves only mimic the true and higher reality of forms even though his student Plato had a contrary view. For Socrates; positive imitation often referred to as pedagogical mimesis or the imitation of virtue, where people are permitted to model themselves after courageous and disciplined individuals allows. This position is in tandem with the Igbo’s believe of life after death. The dead ancestors who has lead good lives are allowed to return as *idi ichie* to watch over the living. As Hanley (2024) notes; a theatrical performance is a live, public presentation of a dramatic or musical work, where actors or performers convey stories through acting, dialogue, dance, or puppetry. These productions, ranging from classical plays to musicals and experimental art. Theatrical productions serve as a medium for artistic expression, storytelling and cultural engagement.

African culture as a concept for artistic inspiration and creation

Visual artist's uses traditional concepts, techniques and mediums, often reinterpret them through a contemporary lens to explore identity, nature, or social issues. Examples include artists working with textiles, sculpture, graphics and painting techniques, blending historical, cultural or organic traditions with modern conceptual themes. Artists in contemporary time took advantage, explore the use of culture as a concept in creating their artworks. Contemporary artists are seen to borrow from traditional elements. Ogbachie (2009) also suggests that "it might be more useful to consider all contemporary engagements with indigenous cultures as forms of appropriation that adapt cultural concepts, signs and symbols. Contemporary African art appropriates indigenous traditions of visual culture in its search for significant ways".

Stokstad (2008) is of the view that "in searching for ways to express an African identity in art, some of these artists draw inspiration from indigenous traditions." Most contemporary works have a clear relationship to traditional African folklore, belief systems and imagery. African art contains elements of traditional art; thereby establishing continuity from traditional to contemporary. Ugochukwu (2017) suggests that artists are experimenting with modern styles as they search for new ways to express their roots. Modern African sculptures are seen to reflect both the preservation of local sculptural traditions and the introduction of styles and techniques from outside the continent. It is possible to see the evidence of borrowing of ideas infused into the created works of art, there is the manifestation of creativity whereby the artist produces something new and distinctive within the range of forms and patterns, which becomes a part of the innovation in the design. It attracted and inspired Western artists, like Pablo Picasso, Andre Derain, Georges Braque, Henri Matisse and also, other famous African artists who have equally explored the use of traditional concepts as a source of inspiration like; Ben Enweonwu, Bruce Onobrakpeya, El Enatsui, among others.

In understanding the use of cultural concepts properly in art creation, more traditional values need to be considered, like the celebration of new yam festivals (Ifejioku), marriage ceremonies, *Oji Igbo* in Umunze, Orumba South LGA of Anambra State. The celebration of *Oji Igbo* is an embodiment of philosophy, general life experience and value attached to the Igbo people. This is visible and evident in its simple nature. *Oji Igbo* possesses forms and conceptual ideas when it appears in multiple cotyledons, which, if analysed and transformed, could enhance appreciation of aesthetics.

The problem that the study faces has been identified by various scholars, such as documentation and preservation of cultural heritage and practices. Westernization, driven by colonialism, Christianity, urbanization, and modern media, has significantly eroded traditional Igbo culture, resulting in the marginalization of indigenous values, language and social structures, while providing some benefits like formal education and technological advancement, this shift has led to cultural dilution and the adoption of foreign behaviors over traditional practices, these notable areas are; language decline, marginalization of traditions, social and moral shifts, religious transformation and erosion in the diaspora The Igbo language is at risk of extinction,

with a rapid decline in proficiency among youth who prefer English for academic and career advancement, treating their native tongue as secondary.

