

# With love, from Edo



3RD EDITION

KOYO!! [Benin] **Obokhian!!** [Esan] **AbEe!!** [Afemai] **Hello** [English]

47 YEARS  
AFTER

Reflecting on one of  
Nigeria's proudest moments



Dear Readers,

**FESTAC 77 - Reflecting on one of Nigeria's proudest moments and the African connection**

Today, we take out a few moments to reminisce on what was one of Nigeria's proudest moments, a time when Nigeria was not only the largest economy in Africa but OPEC'S and the world's 6th largest oil producer.

It was precisely 47 years ago that Nigeria made a bold statement by hosting the most prestigious and celebrated festival in the world - The Second Festival of Black Arts and Culture popularly known as FESTAC. The first and only such festival was held earlier in Dakar Senegal in April 1966. This was at the instance of the great philosopher, poet, cultural theorist and Statesman, Leopold Senghor.

Therefore, when a decade later, Nigeria decided to make its voice heard and its presence felt, it had to dig deep to showcase its best and richest culture to an eagerly awaiting world. After a series of postponements and missteps, Nigeria came out blazing. It showed the world that Nigeria was not another (Money Miss Road) nation as they say in the then Bendel State. As a nation, Nigeria had something unique and special to offer in terms of its cultural heritage and history.

In all, Nigeria was said to have invested \$2.3bn which in today's money, when discounted for inflation, is the equivalent of \$15bn. The CAPEX was on Infrastructure, roads, bridges and a dual carriage expressway from Lagos to Badagry where the earliest slaves were traded. Over 10,000 visitors and tourists flew into Lagos for a period of 3 weeks.

The icing on the cake was the live coverage (streaming) of the Grammy Awards conferment on Stevie Wonder for his greatest album (Songs in the key of Life).

**The EDO Connection (An apple does not fall far from the tree)**

The National Arts Theatre in Iganmu was a masterpiece of architecture which covers an area of about 23,000 square meters of land sprawling between Eko bridge and East Apapa.

The FESTAC project was championed by Chief Tony Enahoro, the then Federal Minister of Information and Culture. He is from Uromi in Edo state.

The FESTAC symbol was the dream and imagination of Erabor Emokpae, the renowned and celebrated sculptor and artist, who was also from Edo state. The creation of the Queen Idia Ivory Mask was a masterpiece and a work of genius.

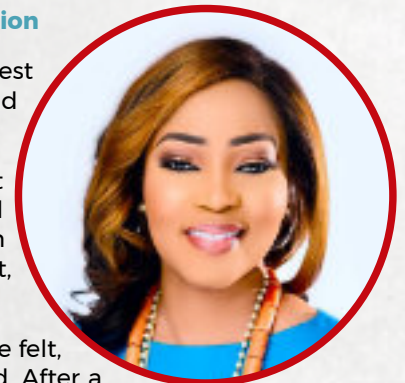
Erabor who hails from Benin City, was a great and creative mind that lived ahead of his time, but in the words of Ralph Emerson, "An apple doesn't fall far from the tree". This is my take for the month.

We read, we learn.

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Publisher's Script



With love,  
*Obehi*

# Erhabor Emokpae: Africa's Legendary Sculptor



FESTAC '77, the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, hosted by Nigeria, was one of the largest and most ambitious cultural gatherings of its kind, with over 50 countries participating. The four-week event, dubbed the Olympic Games of Pan-African Culture, aimed to celebrate and showcase the artistic, cultural, and intellectual achievements of black and African people from around the world. Over 16,000 artists, performers, and intellectuals across Africa and the African diaspora graced this auspicious event. It was a momentous occasion that not only showcased Nigeria's cultural heritage but also marked the nation's emergence on the global cultural stage.

At the heart of this monumental event was an emblem that embodied the spirit of Festac '77, the iconic ivory mask of Queen Idia. The mask, which depicts the image of Queen Idia, mother of the Oba (king) of Benin during the late 15th century, was an iconic representation of the festival and has become a symbol of African art and culture.

