

The Unity Museum Enugu: Historical Conservation of Nigerian Culture and Heritage for National Unity

¹Adaora Peace Ezema & ²Uboegbulam Gideon Chukwunwem

^{1&2}Department of Hospitality Management and Tourism
University of Port Harcourt, River State – Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper explores the significance of Unity Museum, Enugu, in maintaining and showcasing various aspects of Nigeria's rich history, traditions, and artifacts. Secondary sources of data were used in gathering data for this study. The key findings of the study emphasized the importance of promoting cultural awareness and appreciation among Nigerians and visitors from around the world. Ultimately, the paper sets the stage for a comprehensive examination of the Unity Museum Enugu's role in historical conservation and its impact on the preservation of Nigerian culture and heritage.

Keywords: *Unity Museum Enugu, Historical conservation, Culture, Heritage, National Unity*

Corresponding Author: **Uboegbulam Gideon Chukwunwem**

ORCID Number: 0000-0001-6127-5866

Background to the Study

Museums offer an insight into the intellectual, aesthetic, cultural, and technological heritage of a people. The beauty of the museum lies in the fact that vast arrays of knowledge are encapsulated or ensconced within the convenience of indoor viewing. Apart from being a source of inspiration, such artifacts engender enlightenment, pride in the wealth of such possessions, and richness of spirit, which may inspire breakthroughs in scientific discovery. This is in line with the view expressed by Light, Keller, and Calhoun, eds. (1989), that fact states that scientific knowledge and the attendant technological breakthrough emerge from a particular social and historical context. Flights of inspiration notwithstanding, scientific discovery is a highly social achievement. The Capitoline Museums, the oldest public collection of art in the world, first opened in 1471 when Pope Sixtus IV donated a group of important ancient sculptures to the people of Rome. In the same spirit, the Vatican Museums, the second-oldest museum in the world, were founded in 1506 when Pope Julius 11 invited the public to enjoy his sculptural collection. In Nigeria, in addition to the museum established in Esie in 1945, the 1953 antiquities ordinance led to the establishment of museums in Ife (1954), Lagos (1957), Owo (1958), Benin, and Oron (1960). After the Nigerian Civil War, the federal government created museums of national unity in Enugu and Ibadan to foster national unity (www.nigeriamuseums.org). Before this time, collections of cultural artifacts and historic memorabilia were held privately by monarchs, wealthy chiefs, or heads of families. This practice was aimed at chronicling the rich cultural heritage and historic advancement of various families and ethnic nationalities, long before the colonial enterprise created the polity known today as Nigeria.

Like other socio-economic and political institutions in Nigeria, such as the school system, the prison service, the civil service, and the police force, the Nigeria Museum is a colonial creation. It was conceived, established, and midwived as part of the colonial enterprise. It was the vision of the founding fathers of the Nigeria Museum that the day may come when people will voyage from all parts of the world to see the museums and exhibition rooms of Lagos, Abeokuta, Ife, and Benin City (Duckworth, E. H., cited in Afigbo & Okita 1985). The vision thus confined the museum in Nigeria to the role of a tourist attraction. It relegated to the background the most important role of the museum as the repository of both material and non-material aspects of culture, thus bridging the gap between the past, the present, and the future. This is more so in an underdeveloped economy like Nigeria, which is battling to salvage and project its image. This task of projecting Nigeria's image is more daunting in this era of globalization, where improved technology allows the developed countries of the world to advertise and project their cultural practices, belief systems, and values as the benchmark. On the contrary, poverty, unemployment, bad leadership, and the fear of a bleak future have driven many Nigerians into exile in Europe and America (Anah, 2006). It is therefore appropriate at this time to critically assess and highlight the role of the museum in social change and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Research Objective

The objective of this paper is to examine the role of the unity museum, Enugu in historical conservation and its impact on the preservation of Nigerian culture and heritage for national unity.

History of National Museum of Unity, Enugu

The antiquities commission stressed that it is obviously in the public interest that Nigeria should have a national museum in its capital city, hence in 1974 the then Head of state, General Yakubu Gowon (Rtd) came up with the concept of the Museum of National Unity to be located in the capitals of the four Geo-political zones of the federation, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Ibadan and Enugu after the devastating effects of the 1967-70 civil war in attempt to establish the spirit of reconciliation, unity and harmony among the heterogeneous cultural group in Nigeria. He saw the museum as one of the instruments that could be used to unite the people of Nigeria. The antiquities established a museum office in Enugu in 1971 whose office was offered temporal accommodation by the National Archives and in 1975, the East Central State Government allocated a building to the museum along Ogui Road, Enugu, but was grossly inadequate.