Traditional customs, including wedding rites, attire and festivals, are increasingly seen as primitive or outmoded in favor of Western alternatives. The communal spirit, hospitality and respect for elders that defined Igbo social life have been weakened by urbanized individualism. There is growing concern over the adoption of Western dress codes, which some view as immodest and contrary to traditional moral standards. Traditional religious beliefs and practices have been severely impacted by Christianity, with many traditional practices being wrongly associated with "paganism" or fetishism. Erosion in the Diaspora one observes the Igbo people living abroad, face intense pressure to assimilate into Western culture, which leads to a disconnect from their roots and difficulties in raising children with traditional Igbo values. Dakroury (2014), is of the view that the levels of awareness of cultures influence media contents, while media platforms and contents influence cultural and daily activities. The media and cultural standards are intricately intertwined. Beliefs, values and social conventions are key components of culture and serve to bind cultures together. Western centric media and global communication platforms make indigenous practices less visible, favoring English-based content. The Nigerian educational system often biases English, contributing to the neglect of the Igbo language in schools. The relentless influence of Westernization has led to a state where the Igbo cultural identity is in danger of permanent damage and atrophy. It is also pertinent to ask questions as to how can this creative 3-dimensional art piece be created and archived. The mental contemplation, observing the kola nut and deciding what form and shape the created work would take? What would be the possible outcome? This was also followed by drawings.

Method

The research, through participant observation, was able to collect data to enable the creation of works in the studio. It has its rigor, especially its material exploration. The studio serves as the website for crucial inquiries. The photos and how the artist goes about making them are regarded as sources of quintessential inquiry that transform human grasp from easy to complex, known to unknown, to make sense of the daily world we know.

Procedures undertaken during the studio exploration

Materials: The materials used for the actualization are: Clay, Mild Steel rod, Binding wire, Plaster of Paris (POP), Silicon (Transparent clear), Polyester resin, catalyst, accelerator (for fast setting), paint pigment, metal rod, gold dust. Polyester resin is a versatile, cost-effective, two-component thermosetting plastic used for casting, laminating and fiberglass reinforcement. It cures from a liquid to a rigid solid when mixed with a peroxide catalyst (MEKP). Known for excellent water, chemical, and strength properties, it is commonly used in marine, automotive, and construction industries for parts, coatings, and repairs.

Conceptualization/ observation: this can also be referred to as examination, surveillance, scrutiny, or study. In this case, it implies an in-depth mental articulation of ideas in deconstructing and rendering conceptual sculptures inspired by oji Igbo, which was later

translated into sketches. There is a saying that the eye cannot see what the mind does not already know. Then, knowledge is acquired from our immediate environment through the process of observation, examples are seen in Fig.: I, II, III, IV, V and VI.

Photography: Using reference photos as a basis for pictures provided the research with a good source of raw material. The digital cameras provide varied perspectives of viewing; the photograph is a visual education that is based on the evidence that it is a statement. The picture does not represent the object itself but a set of suggestions about the object. A photograph often stimulates vivid memory images of events, places and people. In this case the human hand was used as a reference, while a source place was placed on the palm, see Plate I, while the abstracted images or form were imagined.



Plate I: Reference photo image
Medium: life model and plastic ceramics plate
Source: Artist collection

Drawings: Drawings helped to determine the actual nature of the sculptures that were produced. The study started with preliminary studies and drawings that were done on paper and sketch pad. The drawings created were both from life observations. Sketching is the quickest and most direct way to produce visible representations of ideas. By drawing and looking, designers find visible analogies and are mindful of applicable examples and discover new shapes primarily based on previously unrecognized geometric configurations in their sketches.

Armature construction: The armature construction was carefully planned and twisted to take the shape of the hand position, this further helped for smooth modeling to take place. Sculpture armature construction provides the necessary, rigid skeleton to support materials like clay, preventing sagging or collapse. Using materials like aluminum wire (14-gauge or ¼ -inch) wood or steel, armatures are built by twisting, bending and securing components together to match the desired proportions. Most artists prefer to aluminum wire for balance of strength and flexibility, see plate; II



Plate II: Armature
Medium: 2mm Mild Steel rod
Source: Artist collection

Clay modelling

Clay modeling in this case involves a careful study of the hand carrying a source plate by the palm. However, key hand-building techniques: pinching (shaping with fingers for small forms), coiling (stacking ropes of clay) and slab construction. Essential methods also include scoring and slipping for joining pieces, wedging to remove air bubbles and using tools for texture or sculpting intricate details. As one can observe, the form produced was well detailed, even though there were attempts of combinations of naturalism and abstraction.

