

## A SCULPTURAL REPRESENTATION OF 'TRADITIONAL' MARRIAGE (IGBA NKWU) IN ICHIDA TOWN, ANAMBRA STATE.

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### **Abstract**

*This study attempts to recreate the important values of Ichida traditional marriage rites in visual form. These rites were replicated by using various forms and types of metal scraps. The choice of metal media is based on its rate of permanency. By reflecting on the past, this study brings the traditional marriage of Ichida back to limelight through visual representation. The essence of this study is to engage the challenges facing the visual arts especially sculpture in terms of materials. The study shows that it is possible to retain the initial finish of a sculpture without having to go through the long processes of repairing from time to time. The study also exposes the innate potentialities of waste materials in terms of their deployment in sculptural experimentation. It is hoped that this study will motivate the younger generation of Ichida people and the Igbo at large, who seem to neglect the significance of their traditional values, to take more interest in their local cultures.*

### **Introduction**

Ichida is a town located in Anaocha local Government Area of Anambra State. It is situated towards the east of Igbo-ukwu, Ora-eri Awka-Etiti and Nnobi. The people of Ichida are one of the Igbo speaking groups of Anambra State and majority of the population engaged in farming in the ancient times while in contemporary times a good number of them have veered into private businesses, public, civil and other services, including international businesses.

According to Ezeanya, an Ichida Ozo titled man, (2008) Ichida was the son of Okotu and Okotu was the last son of Nri who had five sons. Agulu was the first son followed by Nneni, Obeledu, Adazi and Ichida was the last. Each of them had their natural god that protected them. There was a myth that holds that, in the past, the Ichida people were protected from mishaps such as motor accidents, by their progenitor god, known as *Oto'Ogbe*. Ichida people believed they were also protected by *Oto'Ogbe* during the Nigeria/Biafra war. During this war, a myth had it that the invading soldiers were blindfolded and the whole Ichida seemed like river in their eyes. It was obvious from the above myths that the work of *Oto'Ogbe* was to protect her children from danger.

The use of materials in this study was exploratory and experimental with the aim of contributing to knowledge in the field of sculpture. The materials that the researcher worked with include metal sheet, wrought iron, junks (found objects) such as motorcycle parts and other. After fabrication or construction, they were painted with mat and glossy

paints. The entire work was executed in stylized and semi-abstracted form, for the visual documentation of the Ichida marriage rites.

The researcher traveled down to Ichida to make enquires about the topic. Some elders and youths within the Ichida community were orally interview. Questions were asked from the list of generic questions.

Video and audio tapes and writing materials were used to record and store data gathered during the interviews. Some of these data were later translated, (some of the interview were in vernacular) before analyzed and visually interpreted in sculptural form. At the end, the works were exhibited and a report written.

Nnamdi Azikiwe University Library was consulted for the facts and information on the topic. Photographs, books, documentaries, films and magazines were used as well as the internet.

Materials used for executing the visual representation are used motor and motorcycle spare parts gotten from spare parts dealers and mechanic workshops around Ekenwan campus of the University of Benin, wrought iron sheets purchased and collected from my immediate environment.

### **Marriage and its meanings**

Marriage is a socially approved sexual and economic union between a man and a woman. Nwoye (1991:28) in Otite states that “before a marriage can be assumed to have occurred the parent of the spouses will give their consent and the bride price will be paid as well”. Marriage can also be defined as God’s calculated and ordained divine union between a man and a woman to affect each other’s lives positively within a legal and psychological bound of intimacy.

### **Marriage as an Institution Ordained by God**

Marriage (Anum din na nwunye) in whatever form is as old as humankind. The way and manner marriage is contracted and conducted varies from one culture to another. The reason for this variation is not far-fetched; it can be attributed to some variables, which includes cultural, social and geographical variables, among others. Ember (1977:41) defines marriage as the union of a man and a woman in order to live together and often to have children.

Marriage is seen by certain groups of people as an arrangement which enables individuals (man and woman) to live together and cooperate in an orderly social life. There is a general belief especially among the Christians, that marriage proffers that when God created the world, He first created man called Adam and seeing that Adam would need a companion, God then created a woman called Eve who later became Adam’s wife. It is a Christian eschatological belief that from the union of Adam and Eve the concept of marriage between a man and a woman was born (Gen:2:18).