In 1975, a suitable and strategically located piece of land covering an area of about 13.628 acres where the museum now stands was discovered and allocated to the defunct Federal Department of Antiquities by Late Brigadier Ochefu then a colonel and the military governor of the then East Central state. The museum is said to have been in a strategic land along Abakaliki road because the proposal suggested that in an age of increased leisure and cultural awareness, museums of this type will become popular both in recreational and educational terms, in serving their communities and forging links with every level of the society. This is reflected in large space acquired for refreshment areas, children's playgrounds, and other recreational facilities. This vision did not come to reality until 3rd May 2006 when former President Olusegun Obasanjo inaugurated the museum to commence operations after 34 years the initiative was shot. The National Museum of Unity Enugu is the only flourishing museum in the country devoted to the No Victor, No Vanquished slogan of post-war. The museum serves as a unifying force that binds the Nigerian nation and as such has three main galleries: the Unity Gallery, the Igbo World View Gallery, and the Coal City Gallery (<http://www.nigeria-law.org/national-commission-for-museum-and-monuments>).

Overview of National Museum of Unity Enugu

The Unity Gallery: This gallery exhibits about 97 objects, illustrating some common concepts in the belief systems and practices of the various ethnic groups of Nigeria.

The Igbo gallery: This showcases the Igbo worldview about the Architecture, religious, political, social, and economic systems of the Igbo people in whose land the museum is situated.

The Coal City Gallery: There is a special exhibition on Enugu the Coal City: Yesterday and Today. This exhibition shows the growth and development of Enugu arising from the discovery of coal until the present.

Nature of the design: The museum complex initially was not designed to serve the purpose of a museum. It is therefore a converted building; its internal structure is polygonal in shape with a courtyard in its middle and a long screen wall from the museum entrance gate.

Materials used: The materials used for this building construction are simple, readily available, and affordable material. The materials used generally include the following;

1. Wall: Sand Crete blocks, and artistic screen wall finishes on the exterior walls.
2. Wall finish: light colour emulsion and oil paints, tiles, and natural stone.
3. Roof: Concrete parapet with corrugated aluminum roofing sheets.
4. Ceiling: suspended ceiling with recessed artificial light.
5. Floor: floor tiles in the interior and terrazzo floors. Appraisal The museum building is a converted building, with a moderately furnished interior not measurable to a contemporary standard. The building is not flexible enough to expand.

Nigerian Belief System

The belief system of the various Nigerian communities forms the basis of their existence. Some of these belief systems are common and cut across the cultures of Nigeria.

1. Kingship and Royalty: Various Nigerian communities have myths associated with their royalties, particularly with the kingship systems. Some of these are associated with divinity. Beautiful ornamental and decorative images of their royalties and their paraphernalia were made and used for commemoration, rituals, and ceremonies.
2. Deities: Many communities approach the Supreme Being in various ways. Some communities make sculptural images of deities (lesser gods) eg anthropomorphic figures from Ikot Ndemeno Atan Onoyom, Cross River State.
3. Life and Death: Many communities believe that death especially among children, is caused by malevolent forces. To check these, sculptural images believed to have spiritual power are made to prevent infant mortality.
4. Divination: Divination is communing with supernatural forces in an attempt to uncover the unknown and foretell the future. For example, among the Igbos the diviner is called Dibia Afa, in Yoruba, he is called Babalawo among the Edos, he is called Obo Ewawa, in Igala he is called Alifa, etc.
5. Rituals: Nigerians believe in the existence of spirits, deities, and ancestors. Some of the spirits are regarded as special guardians who are angered by sins and have to be appeased through the performance of certain atonement rituals. Eg Ofo (community staff) Anam Igbo, udu di anya ugu na asaa (ritual pot) Nkanu Igbo
6. Warfare: The fear of being dominated and the need to protect their territory led many communities to train and keep standing armies. The warriors used charms which are believed to offer protection or repel enemies. The charms were either sewn on warriors' clothing, incised in the body, or carried in the head, e.g. Ebi Aka (charm) Mbaise Igbo, Oyaya (war dance head mask) Abiriba Igbo, Ewu Ogun (charm garment) Yoruba

