



**BEING FREE**

**DEBORAH SEGUN**



Curated by

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CONTEMPORARY ART



October 3 - 31, 2020





Supported by







# THE LIBERATED FORM

*"Freeing yourself was one thing,  
claiming ownership of that freed self was another."*

Toni Morrison, Nobel Laureate

Being Free is an exhibition of paintings by Deborah Segun which draw us into an intimate reverie of physical and mental freedom and self acceptance. Having graduated with a degree in Fashion Design and Marketing from the Polimoda Institute of Florence, Italy, in 2017, Segun embraced a sculptural approach to fashion by creating wearable works which used the body as a canvas adorned with fabric and conceptual shapes, textures and colors, sharing powerful narratives influenced by pop culture while firmly rooted in her African heritage.

This was the beginning of her departure from mainstream fashion, taking bold steps to explore portraiture from a place of body sensitivity, beckoning her audience to step into a world of stylized and simplified imagery reflecting a more truthful, vulnerable essence, leading us into an uber-consciousness of how our body shape and size affects the mind in a myriad of ways.

Segun's titles tell half the story of her bold and colorful cubist influenced works, exploring fragility versus freedom, vulnerability versus self acceptance and self love alongside bold defiance. Her female gaze, which she uses to create a safe artistic space for enfolding, is both inward and outward. She explores the meaning of being and acceptance through works which speak to the internal conversations many of us experience and which sound a familiar bell on how we perceive a "body-perfect world".

In her color pencil drawing, "I wish I could wear that", she draws a face with a few deft strokes, creating a side portrait that most viewers can identify with – capturing a strange emotional mixture

of anxiety, elation, and insecurity camouflaged by bravado, often seen at typical Lagos society events, where the emphasis on show off "shakara" and "see-and-be-seen" posturing silently affects most people's mental health, whether male or female.

Segun's large, acrylic on canvas, "One Week Diet", depicts a voluptuous woman in full sprint, painted against a cloud covered sky, head held high, although her gaze is turned directly at the viewer. This full bodied athlete appears to run in defiance against society's stricture surrounding female beauty and fitness, while the title reveals that dieting is still a dark shadow cast across her pink sky .

Segun's exploration of body positivity provides a thought provoking backdrop to a global trend in which editing filters, make up, and unnaturally exaggerated facial features and contours, eyelashes and hour glass body shapes celebrated across social media, have created asphyxiating pressure on especially young women's mental health and self acceptance.

Through her art, Segun hopes to create "a safe space for self acceptance; for women to embrace themselves and their vulnerabilities", and blossom. Her figures are endowed with graceful expressive hands, which she draws in almost dance like poses, an outward symbol of an inward liberation.

We trust that after months of limited social contact due to the corona virus pandemic, Segun's wonderful paintings provide a much needed release, an inward acceptance and outward celebration of the natural self, through simplified abstractions which communicate a world of meaning through color, shape and nuanced expression.

Sandra Mbanefo Obiako  
Founder & Artistic Director  
SMO Contemporary Art



Deborah Segun is a multidisciplinary artist based in Lagos, Nigeria. She obtained a degree in Fashion Design at the Polimoda Institute of Fashion Design and Marketing in Florence, Italy in 2017. During her studies in fashion, she translated her own art production into clothing, creating conceptual and sculptural wearable pieces.

Deborah's works can be described as a mix between cubism and abstraction; she takes a playful, purist approach to her work by focusing on form rather than detail, through the use of different artistic mediums. Her works are mainly figurative with a focus on portraiture. The inspiration behind her works stem from her personal and shared experiences as a woman, as well as observations of any given space she occupies at a time. She tries to capture these experiences through her unique and experimental use of colours and shapes, which she believes creates a sense of simplicity and calmness out of a rather complex scenario. She exaggerates the figures or displaces them, as she believes it is her own way of confronting how she sees things. She also likes to isolate shapes from the subjects/objects and put them together to create a new composition.



# THE FEMALE GAZE

*A reclamation of fat bodies, decentering the male gaze and championing the female gaze as a means of quiet revolution against societies norms.*

This body of work aims to highlight the liberation, beauty and reframe of how we view the plus size body. Growing up in society as a woman, the female body is constantly judged based off society's perception of desirability, which is often centred around the male gaze.

