

# OBI OKIGBO

## CONVERGENCE











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November 24, 2019 - February 16, 2020





Curated by Sandra Mbanefo Obiago









# Back Into the Belly of Memory Itself

Obi Okigbo is a nimble world spirit. Her creativity is a visual *Convergence* of global mythology, literature, philosophy, and culture presented on a rich tapestry of art. She invites us to “step back into the belly of memory” drawing from generational stories and personal experience spanning across time and space.

We experience the past, present and future coalesce through her delicate ink and pigment paintings on linen, canvas and silk, revealing an artist whose creative expression comes alive in her own unique space. In *Convergence* she explores the meeting point of physical and spiritual birth, life and death, and eventual transcendence.

Okigbo's work is inspired by a keen study of history which emboldened her fascination to cross reference symbols and religious iconography from the European Renaissance through to African tradition, with Asian and Middle Eastern mysticism and mythology all woven together into “one unified material form”, which is rooted in a family legacy of intellectual and artistic brilliance.

In Okigbo's art we feel the wind of memory rustle through the dense tropical vegetation around her hometown of Ojoto. We see a deep reflection of Christopher Okigbo's poetry which beckoned her to return to her familial roots, searching for an encounter with the father she never knew, and eventually to experience release, to embrace her own gift and follow its path:

*“AN OLD STAR departs, leaves us here on the shore gazing heavenward for a new star approaching; The new star appears, foreshadows its going before a going and coming that goes forever.”<sup>1</sup>*

Through the filter of her father's soulful poetry, resplendent with symbolism, lyricism, and the wide arch of metaphor, we step into the refined world of Obi Okigbo, a rich natural dreamscape of lush tropical flora and fauna, alive with forms and beings from universal epochs.

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1 Excerpt from the poem, *Eley For Alto* by Christopher Okigbo

In *Twilight Moment in the Wake of a Dream*, the elephant of memory charges across the background of a meeting between three distinct human forms, possibly representing European, Asian and African culture, naïve in their simplistic outlines, standing like sentinels in a mystical landscape that is their point of convergence.

In *Watermaid* we see a female spirit hovering in mid-flight, wings extended in protection. In *The Clearing*, a Benin masked face with typical lines of ancient scarification, appears in the thicket watching and waiting, while in *Mmanwu*, the ancestral spirits dance through a thick green and red forest, inspired by the writing of Fagunwa's classic *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*.

In *The Yellow Melodies*, two lovers lie in delicate embrace under the shelter of tropical palm fronds intertwined in a reverie of tender love, while nature creates a cocoon around their passion. These scenes mirror some of the rich imagery in Christopher Okigbo's poems:

"Into the hot garden, where all roads  
meet..."

"tangled wood-tale"

... for we are listening in cornfields

Among wind players

Listening to the wind leaning over its  
loveliest fragment"<sup>2</sup>

The "forest works", which form part of Okigbo's *Out of the Ashes* series, signify the connection between the physical and spiritual through the natural world. Just as the annual bush fires across the tropical savannah are a precursor to new growth, so does *Out of the Ashes* signify Okigbo's new artistic growth.

In *Convergence* we see a departure from the intense conversation with her father, which was the subject of her last solo exhibition in 2007, and discover new growth on Okigbo's creative journey, which has taken her into new areas of fascination.



In a quest to study the ancient art of ink and pigment drawings she has honed her skills by learning from the work of 14<sup>th</sup> century Korean painter “Ohwon”, interpreting and mastering the craft of this ancient ink technique.

The influence of Asian mysticism is clearly evident in *Jacob's Ladder*, where clouds nestle around high mountain peaks and forest vegetation creates a visual ascent of humanity's aspiration for enlightened understanding and sight. The journey of discovery is represented by the height of the painting, reflecting the upward journey of faith with Jacob, looking like an ancient Japanese scribe, turning his gaze and chest upwards, exposed and ready to receive divine insight.

Okigbo's exploration of the divine female and the universal concept of spiritual reverence and beauty comes to light in *The “Nous” between the Two*, a portrait of Mary of Magdalene sitting at the feet of Jesus, turning her back on societal criticism, with words such as “ignorance” scribbled like graffiti across the right side of the canvas.

These delicate works are in stark contrast to *Ibeji*, where we see the influence of Okigbo's years of architectural practice. Two mystical Ibeji crowned twin figures, are embedded in a complex city-scape of buildings and skyscrapers, with thick black lines criss-crossing the horizon. On closer scrutiny we see one figure, weeping over the loss of his twin, who has stepped into the next world, but is still present, based on traditional Yoruba philosophy. Transporting these ancient cultural icons into contemporary space is vintage Okigbo.

Her world view is nimble and rests just as easily alongside European classics. Her *Mystic Lamb* series, inspired by the seven meter wide “Ghent Altar piece” by 15th century Belgian artists Jan & Hubert Van Eyck, is her ode to the memory of heroes of African descent. For the past few years, she has worked on over 350 portraits of top past and present influencers, grouping them into literary and artistic giants (including the famous Nigerian Mbari Club of the 1960's), musicians and singers, whom she calls the prophets and angels, and freedom fighters and martyrs, who

fought for black independence and civil rights.

For this exhibition, she presents pencil, ink, and watercolor portraits of Black heroes including Nelson Mandela, Mohammed Ali, Queen Amina, Fumilayo Ransomkuti, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Florence Nwapa and of course her father, Christopher Okigbo.

These powerful portraits are drawn on paper and silk, and are showcased along the main corridors of the Wheatbaker, like a hall of fame, reminding us of our giants through history. In the bar area, eight “angel” portraits of famous black female jazz singers, *Les Anges Chantuers*, include legendary Ella Fitzgerald, Jill Scott, Billie Holiday and Sarah Vaughan, Aretha Franklin and Nina Simone.

These portraits will eventually be included in a large installation piece Okigbo is working on, similar to the Ghent Altar Piece, which will truly reflect her creative dexterity in using powerful portraiture to tell a more complete story of the African renaissance.