Casting

Casting in sculpture is a process of reproducing a 3-Dimensional artwork by pouring materials such as molten metal, plaster, epoxy, or concrete into a mold. It involves creating a negative, detailed impression of an original sculpture (the mold) and filling it with a casting material to produce a durable, precise replica. See plates; III, IV, V, VI, VII and VIII.

Mold Making: A negative mold is made around the sculpture, often using flexible rubber for complex shapes or plaster for rigid, simpler forms, see plates; III, IV, V, VI and VII.

Release Agents (Separator): Essential for preventing the cast from sticking to the mold. Condensed oil and palm oil was used as a separator.



Plate III: Clay model is covered with silicon
Medium: Clay, silicon, 2mm Mild Steel rod
Size: 43 cm X 73cm X 24 cm
Source: Artist collection



Plate IV: First application of POP mother mold on silicon.
Sim line is introduced with oil at the base for ease of separation.
Medium: clay, silicon, 2mm Mild Steel rod
Size: 43 cm X 73cm X 24 cm
Source: Artist collection



Plate V: First part of mother mold is lubricated ready for the second part of POP negative mold cast.
Medium: clay, silicon, 2mm Mild Steel rod and POP
Size: 43 cm X 73cm X 24 cm
Source: Artist collection



Plate VI: Second application of POP to mother mold on silicon. Sim line is introduced with oil at the base for ease of separation.
Medium: clay, silicon, 2mm Mild Steel rod and POP
Size: 43 cm X 73cm X 24 cm
Source: Artist collection



Plate VII: the two sides of mother mold has been applied ready for separation and positive casting
Medium: clay, silicon, 2mm Mild Steel rod and POP
Size: 43 cm X 73cm X 24 cm
Source: Artist collection



Plate VIII: the final positive cast has been revealed
Medium: Polyester filed cast resin, and 2mm Mild Steel rod
Size: 43 cm X 73cm X 24 cm
Source: Artist collection

Surface Painting/ Finishing: The process of patinating the finished filled cast was seamless, hence the right choice of paint was used first before the application of gold dust. Surface patination is the process of developing a thin, often colourful layer of oxidation a patina on to surface of metals like bronze, copper, brass or materials like stone and wood. It acts as a protective, decorative, or aged finish, occurring naturally through weathering or accelerated by chemicals. This process is also the last stage of the sculpture produced. It was properly finished and patinated with gold finish as seen in plates; IX, X, XI and XII.



Plate: IX. Aerial view
Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu
Title: Omenala
Size: 43 cm X 73cm X 24 cm
Medium: Polyester filed cast resin, Mild steel rod, paint pigments and gold dust finish
Year: 2026
Source: Artist collection



Plate: X. Side view
Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu
Title: Omenala
Size: 43 cm X 73cm X 24 cm
Medium: Polyester filed cast resin, Mild steel rod, paint pigments and gold dust finish
Year: 2026
Source: Artist collection



Plate: XI. View from bellow
Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu
Title: Omenala
Size: 43 cm X 73cm X 24 cm
Medium: Polyester filed cast resin, Mild steel rod, paint pigments and gold dust finish
Year: 2026
Source: Artist collection

Plate: XII. Side view
Artist: Ephraim Ugochukwu
Title: Omenala
Size: 43 cm X 73cm X 24 cm
Medium: Polyester filed cast resin, Mild steel rod, paint pigments and gold dust finish
Year: 2026
Source: Artist collection

Analysis of *Omenala*

The naturalistic hand and plate were copied from a model, while the abstracted eight forms were modeled and cast separately before they were later assembled. The problem of the study was properly articulated and well executed in the sculpture produced. From the piece, one is able to draw a conclusion that the title also reflects on the visible 3-dimensional art piece titled; “*Omenala*”. *Omenala* is an Igbo word for Tradition or Custom. This captures the title of the paper “*traditional ethics and a people’s culture: Igbo kola nut as a source of inspiration for 3d sculpture and theatrical performance*”. The seven villages in Umunze was represented in the abstracted seated forms or figures.