However, as this Christian eschatology holds it, God made man who in this case is the husband, the head of the family, and the woman his wife as his helper. God blessed them and commanded them to go forth and multiply. Therefore, there is no leadership contest between the husband and the wife. God made the pronouncement that, the man is the head and leader of the family. And Jesus Christ made an analogy of this relationship

with the church to the man and his wife commanding that as he loved the church and died for it, so must the man love his wife and die for her (Ephesians 5: 25).

### **Traditional Marriage in Igbo Culture**

Marriage in Igbo land or any other African country goes beyond procreation or marital relationship. Traditionally, Igbo marriage institutions are marked by extensive prohibitions on unions between close relatives and the use of marriage obligation to interlink basic social groups within numerous and widely scattered communities. Women are also forbidden marry within their own patri-lineage or those of their mother and their father's mother.

This regulation eliminates not only parallel cousin marriage but also rules out cross cousins. As such, basic lineage groups do not become placed into paired or circular exchange system as they do in many other societies with basic unilateral descent structures similar to the Igbo. At times, a child develops special relationships with his mother's and fathers mother's patrilineages. People must marry outside of their community of origin, since all of its inhabitants usually belong to a common patrilineal group. According to Basden (1912:80):

*In those cases where separate lineage occupy the same village or someone is born and raised in a foreign settlement, the local exogamy restriction still applies.*

A highly ramified nature of the Igbo system is difficult to explain. It may be related to the fact that in past centuries the territorial system was highly expansionary and that a related pattern of internecine warfare necessitated a mechanism for reducing hostilities.

Since traditional marriage constitutes an important aspect of the customs of the people, it is very important, therefore, to document the stages of Igbo traditional marriage. Artists have, as recorded by some scholars, also made some efforts at preserving their works of sculpture while documenting cultural diffusion, social themes and the concept of marriage among the Igbo people over the years.

Traditional marriage rites in this essay is defined as the ceremonies surrounding marriage within a traditional setting according to the customary laws and tradition of the people involved. It involves series of negotiations, presentation of gift, payments and in some cases divination. Traditional marriage rite process can take years from when the girl is betrothed from childhood to when she is actually established in her husband's house.

Brown (1975:66) asserts that:

*No marriage was recognized as valid without fulfilling the customary conditions. Living together as "husband and wife" without performing the traditional marriage rites is not a recognized union.*

In fact, it is living in immorality. Even contemporary society, in its seeming moral decline, and the church still recognize the importance of traditional marriage, which are mainly the marriage rites, (even though they may not consent to some aspects of the rites as it was done in 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries).

Marriage is neither a secret thing nor a joke. It is not a one-man show. To buttress this point Brown (1975:46) says that "in modern England, a marriage is legal if it is registered by a person licensed by the state and only children born of such a union are legitimate." But in African traditional marriage, the state or political authority is not involved. The series of transactions and formalities involving the two parties of kin groups make the marriage legal and children legitimate. These transactions of gifts, payments and services, most of which are from the husband and his kin to the wife's kin is what I have attempted to recreate in sculptural forms, highlighting, once more, its visual force and implications in the contemporary Igbo society.

### **Ichida people and their Traditional marriage**

In the ancient days, according to Ezeanya, "parents on behalf of their son or daughter proposed marriage in Ichida land, at an early age (betrothal)." This gentlemen's agreement was redeemed as a result of observed exemplary character of a young girl or boy. Betrothal could also be earned by a man as a reward for exceptional valor. Normally with this type of marriage, love develops between the couple after marriage has been consummated

Ezeanya, an Ozo titled man (2008) also states that:

*A girl (bride) can be found during "Egwu-onwa" (moonlight plays) as the stream or Ubochi ahia" (market Day). When a girl is chosen for marriage, the parents of the girl will consult "dibia afa" who will tell them whether the groom is appropriate or not. If the "dibia afa" says no, the marriage will be cancelled, but if the answer is yes, the couple will go ahead with the marriage plans.*

At this point, the girl will be confined indoors for some weeks in a room, which is known as fattening room. During this time, she will not participate at the "egwu-onwa" to play with her friends. She will be fed with "azu-okoro", okoroko, and anumpko for seven weeks in order to enhance her looks, and make her very beautiful (agbonma). At this time her body will be decorated with "uku", "ufie", "nzu", and "tangele".