The last section of the exhibition is made up of a series of fourteen miniature studies which show flashes of brilliance as Okigbo presents snapshots of women, community, space, air, water, and earth on her promenade through life.

I hope you enjoy *Convergence*, as we step across the confines of what many consider “art from Africa”, and follow Okigbo’s oeuvre as she takes us on an exciting journey of discovery.

Sandra Mbanefo Obiako

Curator









# A REBIRTH

When Obiageli invited me to write this piece for her solo exhibition, I was more than honoured, having curated her first major show in London. 10 years after that eponymous show, her latest body of work shows an astonishing evolution of her ongoing exploration of self, now expanded into one of the collective, the African collective that translates into a profoundly deeper level of analysis, understanding and thus renewal.

**Out of the Ashes** is trilogy of parts ~ the first features her breath-taking trade-mark Indian ink stain and indigo pigment on linen paintings. The second 'space' unveils new larger format oil paintings whilst the final section, previews a curated selection of portraits from her 'Mystic Lamb' series; a body of work which is a continuous examination of human greatness.

The oeuvre presented is a reflection on the theme of RENEWAL paying reverence to the ancestral realm and our intrinsic belief systems. We are entranced in a

multidimensional 'ceremony' of paint that explores the sacred spirit space of the forest, portraiture and religious iconography.

"The Forest Series"; "Weaver Bird", "Watermaid" and "The Clearing" are inspired by photographs she took during her residency at Wole Soyinka Foundation Abeokuta, in 2016, where she says she felt – 'the impression of the forest inhabited by ancestral memories, presence, and secret stories'.

A further influence was the classic work of African literature, 'Forest of a Thousand Daemons' by D.O Fagunwa, considered to be a triumph of the mythical imagination, where Yoruba cosmology, human, natural, and supernatural beings come alive in the magical landscape of the forest.

The paintings are ancestral melodies, engravings or markings like lyrical stories into one's soul. They tell a tale of mystical times lost but not forgotten. Times that invoke the spirits of our ancestors, a time of purity and connectivity, a place of solace

and grounding, that 'tap into our essential self.'

Explored in her larger artworks, "Jacob's ladder," "Twilight," "Nous between the Two" & "Yellow Melodies" is a re-examining of prevailing Abrahamic religious themes of The Gardens of Eden, Jacob's Dream, the Wise men, the Disciples and 'the everlasting quest to find a higher Truth'. In these transformative pieces, 'Renewal' is expressed, as divergent forms of TRANSCENDENCE, in particular the ability for Love to surpass all human experience – birth, difference, pain, betrayal, displacement and finally death.

"Yellow Melodies" is an exquisite vision of the Story of Eden. With the simple use of just two mediums, Indian ink and a mysterious like yellow haze wash. Each line, visible brush/pen stroke, appears measured but in actual fact is free flowing embodying and soothing in its wake & unveiling intimacy on the purest level. Adam & Eve, pre the fall from grace, or perhaps

after, in spite of temptation would reset the divine order. A new perspective is awakened, but ultimately the viewer is led to his or her own interpretation and neither is wrong. This is the tale that highlights the otherworldly potentiality that is Love.

Finally, Obi's tribute to Van Eyck is manifested in a 'preview' of her much anticipated 300 piece Portraits series, *Mystic Lamb*. She admits that the selection process for this exhibition was challenging, however decided upon a selection of portraits that resonated with 'Nigerian sensibilities'.

MBARI, a gallery of Nigeria's great and good from all forms of art, culture and Literature - Achebe, Soyinka, Okigbo, Clark, Nwoko, Okeke, Obumelu, Mabel Segun, Flora Nwapa, Onobrekpaye, El Salahi, Osawe, Langston Hughes, Ngugi amongst others. The ICONS include Nelson Mandela, James Baldwin and Mrs Ransome Kuti and finally LES ANGES CHANTEURS – celebrates iconic songstresses including

Ella Fitzgerald, Aretha and Nina Simone.

These smaller gentle pieces - poetically rendered ink washes on paper, are sculptural depictions that embrace and celebrate the Pioneers of African culture, in her eyes 'masters in their respective fields' who have impacted, moved, challenged and inspired her and the world beyond. These paintings ask the audience to witness mastery and the limitless potential of man ~ a reminder of our innate desire to achieve and ensure the greater good.

**OUT OF THE ASHES** – is an intense but compelling departure, from the richness of colour and exuberance of symbolism of self discovery encapsulated in her first solo show, *"Tapping into the Known"*. However, this exhibition sees her journey for 'self discovery' metamorphose to a collective discovery of self, which is no less beguiling.

Obi's paintings talk to the purity of SOUL and of LOVE that more than often bring me

to tears. Her art asks you, in that moment, to step out of the confines of societal boxes and predisposed views and enquire on a deeper level, universal concepts of SELF, LOVE, HUMANITY, CREATION and SPIRITUAL 'AWAKENESS'; idioms that continue to provoke and probe one's understanding, and ultimately ask us to return to SOURCE for rebirth – what ever Source may be.

Annabelle Mu'azu  
Art Critic





# OBI OKIGBO

Obiageli Annabel Zeinab Okigbo (b. 1964 Ibadan). Obi grew up in Nigeria until the age of 16. She continued her studies in Kent, then graduated from Oxford Brooks University with a BA in Architecture and pursued her post-graduate studies at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London.

She practiced architecture in London, Rome and Paris until 1995 when she moved to Brussels where she currently lives with her two children. Her training as an architect left a strong imprint on her work, expanding her reach through new media and support, ranging from "Indian ink on linen" to oil paint on canvas and collage. She has exhibited in Nigeria,

United Kingdom, Dubai and Belgium including two major solo exhibitions in Lagos, 2003 and London, 2007.