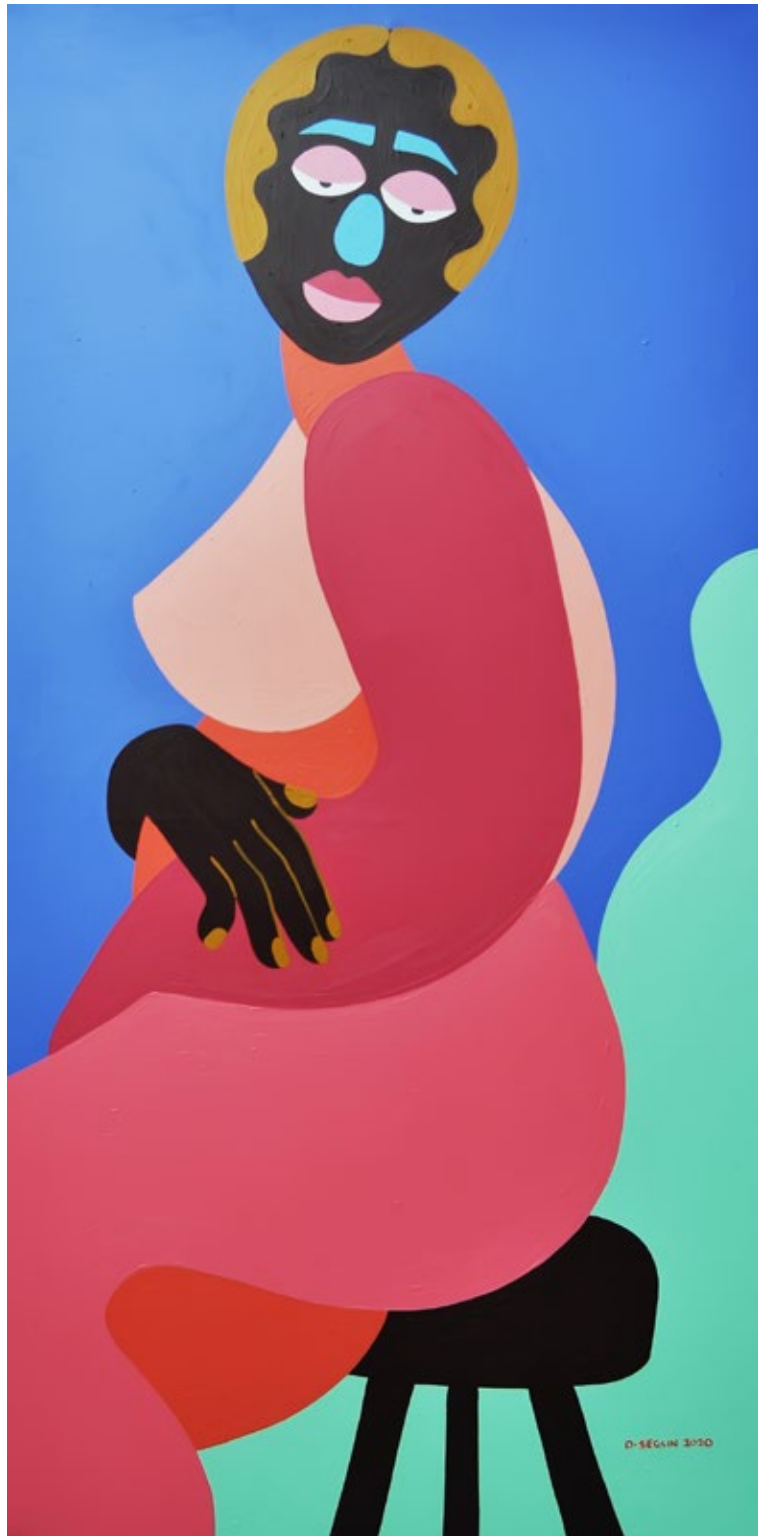
The plus size body is often stigmatised, as it is attached to negative perceptions of poor health, laziness and lack of self-worth. These stereotypes are very harmful to plus size women. This hyper critique surrounding fat bodies, has led to an unhealthy obsession with size, deteriorating mental health, eating disorders and participating in harmful diet culture which takes a toll on one's health and well-being.

Women are now choosing to reject those negative internalised ideologies. Through social movements, plus size women have a safe space to share their experiences and learn to find beauty in the body they're in.