7. **Cults:** A cult is a system of beliefs and practices, popular with a particular group of people as members. In some cases, membership in a cult requires initiation rites. In Nigeria, various communities have similar cults such as the cult of the right hand, fertility cults Ekpe, Gelede, and ancestral cults.
8. **Ancestral worship:** Traditionally Nigerians believe in the worship of important deceased ancestors. To many communities, death is not the end of a man, some communities have their ancestors represented by masks worn with costumes, e.g. Ekpo among the Cross River, Ojuegu among the Igala, and Mmonwu Avia among the Onitsha Igbo.

The Unity Museum Enugu has a very good conservation lab with materials well equipped for conservation. They also have historic and dated materials that are well showcased for learning, the unity museum Enugu is located in a very good area that will make it very easy for people to locate. The Unity Museum Enugu has also a very clean environment and other incentives that are added to the environment.

Besides the strengths mentioned above, they do not carry out constant international training for their conservators. They do not have enough conservation materials. The Unity Museum Enugu has a very good and spacious environment where the government can come in and build different stands for different cultural groups that will help in the improvement of the Museum of Unity. They can equally call on the conservation lab for improvement. The threats Unity Museum Enugu is facing are lack of funding by the government, pests and rodents that attack the museum objects, Government not giving attention.

Theoretical Literature

The need to preserve Nigerian cultural heritage is best explained through the functionalist perspective as enunciated by Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942). Functionalists emphasize that society consists of interrelated parts that work for the integration and stability of the whole system. Malinowski's functionalism assumes that all cultural traits are useful parts of the society in which they occur; in other words, all customary patterns of behavior, belief attitudes, and social structures perform a function within the society in which they occur. He emphasizes that social structures and social institutions exist in societies to meet or perform the psychological and biological needs of the people. It provides cohesion in the social order by promoting a sense of belonging and collective consciousness, a point fervently argues Durkheim (1897). Preservation of Nigerian cultural Heritage is capable of promoting collective consciousness in terms of unity, oneness, and nationalism, and fostering peaceful co-existence among Nigerians. For instance, cultural heritage can be categorized. into two, namely material/tangible and non-material/intangible. cultural heritages. This is because culture in itself is “both physical and non-physical in character” (Ogundele, 2000).

Tangible cultural heritages include man's physical ingenious products that can be touched and seen, such as architecture/buildings, defensive walls and ditches, crafts, tools, ivory, cowries, paintings, textiles, pestles, mortars, iron furnaces, knives, food, wooden objects, tombs and

grave goods, temples, dresses, pottery and potsherd pavements, monuments, books, and works of art, and among other artifacts. "Artifacts, as a broad concept, are objects and/or features made and/or used by humans in an attempt to cope with the challenges and problems of social and natural conditions. It is therefore important to state that man cannot survive without the construction and use of artifacts" (Ogundele, 2014). This further gives a deeper explanation of the function of cultural heritage in society. On the other hand, non-material or Ideological cultural heritages include all intangible and invisible aspects of a people's ways of life, such as ideas, folklore, kinship, norms, values, worldviews, philosophies of life, religious beliefs, and practices, music, dance, festivals, traditions, language, and knowledge, among others (Nnonyelu, 2009; Ogundele, 2000).

The above enumerations show the complexity of cultural heritages, but for simplistic purposes, they could also be classified as moveable (artifacts) and immovable cultural heritages (monuments) based on their nature of portability, which requires different specialized skills for their preservation. It is, however, pertinent to stress that most of these Nigerian cultural heritages are threatened. due to faulty efforts at preserving and conserving them. For instance, In south-eastern Nigeria, the current status of the following cultural Heritages should best be described as "endangered." Ikoru (slit drum) is a traditional medium of communication. Oriko is a traditional practice of re-integration among the Igbo through which social Deviants are welcomed back into society after punishment, such as ostracism. Iru-mgbede, is an Igbo traditional indigenous educational institution through which young maidens are initiated into womanhood (Mathias & David, 2014). There are a host of other cultural heritages among communities in Nigeria that are under threat of extinction. There is therefore a need for a conscious preservation of some useful Nigerian cultural heritage, while negative ones should be discarded.