She established the Christopher Okigbo Foundation in 2005, which is tasked with researching and preserving the legacy of her late father, the poet Christopher Okigbo (1932-1967).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1967, at the start of the civil war in Nigeria, Christopher Okigbo (b. 1932), died on the battle - field fighting for Biafra. He left a slim collection of 72 pages of poetry "Labyrinths" which is now regarded as a modern classic and which has established Christopher Okigbo as one of the founder's of contemporary literature in Africa.



# CONVERGENCE

Like the alchemist who skilfully combines different elements to produce one unified material form, I conceive of each piece as a meeting/ melting point. My work summons the land of my ancestors my hopes desires regrets failures my strength my craft my belief & my favourite things.

Layered temporalities distilled into a single moment - Anchored to the present.

Doth manifest bear fruit and in turn multiply

In a going and coming  
That goes on forever

Obi Okigbo  
November, 2019





*"Obi Okigbo belongs to that sturdy artistic stock that increasingly finds its place among the best anywhere in the world. Her canvases provide shifting visions of reality, her sense of juxtaposition is always deft and eloquent, not arbitrary or faddish. The continent, so rich in many artistic traditions, should be proud to have this talented addition, who has taken the basics of form and texture into a self-renewing language of expression for a modern age."*

Prof. Wole Soyinka, Nobel Laureate







OUT OF THE ASHES



# Annointment

I find inspiration for my work from all aspects of human culture – our belief systems, behavioural patterns, aesthetic values, amongst others.

November 2002, I set about on a project to illustrate my father's poetry from his celebrated collection: LABYRINTHS – dedicated to Sefinat and Ibrahimat, Mother and Child, First published by Heinemann Ltd: LONDON, 1971.

"Labyrinths is thus a fable of man's perennial quest for fulfillment... Inevitably, several presences haunt the complex of rooms and ante - rooms, of halls and corridors that lead to the palace of the White Goddess, and in which a country visitor might easily lose his way.

C.Okigbo, Ibadan, October, 1965

"As I began to dig into the archives of memory, searching for clues about the poet and father that I knew so little about, I plunged into the realm of adventure, taking me back to my childhood experiences in Lagos in the

'60's, and even back into the belly of memory itself. Our common interest in archetypes and mythology sparked this meeting in an auspicious manner and has expressed itself in a collection of paintings surrounded by poetry".

...In exploring my father's poetry through painting, I am not only embarking on a personal discovery and interpretation of his life's work, but also re-enacting, through visual metaphor, the archetypal experience of all the heroes past. Tapping Into The Known is thus a ballade, Okigbo/Okigbo, father and daughter, side by side, together on life's walk with occasional head-on glances.

The Labyrinth is thoroughly known.

*"An intimate dialogue between daughter and father, two distinct artistic personae, two modes of creative responses, a dialogue across time, over which filial memory constructs a luminous bridge. A dialogue? No more expressively, a duet."*  
WS<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Nobel Prize winner, Professor Wole Soyinka





***The Twilight Moment In The  
Wake Of A Dream***

Indian-ink & powder pigment  
on Linen

80cm x 110cm

2019









***The Clearing***  
Indian-ink & powder pigment  
on Linen  
50cm x 50cm  
2019



*I am continually inspired by; Italian Renaissance art, early Flemish masters (14th century), Mbari art and ideology (Igbo, Nigeria), ink paintings by “Ohwon” Jang Seung-Ub (1843-97) & Shintao, the poetry of Christopher Okigbo (1932\_67) & Hafez (13th century), the writings of Joseph Campbell, Afro-beat, Funk and Hip-Hop.*

# WATERMAID

EYE OPEN on the sea,  
eyes open, of the prodigal;  
upward to heaven shoot  
where stars will fall from.

Secret I have told into no ear,  
save into a dughole, to hold, not to drown with –  
Secret I have planted into beachsand

now breaks  
salt-white surf on the stones and me,  
and lobsters and shells  
in iodine smell-  
maid of the salt-emptiness,  
sophisticreamy,

whose secret I have covered up with beachsand...

Shadow of rain over sunbeaten beach,  
Shadow of rain over man with woman.

BRIGHT  
with the armpit-dazzle of a lioness,  
she answers,

wearing white light about her;

and the waves escort her,  
my lioness,  
crowned with moonlight.

So brief her presence -  
match-flare in wind's breath -  
so brief with mirrors around me.

Downward...  
the waves distil her;  
gold crop  
sinking ungathered.

Watermaid of the salt-emptiness,  
grown are the ears of the secret.

AND I WHO am here abandoned,  
count the sand by wavelash abandoned,  
count her blessing, my white queen.

But the spent sea reflects  
from his mirrored visage  
not my queen, a broken shadow.



So I who count in my island the moments,  
count the hour which will bring  
my lost queen with angels' ash in the wind.