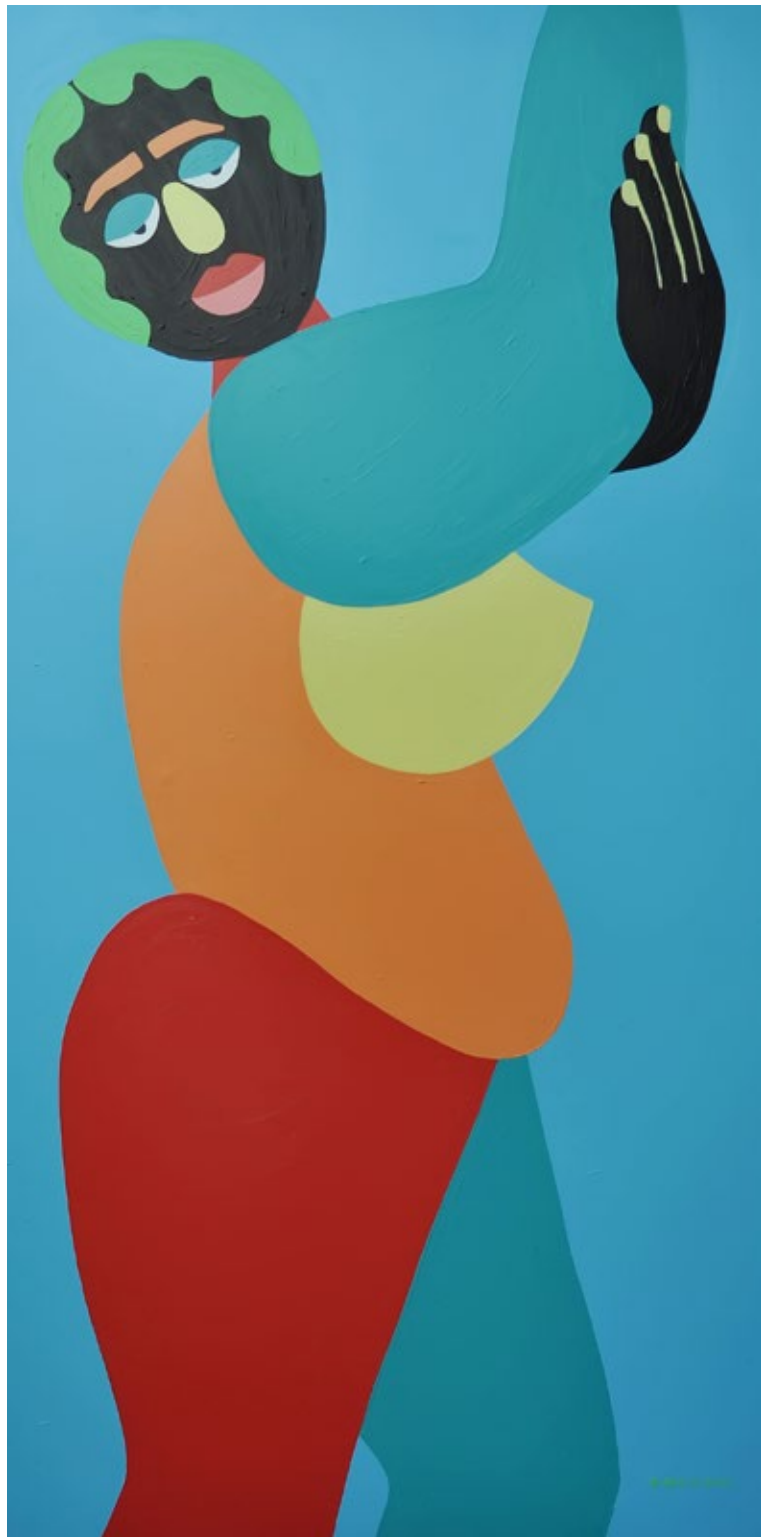
These works provide a safe space in which plus size women are free to embrace themselves and their vulnerabilities. They shine a positive light on the unveiling of fat bodies by appropriating postures that are often used to highlight the beauty in slimmer bodies, whilst providing a semblance of inclusivity and making room for diversity in a society that often denies it.

Deborah Segun  
Artist





Conscious pose  
Acrylic on canvas  
2020  
170 x 85 cm.



Muffin Top  
Acrylic on canvas  
2020  
170 x 85 cm





Exhaustion  
Acrylic on canvas  
2020  
170 x 85 cm.

Through her employment of energetic color palettes and a fearless attitude towards style and expression the oeuvre of Segun represents an expansive force which gives life to the things around us. We feel the physique of her women before we can name any kind of anatomy, or cultural gaze.

Charlotte Langhorst PhD.  
Art Historian









One Week Diet  
Acrylic on canvas  
2020  
200 x 140 cm



As I Am  
Acrylic on canvas  
2020  
200 x 140 cm.



Where Do I Start?  
Acrylic on canvas  
2020  
120 x170 cm





I Just Want Peace  
Acrylic on canvas  
2020  
150 x 120 cm

"My body of work is mostly inspired by women and our shared experiences with a focus on both the physical and emotional aspects and how we navigate through these experiences.

I like to capture these unique experiences through the use of colors and abstract shapes in order to create a story that is relatable to most women."

Deborah Segun  
Artist





Feeling Fragile  
Acrylic on canvas  
2020  
50 x 50 cm



Heavy Duty  
Acrylic on canvas  
2020  
50 x 50 cm



# FULLY HUMAN

In *Notes of a Painter* (1908) the French artist Henri Matisse sheds light on his idea of how to paint a woman. He makes an astonishing forward-looking remark that reconfigures and elevates the perception of the female sex: „suppose I want to paint a woman's body: first of all I imbue it with grace and charm, but I know that I must give something more. I will condense the meaning of this body by seeking its essential lines. The charm will be less apparent at first glance, but it must eventually emerge from the new image which will have a broader meaning, one more fully human.“

The Nigerian painter Deborah Segun is doing exactly the same in her series of bold and curvy women by distilling a form to its essentials. Set against rich backgrounds the female body becomes an experimentation field of unmodulated colors and lines, tonal harmonies and contours. Breasts, thighs and the exuberance of the female silhouette have been transformed into playful and gracious arrangements of geometrical forms that abduct the culturally and often sexualized gaze of the beholder to a more analytic and abstract space. Segun frees our mind from established modes of perception and, most importantly, succeeds in what Matisse claims for his depiction of the female body: an image with a broader meaning that is fully human and dismantled from rigid connotations of ideal features and a possessive male gaze. Her arrangement of cheerful color schemes but at the same time deeply layered compositions formalizes a new force of female expression and confidence. The portrayed women are at ease with themselves and own their narrative as African women.