Empirical Literature

Nigeria is distinguished in sub-Saharan Africa because of her "rich manifestations of vast cultural heritages" of the past (Sowunmi, 2008). Most of the artifacts and collections from remarkable cultural areas in Nigeria are displayed in museums and galleries all over the world. This is because they were consciously preserved. Preservation has been defined by Eluyemi (2002) as "the promotion of cultural property, whether of concrete or non-concrete nature, past or present, written or unwritten or oral. He further posits that preservation involves the identification, documentation (appropriate registration), and proper storage of cultural objects, whether in private hands or museums. The preservation of Nigerian cultural heritage is arguably threatened by human activities, natural forces, biological agents, and chemical agents, among others (Ogundele, 2014; Okpoko, 2011). However, the little successes made over the years in the preservation of Nigerian cultural heritages have been attributed to conscious systematic and scientific efforts and research conducted by professionals in the disciplines of archaeology, cultural anthropology, linguistics, ethnography, palynology, paleontology, geology, geography, museum studies, among other cultural resource managers (Ogundele, 2014; Onwuka, 2002; Andah, Okpoko, & Folorunso, 1993; Okpoko, 2011).

Preservation is very vital because of its capacity to promote past ways of life that are useful to contemporary societies. Arguably, the past is essentially the key to the present and a platform for the future. An understanding of the preservation of Nigerian cultural heritage can best be described in three dimensions, namely pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial. Nigerian cultural heritages during the pre-colonial era were preserved in royal palaces of tribal kingdoms and empires by kings, heads of families and kindred, and deity priests in charge of shrines and sacred grooves, among others (Fasuyi, 1973). The cultural activities, arts, and festivals were managed by the traditional rulers and chiefs in the council through delegation of powers to talented specialists. For instance, the carvers made masks for masquerades; the traditional costume designers made royal regalia, beads, and dresses; other craftsmen made baskets, local talking drums, and other musical instruments; the music and dance specialists made music and praise songs to celebrate valiant warriors; and the dancers trained for annual festivals. These skills were preserved through oral tradition and the training of these craftsmen and women, and then the skills were handed over from generation to generation. This generational pattern of preserving Nigerian cultural heritage was completely or partially truncated in most parts of Nigeria due to the unsolicited incursion of colonialism.

Colonialism ushered in an era of unrestricted negative human activities such as looting, vandalism, thefts, unscientific excavation of grave goods, iconoclasm, wars, and illicit trafficking of cultural objects, among others. The period from 1900 to 1960 marked the era of colonization in Nigeria (Fasuyi, 1973). The most remarkable of these destructive human activities on Nigerian cultural heritage occurred during the punitive expedition in 1897 when the British colonial administration attacked the Benin culture area and looted the rich bronze works and art treasures of the Benin royal palace and Onyima: Nigerian cultural heritage. 279 exiled the King to Calabar, where he later died in 1914 (Eluyemi, 2002; Aremu, 2008; Fasuyi, 1973). Colonialism thus waned the influence of traditional rulers and their role in preserving Nigerian cultural heritage. For instance, during the colonial period, western educational systems were introduced to replace traditional educational systems such as *Irumgbede* among the Igbo. In schools, the English language and foreign literature were taught and read at the detriment of Nigerian indigenous languages (Fasuyi, 1973).

The current status of Nigerian indigenous linguistic heritages is best described as endangered, and they are arguably almost on the verge of extinction. Also, missionaries introduced Christianity, which relegated and designated Nigerian traditional religions as idol worship and branded practitioners as heathens and unbelievers (Eluyemi, 2002). In the entertainment industry, traditional poets, praise singers, clowns, comedians, dramatists, in the king's courts, traditional dancers, songs, music, and local costumes, musical instruments such as drums, have been replaced with Western music, foreign dance styles, foreign dress patterns, and western musical instruments such as bands, microphones, guitars, pianos, etc. All these mindless replacements continued without Nigerians knowing their implications until a few expatriates sensed the need to preserve Nigerian cultural heritage during the colonial era (Eluyemi, 2002; Fasuyi, 1973). These foreigners advised the then-colonial government on the need to preserve Nigerian cultural heritage; they suggested that museums should be created

and that Nigerian arts, cultures, and history should be taught in schools. For instance, E. H. Duckworth wrote in 1937, Help to build up an appreciation of old things; do not be afraid of them. Respect the past, record its history, treasure its signposts, and help to build museums in Nigeria. The day may come when people will voyage from all parts of the world to see the museums and exhibition rooms in Lagos, Abeokuta, Ife, and Benin City (Fasuyi, 1973).