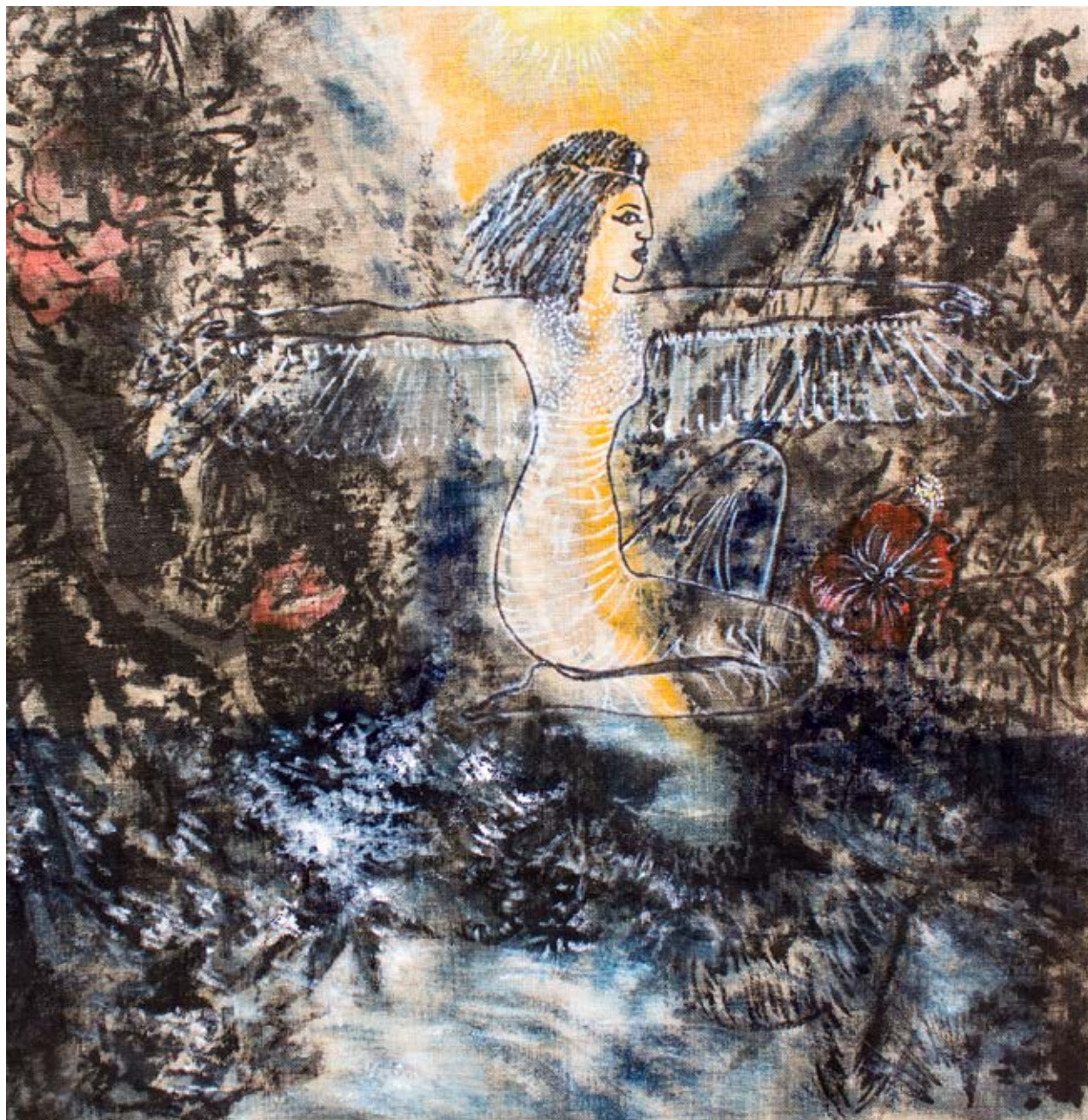
THE STARS have departed,  
the sky in monocle  
surveys the world under.

The stars have departed,  
and I - where am I?

Stretch, stretch, O antennae,  
to clutch at this hour,

fulfilling each moment in a  
broken monody.

Christopher Okigbo, Heavensgate, 1962



**Watermaid**

Indian-ink & powder pigment  
on Linen

50cm x 50cm

2019





**Weaverbird**  
Indian-ink & powder pigment  
on Linen  
50cm x 50cm  
2019









**YELLOW MELODIES**

Indian-ink & powder pigment on Linen  
210cm x 105cm  
2016







# DISTANCES

FROM FLESH into phantom on the horizontal stone  
I was the sole witness to my home coming...

Serene lights on the other balcony:  
redolent fountains bristling with signs –

But what does my divine rejoicing hold?  
A bowl of incense, a nest of fireflies?

I was the sole witness to my homecoming...

For in the inflorescence of the white  
chamber, a voice, from very far away,  
chanted, and the chamber descanted, the birthday of the earth,  
paddled me home through some dark  
labyrinth, from laughter to the dream.

Miner into my solitude,  
incarnate voice of the dream,  
you will go,  
with me as your chief acolyte,  
again into the ant-hill...

I was the sole witness to my homecoming...

