



YEMISI SHYLLON
MUSEUM OF ART
PAN-ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

Artwork 39 Information Sheet

ANAGBADO'S EGWU OGBO



Egwu Ogbo, Acrylic on etched repurposed pallet wood, 112 cm x 148 cm, Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, Pan-Atlantic University.

INTRODUCTION

Retelling history never grows old because there will always be young ears eager to hear the tale. Chuma Anagbado's upbringing, enriched by his global artistic experiences, has shaped a unique style that revitalizes traditional African motifs within modern contexts. Through his art, Anagbado narrates the stories of his culture, aiming to preserve cultural heritage while fostering innovation. One of his most notable works, "Egwu Ogbo," epitomizes his artistic philosophy. This piece not only offers a visual feast but also serves as a medium for cultural dialogue and introspection, inviting viewers to engage deeply with the rich tapestry of African traditions.

THE ARTIST

Chuma Anagbado is a multifaceted Nigerian artist, renowned for his intricate blend of traditional African aesthetics with contemporary design elements. His work spans various mediums including painting, sculpture, digital art, and design, all of which reflect his deep-rooted connection to his Igbo heritage and a forward-thinking approach to art and culture (Anagbado, 2023).

Born in Nigeria, Anagbado's early exposure to the rich cultural tapestries of his homeland significantly influenced his artistic journey. His Igbo background, known for its vibrant customs, folklore, and artistic traditions, provided a fertile ground for his creativity. Anagbado often cites the intricate patterns and symbolic motifs found in Igbo art and craft as foundational elements in his work.

Educated both in Nigeria and abroad, Anagbado has honed his skills and broadened his perspective through formal training and global artistic exchanges. He holds a degree in Fine and Applied Arts from the University of Benin, Edo State. Where he specialized in Sculpture (Anagbado, 2023). Further studies in graphic design and digital media have allowed him to seamlessly merge traditional techniques with modern technologies, making his work both timeless and contemporary.

One of Anagbado's distinguishing features as an artist is his commitment to cultural preservation and innovation. He is deeply invested in exploring and reinterpreting Igbo art forms, using his work to educate and engage audiences about African heritage. His works often feature vibrant

colors, dynamic compositions, and symbolic references to Igbo mythology and philosophy, offering a contemporary take on traditional narratives.

Anagbado's sculptures are another testament to his versatility. He works with a variety of materials, including wood, metal, and reclaimed objects, to create pieces that are both aesthetically striking and rich in cultural significance. These sculptures often explore themes of identity, spirituality, and the intersection of past and present, reflecting the complexities of African experiences in a globalized world.

In addition to his visual art, Anagbado is a skilled designer and digital artist. His graphic design work includes brand identities, digital illustrations, and multimedia projects that demonstrate his ability to adapt traditional African visual language to modern contexts (Anagbado, 2023). This aspect of his practice not only broadens his reach but also positions him as a bridge between old and new, local and global.

Anagbado's work has been exhibited extensively both in Nigeria and internationally. His participation in various art fairs, exhibitions, and collaborative projects has garnered him recognition and acclaim. His contributions to art have been acknowledged with several awards and honors, reflecting his impact on the cultural landscape.

Beyond his personal practice, Anagbado is passionate about community engagement and education. He is involved in various initiatives aimed at nurturing young artists and promoting art as a tool for social change. Through workshops, mentorship programs, and collaborative projects, he seeks to inspire and empower the next generation of African artists.

EGWU OGBO

In fig 1 below, one can observe a group of young men in agile stances, poised and ready for an event. They are positioned differently throughout the piece, with the central figure in the foreground holding a knife in his right hand. This symbolizes the youthful exuberance often seen among young Igbo men and signifies the warrior status that they aspire to when appearing in public as a group.



Fig 1. **Egwu Ogbo**, Acrylic on etched repurposed pallet wood, 112cm x 148cm, © Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art.

The central figure is predominantly dressed in white, with a wrapper tied around his waist. The other figures behind and beside him are similarly attired in white T-shirts, waist wrappers, Igbo traditional caps, and beaded necklaces. They carry various simple musical instruments used for gyrating. Notably, contemporary attire such as sunglasses, sneakers, and joggers is also represented. The dramatic poses suggest an intense musical and dancing activity. Uli patterns adorn the background of the piece, adding cultural depth.