Through her employment of energetic color palettes and a fearless attitude towards style and expression the oeuvre of Segun represents an expansive force which gives life to the things around us. We feel the physique of her women before we can name any kind of anatomy, or cultural gaze.

Our stepping stone into the works is not contemplation but rather a tangible feeling which animates us to create while we see. Therefore the works expand from a limited canvas space into an energetic field of co-creation. We are invited to act as human spectators who perceive not only with cognition but also through purity and empathy.

Charlotte Langhorst PhD.  
Art Historian



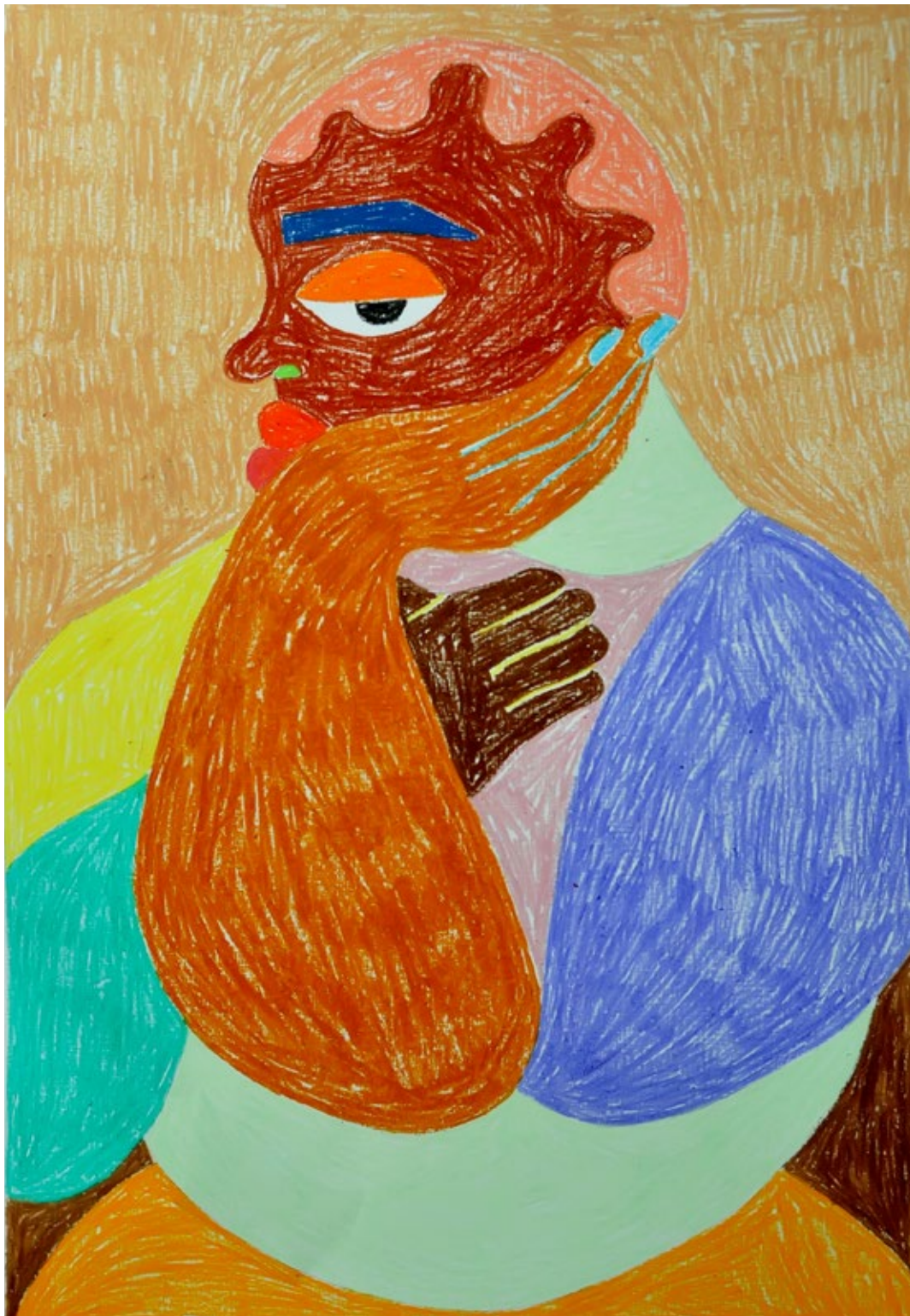
Chubby Cheeks  
Pencil and oil pastel on paper  
2020  
91 x 62 cm





Chin Up  
Pencil and oil pastel on paper  
2020  
91 x 62 cm.