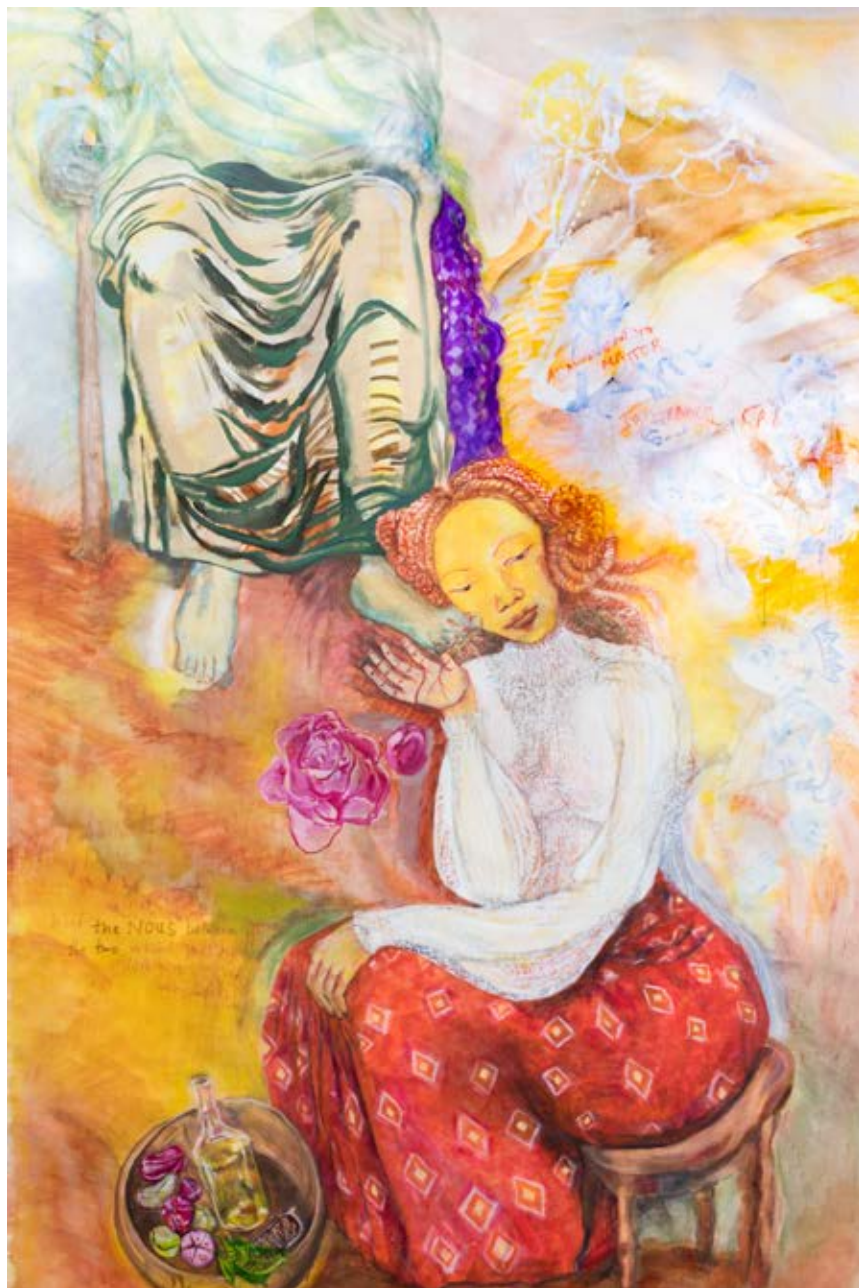
Christopher Okigbo, Distances, 1964

**MMANWU**

Oil on canvas  
100cm x 100cm  
2017







My work is always self-examining and this manifests in my paintings quite often as the female body; indeed the underlying theme of my work is autobiographic, anchored on my identity as an African /Nigerian (Igbo/Igbirra)/ British /Woman/Mother / Daughter...). I just recently showed the series "Lament of the Silent Sisters", at the Art X Lagos fair, Nigeria November 2016. This body of work (Oil paint & Indian-ink on canvas) interrogates the relevance of beauty in our contemporary psyche by exploring the notion of the muse, reclaiming the "female model" onto center stage. Figurative and abstract, the female form with Goddess prowess; nurturer, mother, lover, spiritual provider, evoking a mood that transpires into places in time where chapters are crossed.

**The "Nous" Between The Two**

Oil on canvas  
200cm x 150cm  
2019









***Jacob's Ladder***  
Indian-ink & pigment on linen  
210cm x 110cm  
2011









**IBEJI**  
Indian-ink on paper  
110cm x 75cm  
2008







**MYSTIC LAMB**



# Ablution

*My on-going interest in ancient art and mythology, has led me to a process of juxtaposing archetypes from different cultures and epochs with my own personal experiences.*

*I'm currently working on a body of work, 'Out of the Ashes' which I have been developing since 2008 exploring themes of transcendence and metamorphosis through the 're-interpretation' of existing religious iconographic art (Renaissance paintings, Igbo-Ukwu sculptures, Coptic icons, Sufi poetry, Khemet scripts) - the everlasting cycle of Birth, Death, and Regeneration.*

*This layering technique gives the painting a 'timeless' dimension, where past present and future coexist on the same plane*

*The culmination of this research is a life-size Re-production of the "Ghent Alter-piece" or "**Mystic Lamb**": the polyptych by Jan and Hubert Van Eyck, 1425 (measuring approximately 7mx3m in total) consisting of over 200 portraits of protagonists of*

*3000 years of African' story portrayed therein. Inherently, this piece is perceived as an offering: a work of devotion to "Those who have paved the way" so that we may shine. To ignite inspiration: A celebration of collective memory, the archetypal quest for the Self and the truth of our existence.*



# THE MBARI CLUB

I am going back to the 1960s to the time of the Mbari Artists' and Writers' Club, a really awesome part of Nigerian (and more broadly African) literary history.

The Mbari Club was founded in Ibadan in 1961 by German scholar, writer and editor **Ulli Beier**, Nigerian writers **Wole Soyinka**, **Christopher Okigbo** and **JP Clark Bekederemo** and South African writer **Ezekiel Mphahlele**. Located in Ibadan's Dugbe Market, the site of the Mbari Club was an old Lebanese restaurant that was converted into an open-air performance venue, an art gallery, a library, and an office. Nigerian dramatist, Duro Ladipo (along with Beier and Mphahlele) also developed a similar club at Oshogbo in 1962, which was called Mbari Mbayo. Other members of the club included **Chinua Achebe**, **Francis Ademola**, **Demas Nwoko**, **Mabel Segun** and **Uche Okeke**.

The name Mbari was actually suggested by Chinua Achebe after the mbari ceremony of the Owerri Igbo, as this piece by James Eze reveals:

"When did you found the club? You ask. 'I think in 1960 and it was Chinua who gave it a name. Mbari is an Igbo name. Soyinka and I were tossing around in search of a name to give the club and then Chinua rang and said "what about Mbari?" And I jumped at the name because I knew Mbari Houses,' he recalls with a nostalgic glint in his eyes".

In the 1960s, the Mbari Club was a centre of cultural activity in Nigeria for artists, writers and anybody involved in the arts, but it was more than that. Mbari not only promoted African writers, but it also provided a local outlet for publishing with a transnational reach and encouraged writers to find inspiration for their work in their own contexts rather than in colonial stereotypes about Africa. It's also said to have been a crucial prelude for several young African writers to being published in London and New York. Mbari publications (which grew out of the journal *Black Orpheus* and the Mbari Artists' and Writers' Club), was unique as it was said to be the only African-based publisher bringing out

books of Anglophone African literature in the early 1960s. It also published some iconic works of African literature - the first books by Clark, Okigbo, and Soyinka alongside translations of francophone poetry and work by South African writers critical of the apartheid system. Works included J. P. Clark's play *Song of a Goat*, Clark's *Poems* and Okigbo's *Heavensgate* and *Limit* (these two booklets became the first two sections of *Labyrinths*, which was published after Okigbo's death), Wole Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers*, Bakare Gbadamosi's *Okiri* (a Yoruba-language collection), as well as South African writers like Alex la Guma's *A Walk in the Night* and Dennis Brutus's *Sirens Knuckles Boots*.