According to Nwanyinkwo, the head of Ichida kindred women (2008) "various aspects of dressing and make-up among the Igbos were carried out at the period when the book, *Things Fall Apart* was written." Traditionally, the Igbo women especially, believed in decorating their bodies for a variety of reasons including aesthetic. The Igbo people have a saying that *one's body is his or her temple*.

Nwanyinkwo also notes that in preparation for the ceremony, women decorate their bodies with various styles of hairdos and paintings on their bodies with temporary traditional cosmetics, using "nzu", "uli", "edo", and "tangele".

### **Method of production**

Certain Nigerian sculptors who have represented indigenous marriage in their works must have aimed to project and reinforce the historical and cultural consciousness that Nigerians exhibited as a people. However, their creative methodologies may have fallen short of the style I used in this research. The following vividly captures my creative methodologies and style.

**Sketches:** Sketches and detailed drawings were made on the different stages of the Ichida traditional marriage rites. It was made both in semi-abstract and stylized forms.

### **Metal Construction**

In some cases, metals were constructed in proportion to serve as supporting frames before using the metal sheets to cover some parts.

### **Cutting**

I used various sizes of metals both medium and small sizes: metal sheet were cut normally with a cutter.

### **Shaping**

Shaping of metals involved hammering, bending, twisting, folding, etc.

### **Welding**

Welding is a process of joining metals by using arc-welding machine and electrodes.

### **Finishing`**

Various effects of welding techniques were exploited, including grinding of surfaces while some were selected from the range of works. The works were coated with mat paint (mixture of oil and emulsion) to prevent rust while some were partinated by using gold dust.

### **Tools**

The tools used are sledgehammers of different weights, ball pen hammer, robber mallet, vices and anvil, hand gloves, pliers, tape rule.

### Few of the executed works



Plate: 1

Title: "Ntughariuche"

Medium: found Object

Size: 74 x 28 inches

#### Description

"Ntughariuche" is a 3 dimensional sculpture showing a seated male figure in a meditative posture with his head bowed down, using the right hand to support the head, showing a feeling of loneliness and depression. The sculptural work is attached to a wood.

#### Interpretation

"Ntughari Uche" means meditation; it indicates the initial reason for marriage, which is companionship. The figure is gripped by anxiety as to whether the girl will accept him or not.



Plate 2

Title: **“Onyeakaebe”**

Medium: Composition of found objects

Size: 29 x 32 inches

“Onyeakaebe” is a 3 dimensional sculpture, with two male figures, in a seeming encounter the fear of the old aged man looking male figure can be interpreted as curiosity to elicit a statement tells the viewer that he want to find out something from the visitor, with assumed an interesting posture, sitting upright with stretched out arms. The figures are executed in stylistic form.

**Interpretation:**

“Onyeakaebe” means a witness, the visitor is having a serious discussion with the bride’s father, trying to make enquiry about his daughter. There is a clear view of the kolanut served in from of them.

**A SCULPTURAL REPRESENTATION OF 'TRADITIONAL' MARRIAGE (IGBA NKWU) IN ICHIDA TOWN, ANAMBRA STATE--Azuka Nzoiwu**



Plate 3

Title            **“Ijuase”**

Medium:        Composition of bolts and nuts

Size:            24 x 26 inches

**Description**

The **“Ijuase”** is quite interesting figuratively. It shows four men whose replica were viewed from opposite direction, horizontally arranged on a semi-circular setting position. Directly opposite one another, the formation gives a feel of meeting session as talking and listening are expressive on the features. The sculptural work is executed in bolts and knots, the seated figures consist of the bride’s father and a witness, the groom’s father and a witness.