I Wish I Could Wear That  
Pencil and oil pastel on paper  
2020  
91 x 62 cm.



The plus size body is often stigmatised, as it is attached to negative perceptions of poor health, laziness and lack of self-worth. These stereotypes are very harmful to plus size women. This hyper critique surrounding fat bodies, has led to an unhealthy obsession with size, deteriorating mental health, eating disorders and participating in harmful diet culture which takes a toll on one's health and well-being.

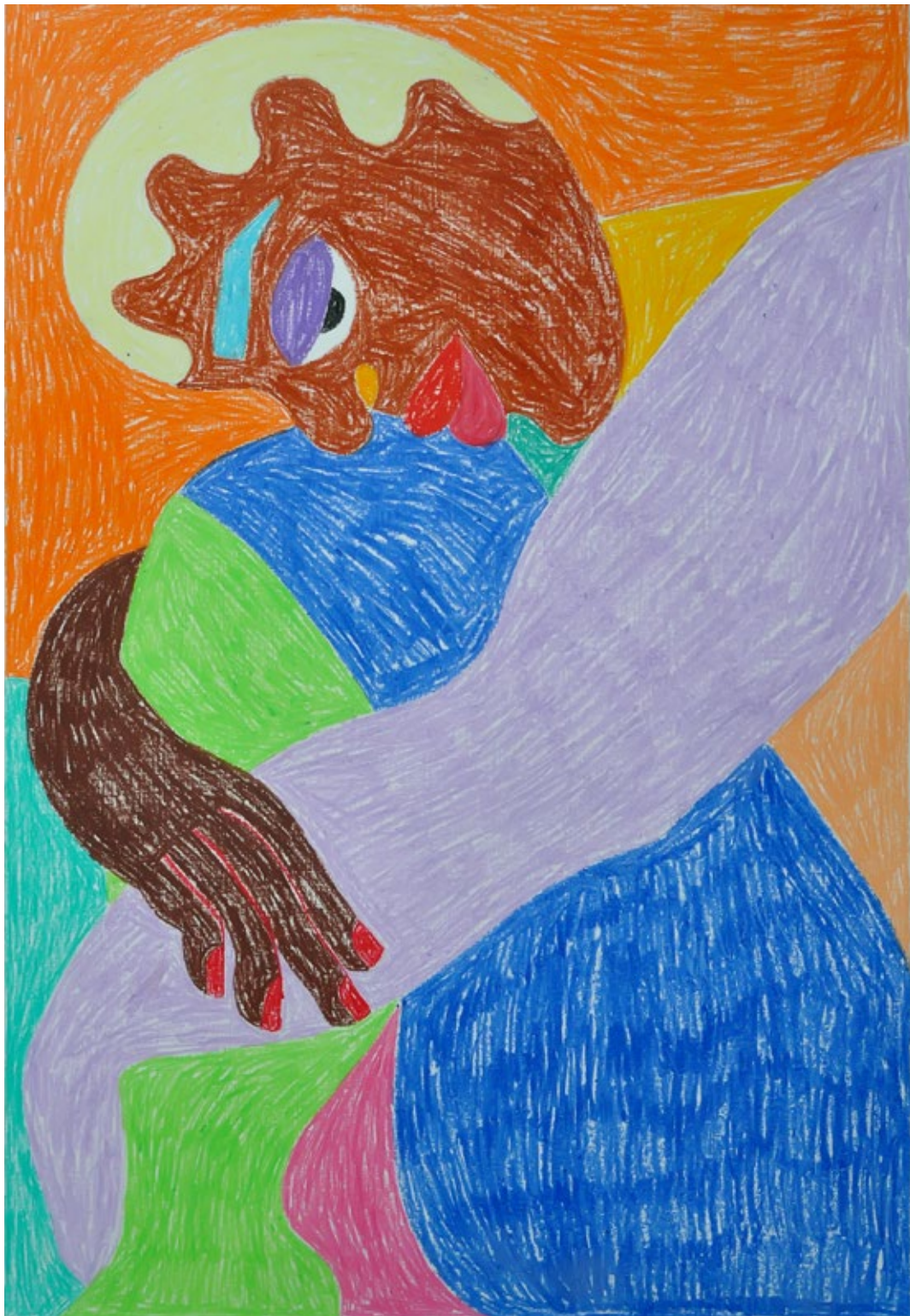
Women are now choosing to reject those negative internalised ideologies. Through social movements, plus size women have a safe space to share their experiences and learn to find beauty in the body they're in.

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Deborah Segun  
Artist







I Feel Vulnerable  
Pencil and oil pastel on paper  
2020  
91 x 62 cm.