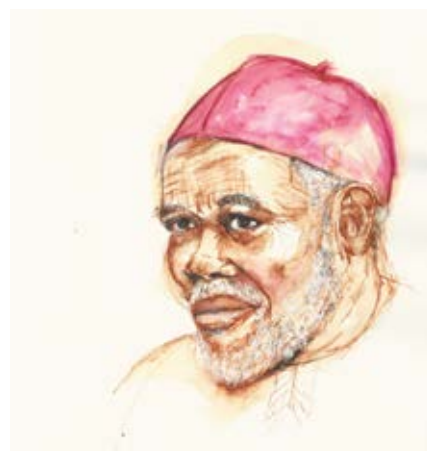
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Quote from Blog: Bookshy - 54 years of Nigerian Literature : The Mbari club published 10/ 2014



GUERRIERS DU CHRIST / - WARD  
MBARI / HEROES of 1960's Revolution

- ① CHRIS OKIGBO
- ② WOLE SOYINKA
- ③ CHINUA ACHEBE
- ④ PATRICE LUMUMBA
- ⑤ THOMAS SANKARA
- ⑥ STEVE BIKO
- ⑦ NELSON MANDELA
- ⑧ FELA ANIKOLAPO KUTI
- ⑨ AMILEAK CABRAL
- ⑩ CHÉ GUEVARA
- ⑪ SAMORA MACHEL
- ⑫ KWAME NKRUMA