Another expatriate known as K. C. Murray, on the other hand, also made this suggestion: "Make a list of all works of art and gather them whenever possible into the safety of museums" (Eluyemi, 2002, p. 6). "E.H. Duckworth, who was the editor of the colonial government-owned Nigerian magazine, was first published in Nigeria in 1923 as the Nigerian Teacher; its title changed to Nigeria in 1927 and later became the federal government cultural information journal" (Fasuyi, 1973). Other British colonial civil servants, such as K. C. Murray, who was an art teacher; B.E. Bernard Fagg; and S. Milburn, among others, also made contributions to the preservation of Nigerian cultural heritages (Eluyemi, 2002). "One result of the wanton exportation of Nigerian antiquities was the emergence of museum creation in Nigeria, the creation of the Nigerian Antiquity Service in 1943, and the Office of the Surveyor of Antiquities in the same year" (Eluyemi, 2002, p. 6). Systematic preservation of cultural heritage therefore gradually began with suggestions by colonialists and finally metamorphosed into a well-formulated cultural policy in 1988, which necessitated the creation of museums.

A museum is an institution that collects, studies, exhibits and conserves artifacts or objects for cultural and educational purposes (Okpoko, 2011). According to Eluyemi (2002, p. 7), "the first museum in Nigeria was created in 1945 at Essie, known as Ileere (house of images)," followed by other museums such as Jos Museum in 1954 (Fasuyi, 1973, Jos Museum was opened in 1952), Ife Museum built in 1954, Lagos Museum in 1957, Owo Museum in 1958, Benin Museum in 1959, and Kano Museum in 1960, among all others. In summary, the preservation of Nigerian cultural heritage during the colonial era is remarkable in that some commendable landmark achievements were made, such as the creation of the "Nigerian magazine, the establishment of museums of antiquities, the creation of the post of federal art adviser, and the creation of the department of art" (Fasuyi, 1973, p. 23).

In the post-colonial period, the Nigerian Antiquity Service metamorphosed into what is now known as the National Commission for Onyima: Nigerian Cultural Heritage. 281 Museums and Monuments (NCMM). Museums are currently managed under the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), with its administrative headquarters in Abuja, but the national museum in Onikan, Lagos, used to be the headquarters of NCMM. The Onikan Museum houses collections and exhibitions of archaeological discoveries and documents from our recent past. There are three main galleries in the Onikan Museum: one housing Benin arts, another on the treasures of ancient Nigeria, and a third on contemporary Nigeria. There is a museum kitchen and theater for staging plays, recitals, and cultural festivals (Aremu, 2008). According to Okpoko (2011:1), "Museums are institutions for research, teaching, exhibition, and conservation in one or more fields of human activity." It is an

institution that collects, studies, exhibits and conserves objects for cultural and educational purposes. Nigerian museums are part of Nigerian historic and cultural heritage and are found in almost all states of contemporary Nigeria. Apart from national and state museums, Nigeria has lots of other types of museums, such as privately owned museums like the Obuofonri, Igbo-ukwu, and Odinaani museums all in Anambra State, university museums, the war museum at Umuahia, and the medical or anatomy museum in Jos, among others.

Challenges: Impact of Ignorance, Conflicts, Change, Globalization, and Development in the Preservation of Nigerian Cultural Heritages

Nigerian cultural heritages are faced with a lot of challenges, such as the influence of modernization, Christianity, commerce, civilization, change, development, looting, and antiquarians, among others. Apart from smuggling, theft, vandalism, and looting of museums, another most threatening challenge facing Nigerian cultural heritage is religious dogmatism and iconoclasm. Eluyemi (2002) refers to them as die-hards suffering from colonial hangovers; they are the religious zealots who burn cultural objects in the name of deliverance. Apart from human activities, in West Africa, the soils are generally acidic, and the vagaries of weather as well as the destructive nature of termites militate against the preservation of cultural heritages (Ogundele, 2000). Despite the above, the National Antiquities Commission (NAC), now the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), has taken bold steps in preserving these threatened heritages. The commission is responsible for the establishment and maintenance of museums, the discovery of heritage sites, and the preservation and study of traditional arts and culture. It also has powers to schedule monuments and antiquities and to control archaeological excavations and the export of antiquities (Fasuyi, 1973). However, the efforts by NCMM have often been stalled by some challenges, ranging from low subventions and funding from the government to carry out their statutory responsibilities.