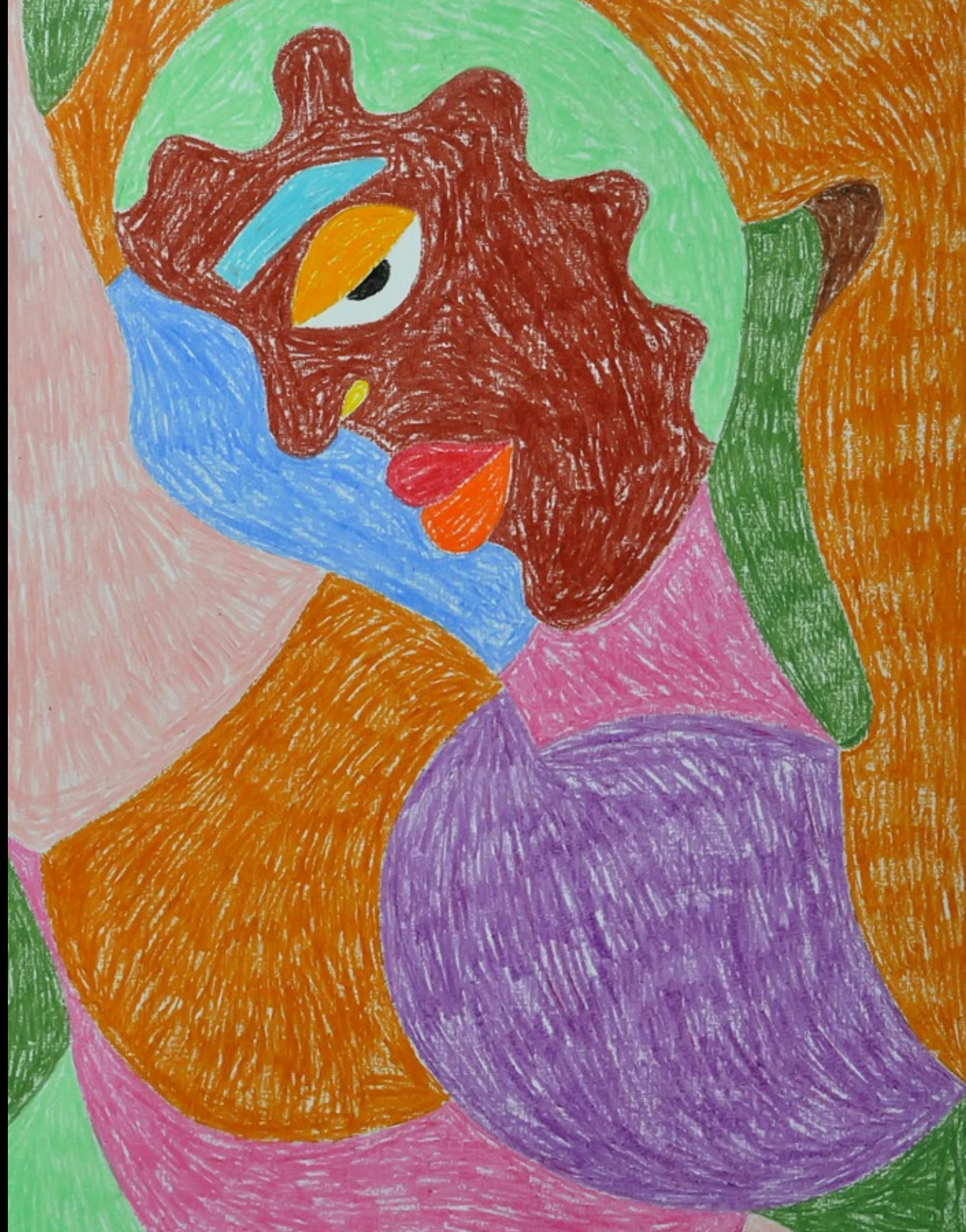


Body Dysmorphia  
Pencil and oil pastel on paper  
2020  
91 x 62 cm.