The Ivory Mask depicts not only the fine facial features of Queen Idia but also the intricate details of her traditional headdress, symbolic ornaments, and regal necklaces. It is a testament to the artistic achievements of the Benin Kingdom, which could only be brought to life by a true son of Benin, Erhabor Emokpae.

With Edo as his birthplace and a backdrop for his artistic journey, Erhabor Emokpae's story is that of a skilled sculptor whose roots run deep in the very soil that nurtured his boundless creativity. More than just a sculptor, he was a muralist, graphic artist, and painter and is regarded as one of the pioneers of modern art in Nigeria.

Some of his other well-known works include the decorations on the four entrances of the National Arts Theatre in Lagos and a popular painting of Queen Amina.

Emokpae was largely influenced by the Benin Guild of Carvers. The Queen Idia ivory mask he crafted captured the essence of Edo's cultural heritage, celebrating not only Edo's past but also projecting its vibrant future onto the global stage with meticulous precision and a deep appreciation for the state's history. The mask's intricate details and profound significance marked a turning point in Edo's cultural narrative, reigniting a passion for artistic excellence that has been inherent in the state for generations.



The brilliance of the ivory mask is a testament to all who laid eyes on it, making it worthy of being the emblem of the prestigious FESTAC event. Emokpae, with the mask, boasted the creativity and cultural heritage that have been passed down in Benin from generation to generation. He, along with Festac 77, stood as a powerful reminder that Nigeria has much to offer beyond its natural resources; it has a vibrant and diverse cultural landscape waiting to be explored.



## DID YOU KNOW??



1

Did you know that Edo state has the largest brass industry in Africa, dating back to the 13th century

2

Edo state is known for its rich culture and arts, such as bronze casting, wood carving, ivory carving, coral bead making, and masquerade festivals.

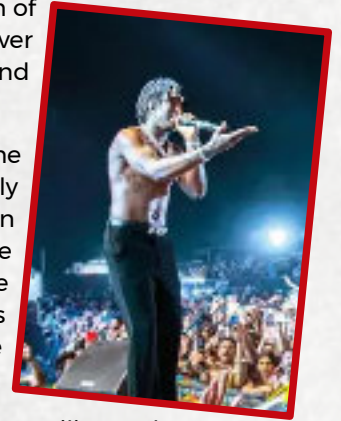
3

Edo state has a flag that consists of three main colors: red, white and green. The red color and the three stars stand for the bloodshed of Edo heroes, the white color stands for peace and the green color stands for vegetation.

## Rema: The Globalization of Afrobeat & Edo Culture

Nigeria's economy is currently facing significant challenges, notably the prevalent depreciation of the naira and a rising cost of living. However, a glimmer of hope for the country and stress reliever amid these hurdles is the burgeoning receipts from invisible trades, with tourism and entertainment playing pivotal roles in this regard.

Nigeria's music industry has witnessed remarkable growth in recent years, thanks to the creativity and innovation of its artists, producers and promoters. The industry is largely influenced by Afrobeats, a genre that showcases the diversity and richness of the Nigerian people and their culture. Afrobeats has also gained global popularity recently, thanks to the efforts of many Nigerian musicians like Davido, Burna boy, Wizkid, etc. Who have overcome cultural barriers and impressed audiences worldwide. One among these talented musicians is Rema, a young singer and rapper who originates from Edo state and stands out with his unique style and captivating songs.



Rema's music is a fusion of Afrobeat, pop, R&B, hip-hop, and trap. He is known for his versatility and experimentation with different genres and sounds. He has been praised for his catchy melodies, smooth vocals, and relatable lyrics and even joked to mimic Indian sounds. Some of his popular songs include "Iron Man", "Beamer", "Woman", "Ginger Me", and "Calm Down". Rema also broke the Guinness world record for an artist with his song, "Calm Down". The song is now the most listened to by an African performer on Spotify with more than 1 billion listeners.