Anagbado begins his designs using a graphic tablet before transferring them onto wood with a "computer-controlled cutting machine." He outlines the figures with black Indian ink and highlights certain parts with acrylic paint in various colors. He describes his works in this style as Phygital art, which exists at the intersection of the digital and physical worlds. This style can be defined as "Using technology to connect the digital world with the real world to give the user unique interactive experiences" (Keingati & Okoh, 2023).

The Age grade, known as "Ogbo," is a group of men born within a span of 3 to 6 years. Upon approaching 30 years of age, individuals are considered mature enough to join an age grade. These young men are composed into a group in preparation for initiation into the social system, signaling their readiness to participate in the social, economic, and political development of their town. The age grade system, dating back to the 1800s, was initially a male affair. Recognizing the significant role women play in society, a women's wing was established in the 1950s and has remained active since. Each group is named based on the prevailing circumstances at the time of the members' birth. They also learn a particular dance, termed "Egwu Ogbo" (Age Grade Dance), which includes choreographed steps, composed music, and specific costumes. This dance is performed during festivities and social events such as masquerade festivals, burials, marriages, and initiations. The age grade is an indispensable vehicle for governance, administration, and overall well-being in many Igbo societies (Anagbado, 2024).

Chuma Anagbado's "Egwu Ogbo" is a striking piece that encapsulates his deep connection to Igbo culture and his innovative approach to art. "Egwu Ogbo" translates to "Dance of the Age Grade," hinting at the dance performed by the age grade group in this work. This piece is part of Anagbado's broader effort to preserve and reinterpret traditional African aesthetics through contemporary mediums.

Anagbado is renowned for his use of traditional Igbo Uli art forms, characterized by fluid lines and geometric patterns. Uli motifs, historically used for body and wall painting by Igbo women, are central to his work, reflecting his commitment to cultural preservation and modern reinterpretation. "Egwu Ogbo" vividly manifests this aesthetic, with intricate patterns and lines representing the symbiotic relationship between the Igbo people and their environment.

In "Egwu Ogbo," Anagbado employs a palette of black, blue, white, and red. The black color creates a stark contrast that highlights the intricacy of his line work. This choice of color is deliberate, as Anagbado believes it allows viewers to engage more deeply with the art's narrative and symbolism. The black-and-white scheme also underscores the dualities present in life and art: modern versus traditional, natural versus artificial, and simple versus complex (Shedrach, 2021).

The thematic core of "Egwu Ogbo" lies in its exploration of identity and reconnection with ancestral roots. By integrating traditional Uli designs into contemporary formats, Anagbado invites viewers to reflect on the continuity and evolution of cultural identities. His art is not merely decorative but serves as a medium for cultural dialogue and introspection. It bridges the gap between past and present, inviting re-engagement with traditional African philosophies and aesthetics in a rapidly changing world (Kihara, 2021).

Furthermore, "Egwu Ogbo" aligns with Anagbado's broader vision of art as a tool for societal reform and transformation. His work often delves into themes of identity, materiality, and the human condition, using art to comment on social issues and inspire change. By drawing from the rich visual language of his Igbo heritage, Anagbado positions "Egwu Ogbo" within a larger narrative of cultural resilience and renewal. This piece, like much of his work, seeks to empower viewers by reconnecting them with their cultural heritage and highlighting the enduring relevance of traditional knowledge and practices.

CONCLUSION

Learning about culture and tradition through art is a beautiful way to educate and engage both the old and the young. By reinterpreting traditional Uli motifs in a contemporary context, Chuma Anagbado not only preserves his cultural heritage but revitalizes it, making it accessible and relevant to new generations. His work exemplifies the potential of art to inspire, educate, and transform.

"Egwu Ogbo" bridges the past and present, offering a contemporary reinterpretation of traditional Igbo motifs. Anagbado's dedication to preserving and promoting African cultural heritage through art positions him as a vital voice in the ongoing dialogue about identity and creativity. Through his art, Anagbado celebrates the richness of African traditions while pushing the boundaries of contemporary design, making a lasting impact on the cultural landscape.

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