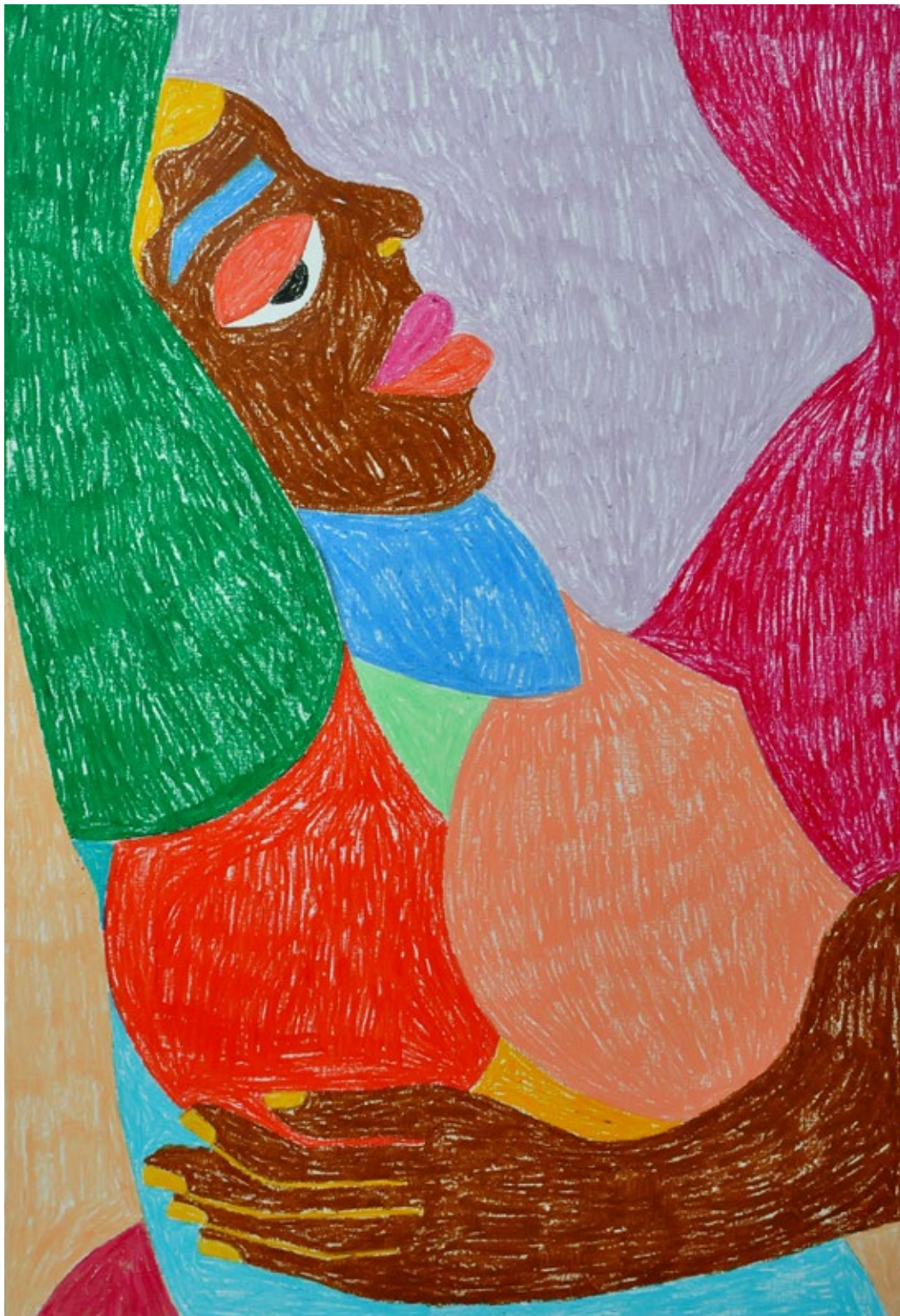


These works serve as a safe space free of judgements and notions of what a plus size woman's body should look like. Giving her back the power as she has full agency over her body and she gets to decide what aspects of her body she considers beauty. It's shifting it from an objective male gaze to a more appreciative and inclusive female gaze.

Deborah Segun  
Artist







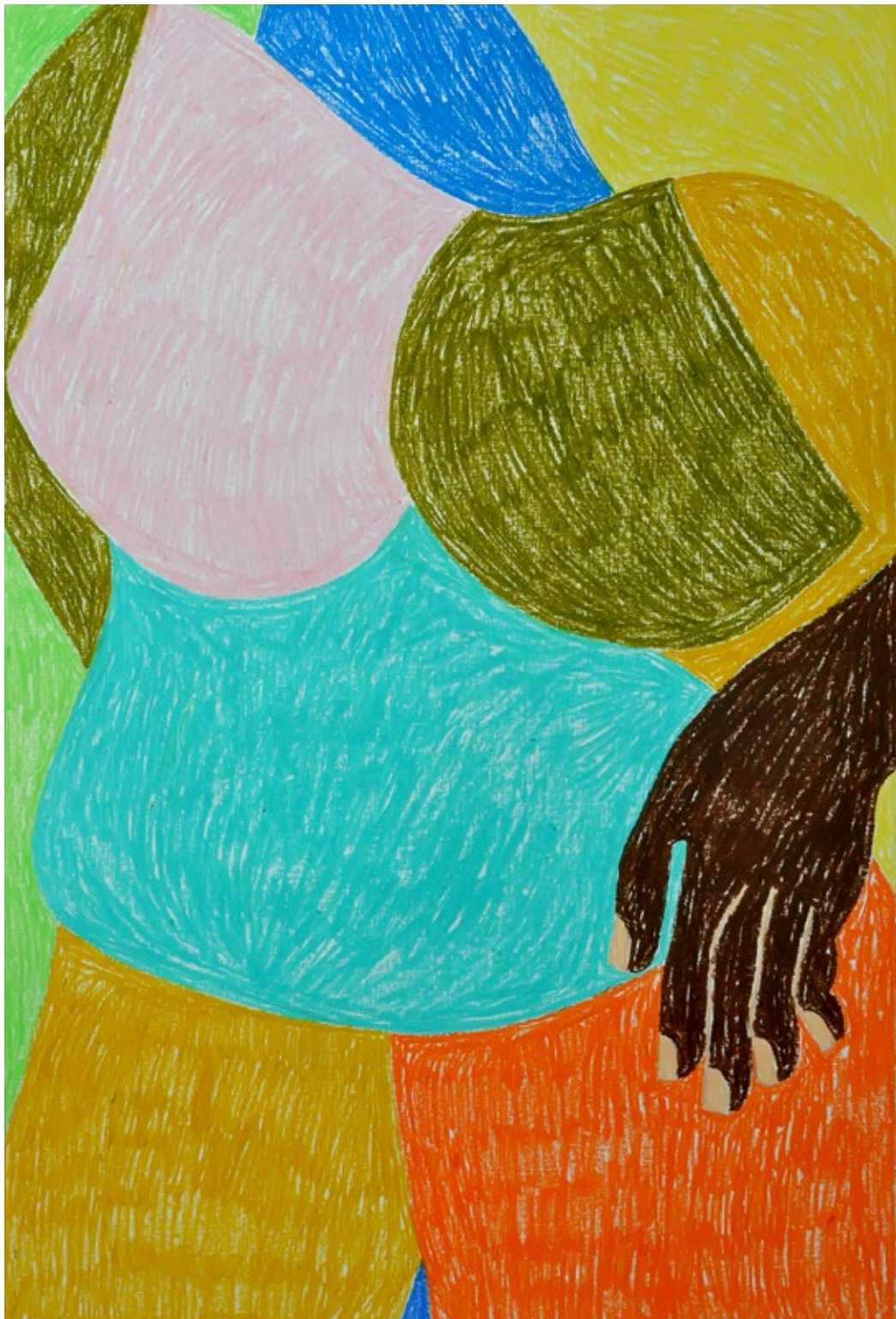
Its All About Packaging  
Pencil and oil pastel on paper  
2020  
91 x 62 cm.





