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## Igbo Language and Art: *Preserving Heritage and Promoting Growth*

By Chuka Odike

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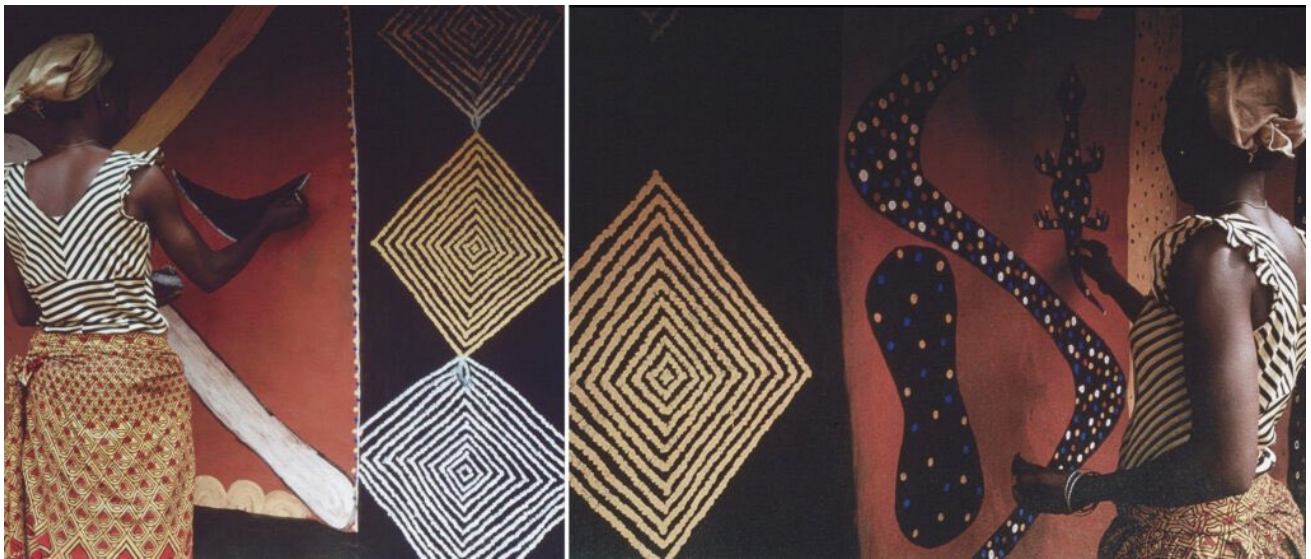
### Lagos Igbo Hangout. Photo by Oyibo Ugbo

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article

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IGBO LANGUAGE AND ART

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Women decorating the Iyazi shrine in Agukwu Nri, located in present-day Anambra State, Nigeria, 1984. Photographs taken by Chike Aniakor.

**T**he Igbo language and art are integral components of the cultural heritage of the Igbo people of Nigeria. While these cultural expressions have thrived for centuries, globalization and modernization pose significant threats to their survival. This article explores the significance of Igbo language and art, the challenges they face, and strategies for their promotion and preservation.

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# The Significance of Igbo Language and Art

The Igbo language serves as a vital medium for communication, storytelling, and the preservation of Igbo history and traditions. It is also a rich storage of proverbs, idioms, and oral traditions that reflect the philosophical and ethical worldview of the Igbo people. Igbo art, on the other hand, encompasses a wide range of creative expressions, including sculpture, mask-making, pottery, and textile weaving, each embodying spiritual and historical meanings. These artistic practices are deeply intertwined with the Igbo worldview, celebrating identity, spirituality, and communal values.



Uli decorations were placed on the newly constructed concrete walls of the Iyazi shrine in Agukwu Nri during the inauguration of the refurbished Odinani Museum on 28 December 2018.

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## Challenges Facing Igbo Language and Art

Despite their cultural importance, Igbo language and art are facing

significant threats, including:

1. **Language Endangerment:** The decline in the number of fluent Igbo speakers, especially among younger generations, is alarming. This trend is fueled by the dominance of English in education, business, and governance.
2. **Globalization:** The influx of foreign cultural influences and technologies has overshadowed traditional Igbo art forms, making them less appealing to the younger generation.
3. **Lack of Institutional Support:** Insufficient government and institutional support for Igbo cultural programs has contributed to the decline in the promotion of Igbo language and art.



The Ngene figure, known as Alusi Ngene, is a carved wooden representation that embodies both male & female physical attributes. It features scarification marks & carved bangles on the ankles & wrists. Collected by Northcote Thomas in Awgbu, present-day Anambra, Nigeria, in 1911

# Strategies to Promote Igbo Language and Art

Promoting Igbo language and art requires collective efforts from individuals, communities, and institutions. some strategies include:

1. **Incorporating Igbo in Education:** Introducing and making Igbo subjects compulsory to Igbo pupils and Igbo language instruction in schools can help nurture fluency among younger generations. Igbo art can also be incorporated into art and history curricula to foster appreciation.
2. **Digital Innovation:** Leveraging technology, such as apps, e-books, and online platforms, to teach Igbo language and showcase Igbo art can reach a global audience.
3. **Cultural Festivals and Exhibitions:** Organizing festivals and exhibitions that celebrate Igbo language and art can raise awareness and appreciation among both locals and the international community.
4. **Media Engagement:** Encouraging the production of Igbo-language films, music, and television programs can popularize the language and art forms.
5. **Government Policies and Support:** Governments can establish policies that promote Igbo language and art, including funding for cultural preservation projects and recognition of cultural practitioners.



Left and centre: Evocations of the colour and movement of agbogho mmuo in the art of Ben Enwonwu. Right: Maiden spirit masquerade costume photographed by G. I. Jones in Awka, present-day Anambra State, Nigeria, in the 1930s.

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## Conclusion

The Igbo language and art are essential pillars of Igbo identity and heritage. Their preservation and promotion are crucial for ensuring cultural continuity in an increasingly globalized world. Through education, technology, cultural events, and supportive policies, Ndi Igbo can secure their rich linguistic and artistic legacy for future generations.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Chuka Odi

I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explores ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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