Rema is not only a musical sensation but also a cultural icon. He often incorporates elements of his Edo heritage into his music and fashion. For instance, in his song "Calm Down", he sings in the Benin language, one of the languages spoken in Edo state. He also wears outfits that are inspired by Edo's traditional attire, such as the coral beads. He has also expressed his pride in being from Edo and his desire to promote the culture and tourism of his state.

Rema is undoubtedly one of the most influential and successful artists in Nigeria and Africa today. He has proven that he is not only a star but also a role model for many young people who aspire to achieve their dreams. He has also shown that he is proud of his roots and that he is committed to showcasing the beauty and diversity of Edo culture to the world.



### Igun Street: Where Sculptors are Born & Bred

"Guild of Benin Bronze Casters", "World Heritage Site," and Festac's insignia - Queen Idia's Mask, sit proudly at the entrance to the renowned Igun Street, home to a lineage of Benin sculptors and artists.

At Igun Street, you are immediately thrown into a world of diverse sculptures and rich art, ranging from 6-foot bronze humanoid sculptures to a plethora of detailed wooden animal sculptures.

Igun Street and its neighboring counterpart, Owina Street, may initially seem like ordinary markets within

the bustling city of Benin. However, these streets encapsulate the lives of 500 to 1,000 individuals, each intricately woven into a tapestry of history that traces its origins back to the illustrious Benin Empire.

With joy and reverence, they describe the labor, process, history, and significance behind each masterpiece. For centuries, Igun Street has nurtured generations of Benin sculptors. Each artist reveres their role as a guardian of a meticulously guided art form, entrusted solely to family and fellow guild members.

Amid this cultural site, the Queen Idia Mask stands as an iconic testament to the enduring impact of FESTAC. Displayed in various sizes, forms, and materials, the ivory mask graces every corner, a testament to its universal appeal and the allure of Festac, even after 46 years. Both international patrons and Nigerian citizens alike clamor for this masterpiece, driving its popularity.

## The Cycle of an Embedded Proprietary Skill



A typical day on Igun Street includes sculptors and artists showing their work or participating in one of the many tasks that go into creating artistic pieces. Archaeological experts and history enthusiasts, the architects of concepts and owners of intellectual patent rights, impart their visionary ideas to the sculptors, who in turn breathe life into these concepts, bringing them to tangible existence.

In his seventies, Mr. Anthony Osemwegie, a torchbearer of tradition having been apprenticed under the tutelage of both his father and grandfather and now continuing the legacy by instructing his own children, provided a concise overview of the processes involved.

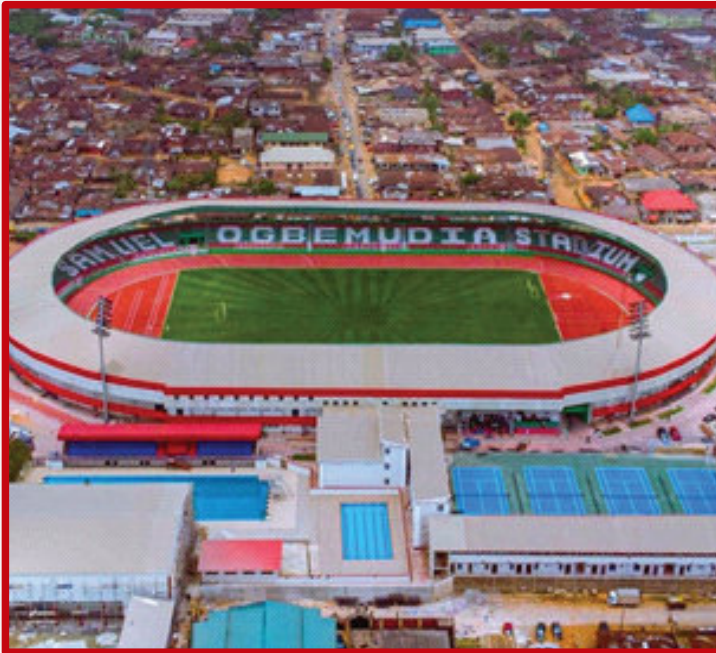
It commences with the gathering of red sand (clay), serving as the foundation, followed by the crafting of wax to capture intricate nuances, and then integrating the bronze before finally casting. Each step is an art perfected over time, yielding a spectrum of skillfully executed designs. The timeline for the completion of sculptures typically spans an average of 3 to 4 weeks, contingent upon the complexity of the work and the success of the casting process.

Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Igun Street endures as a repository of historical and cultural significance. Standing steadfast through the ages, the present generation remains staunch custodians of this heritage, making the site a paramount epicenter of the thriving tourism sector in Edo and Nigeria.



## Bendel Insurance: Rekindling the Past Glory

The Samuel Ogbemudia stadium which is home to Bendel Insurance FC is known for being a historic and significant sports facility in the country. The stadium was built about 50 years ago during the tenure of former Governor Samuel Ogbemudia of the old Bendel State.



One of the most notable events in the history of the Ogbemudia Stadium was the exhibition match between Pele's Santos and a Nigerian All-Star team in 1969. This match brought global attention to the stadium and showcased its capacity to host international football events. However, in recent times the stadium has been notable for various activities other than sporting activities and was banned by the Nigeria National league in 2009 for having an unsafe, below-standard playing field.

In 2018, the Governor Godwin Obaseki led administration, in line with its Making Edo Great Again (MEGA) agenda, embarked on a total overhaul and reconstruction of the stadium's facilities. All the seats in the previous 20,000-capacity stadium were replaced with modern ones, the synthetic grass in the pitch was exchanged with natural grass as well as the tartan tracks.



The focus of the administration is leveraging the past glory to sustain future performance and the results are becoming clear. Bendel Insurance FC brought back nostalgic memories of past victories after an absence of about 34 years from the continental stage. They secured victory over ASO Chlef FC of Algeria across two matches, propelling them to the next stage of the 2023/2024 CAF Confederation Cup.

The first leg of this enthralling contest unfolded at the illustrious Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium in Benin City on the 19th of August, 2023. The game itself bore an air of uncertainty due to the preceding night's heavy rainfall in Benin City, coupled with lingering overcast skies on match day. However, as if scripted by fate, the skies unexpectedly cleared just prior to the scheduled kickoff. This meteorological twist adds an intriguing layer to the narrative, evoking memories of the Rain Doctor story featured in our 2nd Edition of "With Love, from Edo." Could it be conjectured that a Rain Doctor's intervention staved off the rainfall, or was this a mere coincidence?



## ENTERTAINMENT

- 1 When last did Bendel Insurance play at the CAF championship?
- 2 The theatre festival that took place in Benin last weekend was called?
- 3 The 60<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the Mid-West States was held where?

Answers are in the word puzzle

## WORD PUZZLE FROM THIS EDITION

T N S A N V B S E B Z E M G  
 Y J M I C E T M R N G R A Z  
 M E N G S A L O M A I E S L  
 R E E R D T N E T Q E N K Y  
 B M W I G Z Z I P B N M A C  
 S K U W E U R A M U S I C A  
 R M M H O E I I P R J A Q F  
 O O Z V H B Y L R D D K K R  
 T I G H D A I F D M L G C O  
 P S T H I R T Y F I V E A B  
 L E D N E B T U F E Z M T E  
 U H R C U E M O K P A E S A  
 C N Q D E G Q M S Q F C E T  
 S H N A I D I R V P S H F S

AFROBEATS  
 BENDEL  
 IDIA  
 STADIUM  
 GUILD  
 REMA

EMOKPAE  
 MUSIC  
 HERITAGE  
 SCULPTOR  
 IGUN  
 BENIN

ENINA  
 MASK  
 THIRTYFIVE  
 FESTAC  
 PELE  
 BRONZE

## EVENTS

### Ukpe-Ekpahe

October

Masquerade festival

### Eho

October

New Yam festival

### Uba

November

Initiation into womanhood



## LINGO

