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Embodied Spirits:

Igbo Wood-Masked Dancers and the Cultural Significance of Masquerades in Ugwuoba, 1959

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

Small group of Igbo wood-masked dancers in various raffia and leaf costumes, Ugwuoba village, Nigeria.’ Simon Ottenberg, 1959. Smithsonian.

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In 1959, anthropologist Simon Ottenberg documented a small group of Igbo wood-masked dancers in Ugwuoba village, Nigeria. These dancers wore elaborate costumes made of raffia and leaves, which are traditional materials commonly used in masquerades across various Igbo communities.

Masquerades are integral to Igbo cultural and spiritual life, serving both entertainment and ceremonial purposes. The masks represent spirits, ancestors, or deities, and the performers, often believed to embody these supernatural beings, play roles that uphold social norms, enforce justice, or mark significant communal events.

Ottenberg, S. (1959). Small group of Igbo wood-masked dancers in various raffia and leaf costumes, Ugwuoba village, Nigeria

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuka Odike

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 explore 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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