Abstract art is a style that rejects copying nature, focusing on using color, shape, form, and line to create independent, non-representational compositions. It does not attempt to accurately depict visual reality, noticeable in Plates: IX, X, XI and XII. It emphasizes emotional or conceptual expression over realistic depiction, allowing for open viewer interpretation. It ranges from partially abstract to purely non-objective works. Abstraction is a deviation from representation. Its goal is to change the perception of reality. Abstraction took place in the mind of the artist and is communicated through the visible work of art showcased here. The goal is to give the audience a new perspective, the artist perspective on this particular subject matter, which is the kola nut activity, its braking and communication with the ancestors. The goal of abstraction is clearly different from representational art. Even though both two art forms were

merged here (Abstraction and Naturalism). One can see a representational art form visible with the hand holding the source plate, on which the eight figures are positioned, while the business of kola nut braking activity takes place. The visible standing figure is engaged in a praying mode, with something that looks like a kola nut in hand. The standing figure represents the slave that took care of Nze's family when he passed away. The hand holding the plate represents Nze and the ancestors who watches over his family and protects them against danger. The skit by Akams (2025), on pages 12-13 illustrates the enactment of what transpires each time the kola nut is broken.

Conclusion

In conclusion, more traditional content and concepts can inspire art creation, especially those cultures that are practiced among the Igbo people, even though the advent of Christianity hindered some of these practices, exploring one's own indigenous culture is a way out of the colonial entrapment.

The findings here tend to illustrate the great potential of visual art in fostering cultural conservation, social change and sustainable development in Nigeria. With both traditional and contemporary practices, artist's practitioners have demonstrated that creativity goes beyond aesthetic value because it is a medium for education, advocacy and nation-building. However, realizing the full potential of the visual arts requires deliberate policy support, institutional commitment and societal appreciation. In view of the challenges, there is an urgent need for integrated actions that could strengthen structures supporting artistic innovation and cultural identity. Furthermore, eco-friendly practices and indigenous materials in studio productions have their place in global goals on sustainability and represent local identity, owing to the fact that the research is an explorative one, this has shown in the creative output that has given the artist the opportunity to create and the avenue for money generation and wealth creation.

The research concludes that the present-day traditional sculptors are no longer commissioned by villagers and individuals to produce art that are inspired and driven by cultural ideologies, primarily because of the advent of Christianity and the introduction of Western cosmetics. Scholars like Okeke (1999), Frank (2008) and Ogbechie (2009) believes that exploring one's own indigenous culture is a ready way out of the colonial entrapment, that Western art idioms have done more harm to African artistic expression. There should be a growing consciousness amongst artists to use truly African idiom to relate the African experience, even though the Igbo art infused western idioms into its artistic adventures. African traditional cultural practices can inspire and continually be used as a source of inspiration for art creation.

The 3-dimensional sculpture produced doesn't just represent the celebration of kola nut, it reactivates its power in modern life. In the world where young people forget ancestral wisdom, the sculpture becomes silent teacher, environmental reminder and economic catalysts.

References

Attah, A. (2016) The Secret of Ozo Title. From <https://www.sunnewsonline.com/secrets-of-ozo-title/>. Accessed 10/07/2021.