Other challenges are some government developmental projects that destroy cultural heritage, conflict, and social change. Social change implies an alteration, modification, or shift in behavior, attitude, social institutions, and social structure. Most Nigerian social institutions and structures, such as families, marriages, and kinship systems, are threatened by the wave of modernization, technological developments, and globalization. For instance, the value system has gradually been eroded as issues like respect for elders, chastity, integrity, and morality are considered archaic, while wrong values like disrespect, disobedience, nudity, fraud, kidnapping, and corruption are entrenched in society (Ogirisi, 2016). This has been traced to the failure of the family system. Parents, in their quest for wealth and materialism, abandoned their primary responsibility of inculcating righteous moral values in their children through proper parental training. This affects society negatively in the long run by leading to chaos and conflict.

Prospects: Economic, Tourism & Development Potentials of Nigerian Cultural Heritages

Nigeria stands to benefit a lot if her cultural heritage is adequately preserved. It has great potential for boosting the country's economy through tourism. When cultural heritage is

properly preserved and advertised through print and electronic media, it stands a chance of attracting tourists from the nooks and crannies of the world. This would be a plus to national revenue and GDP, which will in turn provide more funds for the development of the country. Nigerian cultural heritage is also capable of promoting mutual understanding and respect among Nigerians. For instance, when people attend state or national cultural festivals, they will learn to appreciate the various cultures exhibited by people in Nigeria and this will engender unity in diversity. Museums could contribute to Nigerians' appreciation of aesthetics, relaxation, and leisure, which could go a long way in dousing tensions and high blood pressure. Some non-material cultural heritages, such as values of respect, integrity, and dignity of labor, will re-orient Nigerians from materialism to appreciating appropriate morally right pursuits and endeavors. All these will culminate in a better Nigeria.

The Nigerian People and Her Response to Cultural Heritage and National Unity

The Nigerian nation has various socio-cultural structures and ideological inclinations. The population figure is over 120 million people, as projected by the 1993 census. The country is comprised of 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory, and it is subdivided into six geopolitical zones. The nation has about 400 ethnic groups, speaking over 300 local dialects with variations in social practices and concepts. Along religious lines, the north is dominated by Muslims, and the south is dominated by Christians; in both sub-regions, traditional religious practices also go on, side by side. However, Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo are the dominant cultural collections in the country. Nigerians have their religious ways of doing things, according to Arthur Leonard (Mbiti, 1992). This implies that customary religious conviction is at the center of the Nigerian personality.

Regrettably, the yearning for tradition started fading when the first European missionaries set foot on African soil. By observation, it is obvious that the Nigerian media and scene add to this loss of social personality by passing on both adverse and constructive esteems to emphasize Western instead of conventional Nigerian esteems, and this outsider culture propagates social division, accordingly, undermining the quest for illuminated social improvement much wanted in the nation. The media has become the basis of modern culture, supplanting traditional sources of icons like painting, drama, music, museums, and even religion (Twitchell, 1997). However, Chavez (2001) opines that the preservation of one's own culture does not require contempt or disrespect for other cultures.

Conclusion

The preservation of a nation's cultural identity is a significant factor for the future success of the nation. Unity Museum Enugu serves as a vital institution for the preservation and celebration of Nigerian culture and heritage. Through its extensive collection of artifacts, exhibits, and educational programs, the museum provides a unique opportunity for visitors to learn about the rich history and traditions of the Nigerian people. Additionally, the museum's focus on unity and diversity highlights the importance of embracing the country's cultural differences and shared history. As a result, the Unity Museum Enugu stands as a valuable resource for both Nigerian citizens and international visitors alike, promoting a greater understanding and appreciation of the country's cultural heritage.

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