**Ezekiel Mphahlele**  
Felt-tip wash on paper  
30 x 21 cm  
2018





**Chinua Achebe**  
Felt-tip wash on paper  
30 x 21 cm  
2009 & 19

**Flora Nwapa**  
Felt-tip wash on paper  
30 x 21 cm  
2019

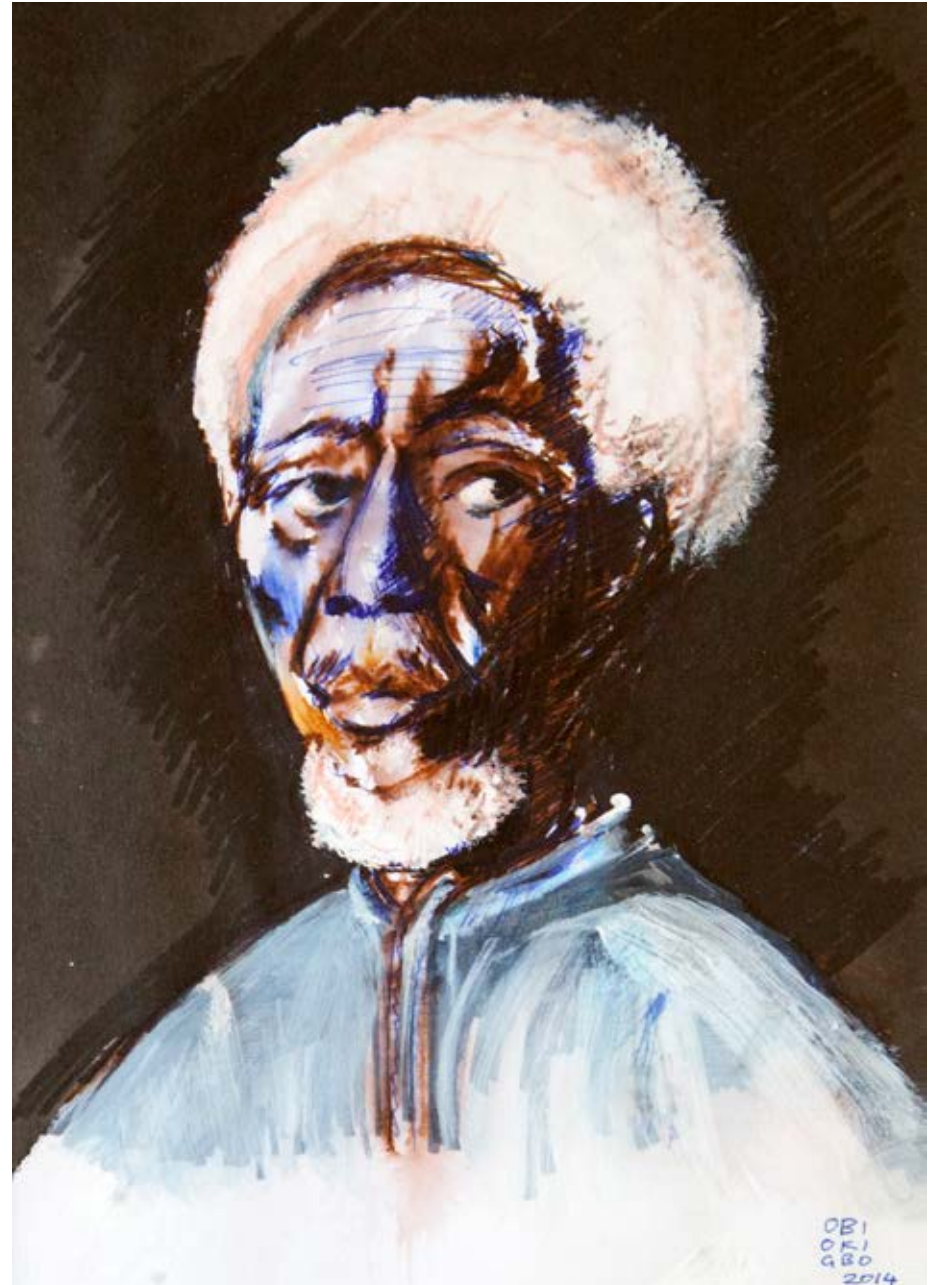






**Ngugi**  
Felt-tip wash on paper  
30 x 21 cm  
2019

**Demas Nwoko**  
Felt-tip wash on paper  
21 x 15 cm  
2017



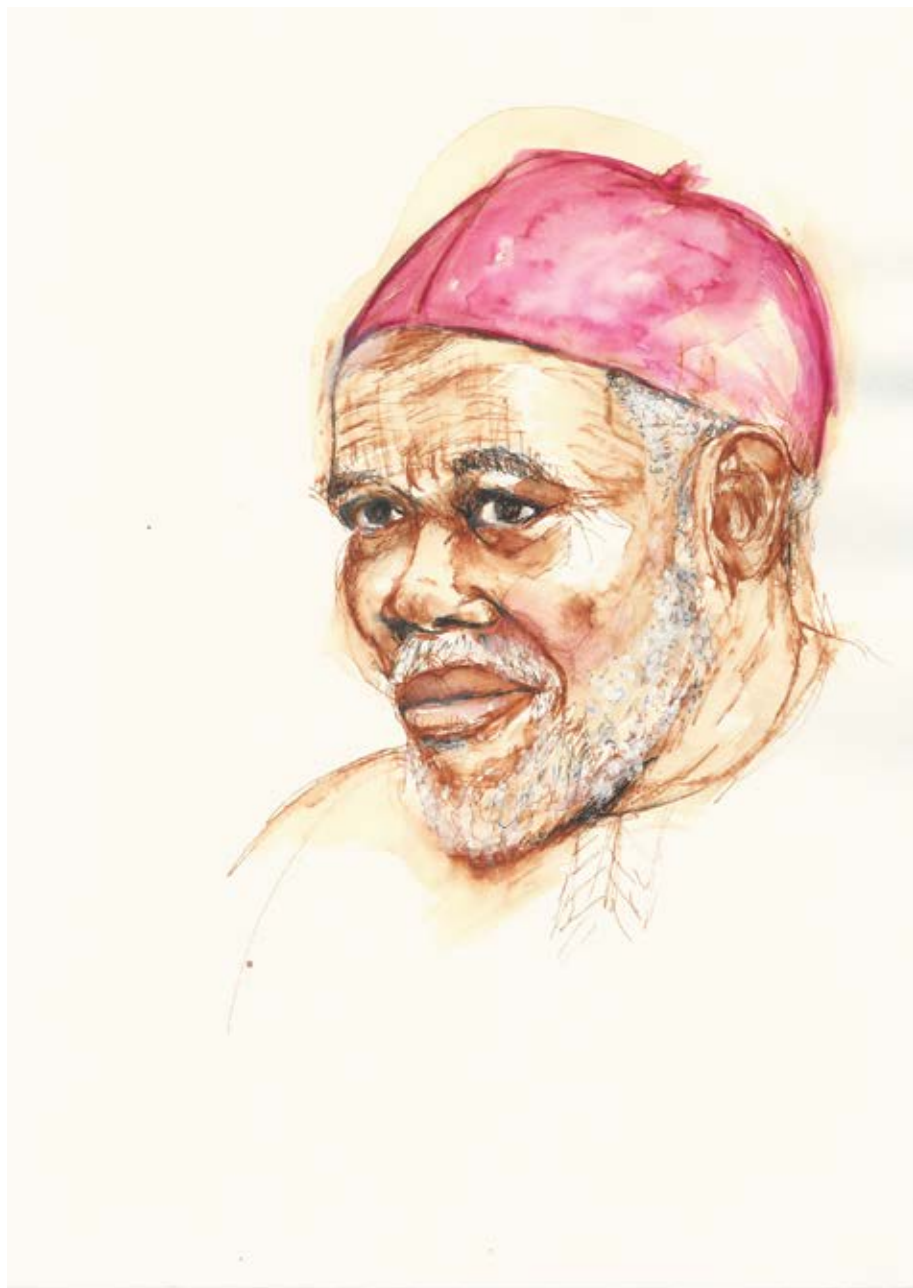


**Ben Obumsele**  
Felt-tip wash on paper  
30 x 21 cm  
2017



**Bruce Onobrakpeya**  
Felt-tip wash on paper  
30 x 21 cm  
2019





**Uche Okeke**  
Felt-tip wash on paper  
30 x 21 cm  
2018

**JP Clark Bekederemo**  
Felt-tip wash on paper  
30 x 21 cm  
2019







**Wole Soyinka**  
Indian ink on paper  
30 x 21 cm  
2009 & 2019

**Christopher Okigbo**  
Felt-tip wash on paper  
30 x 21 cm  
2007



# THE PASSAGE

BEFORE YOU, mother Idoto\*,  
naked I stand;  
Before your watery presence,  
a prodigal

leaning on an oilbean,  
lost in your legend.

Under your power wait I  
on barefoot,  
watchman for the watchword  
at Heavensgate;

out of the depths my cry:  
give ear and hearken...



DARK WATERS of the beginning.

Rays, violet and short, piercing the gloom,  
Foreshadow the fire that is dreamed of.

Rainbow on far side, arched like a boa bent to kill,  
foreshadows the rain that is dreamed of.

Me to the orangery  
Solitude invites,  
A wagtail, to tell  
The tangled-wood-tale;  
A sunbird, to mourn  
A mother on a spray.

Rain and sun in single combat;  
On one leg standing,  
In silence at the passage,  
the young bird at the passage.

SILENT FACES at crossroads:  
Festivity in black...

Faces of black like long black  
column of ants,

behind the bell tower,  
into the hot garden  
where all roads meet:  
festivity in black...

O Anna at the knobs of the panel oblong,  
hear us at crossroads at the great hinges

where the players of loft pipe organs  
rehearse old lovely fragments, alone-

strains of pressed orange leaves on pages,  
bleach of the light of years held in leather:  
For we are listening in cornfields  
among the wind players,  
Listening to the wind leaning over  
Its loveliest fragment...