Plate 4

Title: **Mkparitauka**  
Medium: Polymer-matix  
Size: 33 x 34 inches

#### **Description**

The work "**Mkparitauka**" is a 3 dimensional sculpture, also a cast work, it is a male and female seated figures with creative combination of realistic and stylistic figures. The female figure is holding a cup of palm wine in her right hand while the male figure is discussing with her.

#### **Interpretation**

**Mkparitauka**" means a discussion, the man as the head of the family, calls the wife and tells her the reason why the visitors came and also serves her the drink which the visitor brought, the bride's father tries to convince his wife to accept the visitor's proposal.

**A SCULPTURAL REPRESENTATION OF 'TRADITIONAL' MARRIAGE (IGBA NKWU) IN ICHIDA TOWN, ANAMBRA STATE--Azuka Nzoiwu**



Plate 5.

Title            **“Ijeozuzu “ (Home Training)**  
Medium        found object  
Size:            114 x 36 inches

**Description**

“Ijeozuzu” is a female figure, with a handful of fire wood on her right hand side, the figure shows excitement on her face, the viewer will also indicate the fastness on her, trying to get home early in order to cook for the intended husband’s family, also to meet up with the time.

**Interpretation**

“Ijeozuzu” means olden days home training, when the bride went to her husband’s house to reside before the traditional marriage; in order to spend two weeks with them for home training and also to find out whether the family members are good enough to live with. The groom’s family will also know whether the girl is well trained by the parents or not. The figure shows that the bride is well trained and this explains why she fetched fire wood in order to cook for her husband and the family members.



Plate 6

Title "Agbamkwu"  
Medium: composition of saw-dust/bond  
Size: 46 x 28 inches

### **Description**

"Agbamkwu" is a 3 dimensional realistic sculptural rendition that is a combination of still life objects. The composition comprises of gouge of palm wine, smoked fish, alligator pepper, cowries, kolanut. Each object was molded separately with saw-dust and bond then carefully arranged. The strength of this sculpture seems to be in the composition. The sculpture appears more powerful when the works are put together than when singly displayed.

### **Interpretation**

"Agbamkwu" means traditional marriage. These are the olden days gifts items brought by the groom's family for the marriage ceremonies. Without these items, the marriage would not hold. These gifts are mainly food stuffs which are brought in specific numbers and used to pray for the couple, for the purpose of the visual presentation only, a sample of each items was sculpted.

**A SCULPTURAL REPRESENTATION OF 'TRADITIONAL' MARRIAGE (IGBA NKWU) IN ICHIDA TOWN, ANAMBRA STATE--Azuka Nzoiwu**



Plate 7

Title: "Egwu-Umuokpu"

Medium: composition of found objects

Size: 52 x 42 inches

**Description**

The "Egwu-umuokpu " is a very expressive 3 dimensional sculpture, showing the inter-relationship between music and dance as expressed in the dramatic dance steps of the dancers and beautiful posture of the figures, this sculpture consists of seven female stylized figures.



**Plate 8**

Title: "Idu-Ulo"  
Medium: found object  
Size: 10 x 36 inches.

**Description**

Idu-ulo" is a female figure with a full basket of dresses in her right side of her hand. With a very beautiful hairdo, the viewer can observe the figure's lighter mood.

**Interpretation**

"Idu-ulo" means properties or item given to the bride when she finally leaves for husband's home, it comprises different kinds of domestic things that the bride is equipped with, in order to start a new life in her husband's home.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, I have dwelled on the sculptural representation of 'traditional marriage' ceremony in Ichida town of Anambra State. It was evident that 'traditional' marriage, though may have lost stable meaning in contemporary scholarship, has provided the thematic base with which I explored the three dimensionality of found objects. Different stages of the traditional marriage, as it was practiced in the old, have been painstakingly enacted using metals. The semi-figurative and stylized styles deployed showed that there is a potentially hidden quality in metal as a medium of sculptural expression. The paper, once again, exposes the crises of modernity by invoking the concept of 'traditional marriage' for a renewed appreciation in contemporary visual studies scholarship.

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## Oral Interview

- Chief Ezeanya .O. (Ichida Ozo title man 2008) oral interview collected on 23<sup>rd</sup> of January.
- Madam Nwanyinkwo .M (The head of Ichida Kindred women 2008) 14<sup>th</sup> February.