Constant Reminder  
Pencil and oil pastel on paper  
2020  
91 x 62 cm.





Body Posi  
Pencil and oil pastel on paper  
2020  
91 x 62 cm.



Breasts, thighs and the exuberance of the female silhouette have been transformed into playful and gracious arrangements of geometrical forms that abduct the culturally and often sexualized gaze of the beholder to a more analytic and abstract space.

Charlotte Langhorst PhD.  
Art Historian







Love Handles  
Pencil and oil pastel on paper  
2020  
91 x 62 cm.





Acceptable Type Of Fat  
Pencil and oil pastel on paper  
2020  
91 x 62 cm.

# DEBORAH SEGUN

B. 1994 in Lagos, Nigeria.  
Lives and works in Lagos.

## EXHIBITIONS

### 2019

Play as Collective, AWCA, ArtxLagos Art Fair, Lagos, Nigeria.  
Still Life (solo exhibition) Art Oja, Lagos, Nigeria.  
"I Feel Like I Am" (Solo Exhibition) Relate Africa, Lagos, Nigeria.  
Eparapo, The Working Girls Forum (group exhibition) A Whitespace Creative Agency, Lagos, Nigeria.  
Affordable Art Auction, Arthouse Contemporary, Lagos, Nigeria.  
I Design Art Fair, Lagos, Nigeria.

### 2018

Art Oja Portfolio II (group exhibition) Miliki, Lagos, Nigeria.  
I Design art sale, Lagos, Nigeria.  
Family and Friends group exhibition, Wafflesncream, Lagos, Nigeria.

### 2017

Polimoda Performance Art and Fashion Show, Florence, Italy.







Having opened its doors in May 2008 Temple Muse is West Africa's leading luxury concept store focusing on designer home & giftware, fashion & accessories as well as art & design. Our strength not only lies in offering the very best of world-renowned brands, but also in nurturing homegrown talent from across the continent.

The iconic flagship store equipped with its very own champagne bar is located in the heart of Lagos and possesses a "gallery-like" open feel, where clients can relax & indulge in all things wonderful.

Over the years Temple Muse has developed a reputation as being one of the leading art spaces in Nigeria having hosted a number of critically acclaimed exhibitions, and through continuously offering its clients cutting edge contemporary art.

[www.temple-muse.com](http://www.temple-muse.com)



SMO Contemporary Art (SMO) is an international art platform, showcasing a unique portfolio of modern and contemporary art from Africa and the Diaspora to a global audience. Based in Lagos, Nigeria, SMO curates exhibitions, as well as public and private art events of leading and emerging talents for a diverse audience. SMO is dedicated to artists of all generations who have been instrumental in shaping West Africa's contemporary art canon and who became crucial in establishing a unique narrative of the continent. The SMO programme sheds light on forgotten talents who have paved the way for new identities in contemporary art while encouraging a vibrant and continuous discourse around their oeuvres.

Regular exhibitions at diverse and unconventional gallery spaces, often affiliated to ecosystems of design, fashion and hospitality, underpin SMO's vision to engage with large and heterogenous audiences. The platform curates private and public creative events at international venues, and showcases a dynamic portfolio of contemporary art at local and international fairs. Specialized in art advisory services SMO Contemporary curates and manages important private and corporate art collections with a great commitment to documentation, preservation and communication.

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