- Britannica (2022) Braking of Kola nut, <https://www.britannica.com/science/kola-nut>. Accessed 06/04/ 2024
- Chidume, C. G, Osisioma,U. S & Echem, S. O.(2015) The Symbolism of Kola nut in Igbo Cosmology: A Re-Examination. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330449351>. PDF. 51-52.
- Chukwu, J. (2022). If I were Emeka Nwajiuba. Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) AE-FUNAI WhatsApp Platform. Retrieved on 02/21/2022.
- Dakroury, A. (2014). Media and culture. *Global Media Journal Canadian Edition*, 7(2), 1-3.
- Ekeanyanwu, N. T. (2015). *International communication*. (3rd ed.). Stirling-Horden Publishers Ltd.
- Flanagan, T. (2022). The Geography of Nigeria Loaded with Sarcasm. From [www.http//whatsappforum](http://whatsappforum). Accessed 21/02/2022.
- Iowa, (2022) Igbo People, from <https://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/peoples/show/>. Accessed 08/06/2022.
- Kammampool. B & Laar. S (2019) The Kola Nut: Its Symbolic Significance in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart, <https://www.arcjournals.org> <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijSELL/v7-i8/3.pdf>. Accessed 05/03/24
- Maduagwu, B.O.J (2013). Revised History of Umunze with The Intelligence Report of 1929. As compiled by D.C Jovey (A.D.O) AwkaDistrict, pp.133-134.
- Obiefuna, A. K (1978). Some Aspects of Traditional Moral Heritage with Particular Reference to the Igbo People of Nigeria, art. In *Lucerna*, Enugwu, Bigard Memorial Seminary n.1. vol. 1, pp. 25-27.
- Ogbechie, S, O. (2013). *From Masks to Metal Cloth Artists of the Nsukka School and the Problem of "Ethnicity."* University of California Santa Barbara.p. 134. Retrieved from http://www.aachron.com/editions/critical_interventions/components/com_p2dxt/data/03_07_ogbechiensukka.pdf p. 134. Accessed: 05/03/26
- Okeke-Agulu. C (2015). *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonisation in Twentieth-Century Nigeria*. Duke University Press
- Okoli. A, UJumadu. V, Nkwopara. C, Nwaiwu. C, Ozor.C, Adonu, C, Alozie. C, Odu.I& Okutu. P (2020). Why Kolanut is celebrated and Venerated in Igbo land. From <https://www.vanguardngr.com>. Accessed 03/09/2021.
- Olanegan. T (2022). Feature: Geography of Nigeria: A Beautiful Nation Loaded With Intrigues and Sarcasm, <https://www.pegasusreporters.com/2022/06/25/feature-geography-of-nigeria-a-beautiful-nation-loaded-with-intrigues-and-sarcasm-taiwo-olanegan/>. Accessed 14/12/25
- Sciencedirect, (2026). Kola Nut An Overview, (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/agricultural-and-biological-sciences/kola-nut>) Accessed 05/03/26.
- Slattery, K (2022). The Igbo People - Origins &History <http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~legneref/igbo/igbo1.htm>. Accessed 10/05/2022. Accessed 08/07/2021.

- Smith, D. (2022). What is the Biblical Significance of the Number Seven, from [HTTPS? 11/06/2022](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260343661_Art_Practice_as_Research_Inquiry_in_the_Visual_Arts_by_Graeme_Sullivan).
- Stokstad, M. (2009). *Art History-Third Edition*. University of Kansas. New Jersey. U.S.A: Upper Saddle River. pp. 936-1182
- Sullivan. G (2010). *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260343661_Art_Practice_as_Research_Inquiry_in_the_Visual_Arts_by_Graeme_Sullivan. Accessed 07/08/2025
- The Line That Remembers: Uche Okeke and the Art of Expression. <https://ucheokekelagacy.artfundi.tech/news/the-line-that-remembers-uche-okeke-and-the-art-of-expression>. Accessed 02/09/25
- Ugiomoh. F (1998). *Aesthetics of African Visual Arts and the Problems of Categorization*. An unpublished manuscript
- Ugochukwu, E. K. (2017). *Creating Sculptural Form Inspired by Ijele Masquerade*. Published PhD Thesis, <https://kubanni.abu.edu.ng>. Accessed 03/05/2026.
- Ukaegbu, J. O (2003). *The Kola Nut: As an Igbo Cultural and Social Symbol*. From <http://kolanutseries.igbonet.com/jukaegbu/pdf>. Accessed 08/07/2021.
- Wikipedia (2000). *Igbo Kola Nut*. https://www.google.com/search?q=About+https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kola_nut&tbm=ilp&ctx=atr&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiL1MPW8b-RAxUJzLsIHeYXBpsQv5AHegQIABAD. Accessed 14/12/25