Christopher Okigbo, Heavensgate, 1962

\* A village stream. The oilbean, the tortoise and the python are totems for her worship.

**Christopher Okigbo**

Felt-tip wash and Indian ink on paper

30 x 21 cm

2009 & 19





# ICONS

This piece is perceived as an offering: a work of devotion to "Those who have paved the way" so that we may shine. To ignite inspiration: A celebration of collective memory, the archetypal quest for the Self and the truth of our existence.





***The Humanist – Nelson Mandela***  
Ink-wash print on 100% silk satin  
70 x 70cm  
2017



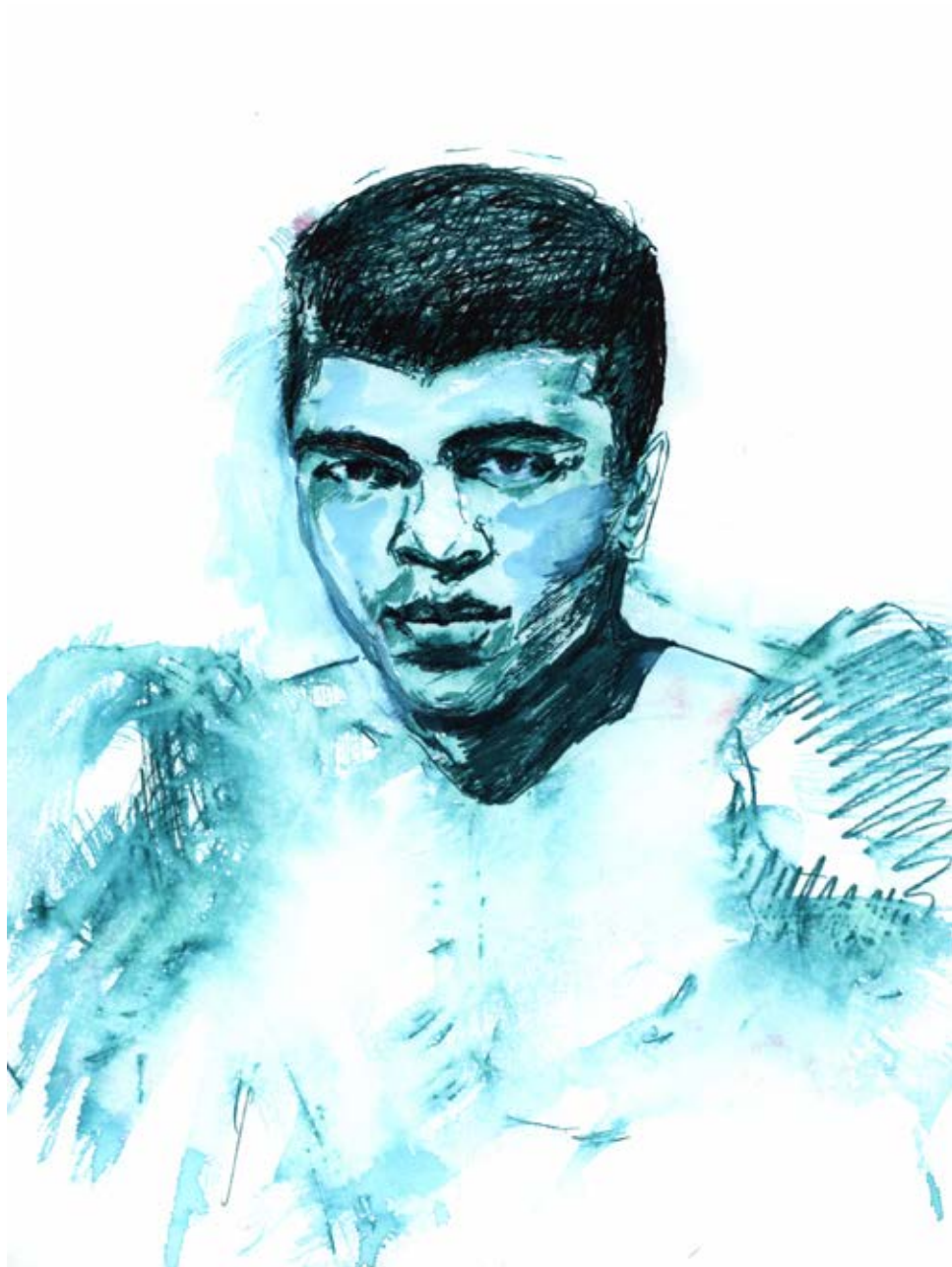


***The Queen – Queen Amina of Zaria***

Ink-wash print on 100% silk satin

70 x 70cm

2019



***The Champion – Mohamed Ali***  
Ink-wash print on 100% silk satin  
70 x 70cm  
2017

***The Storyteller – Butchi Emecheta***  
Ink-wash print on 100% silk satin  
70 x 70cm  
2019







**The Amazone –**  
**Funmilayo Ramsome Kuti**  
Ink-wash print on 100% silk satin  
70 x 70cm  
2017

***The Pioneer – Kwame Nkrumah***  
Ink-wash print on 100% silk satin  
70 x 70cm  
2019





***The Visionary – James Baldwin***  
Ink-wash print on 100% silk satin  
70 x 70cm  
2017





# ANGES CHANTEUR

Homage to the DIVAS  
Of voice divine  
Resonate within our soul's abode  
May they forever shine







**Sarah Vaughan**  
Indian-ink on Paper  
42 x 30 cm  
2018

**Diana Ross**  
Indian-ink on Paper  
42 x 30 cm  
2018





**Nina Simone**  
Indian-ink on Paper  
30 x 42 cm  
2018



**Ella Fitzgerald**  
Indian-ink on Paper  
30 x 42 cm  
2018





***Maria Anderson***  
Indian-ink on Paper  
42 x 30 cm  
2018

**Aretha Franklin**  
Indian-ink on Paper  
42 x 30 cm  
2018







**Jill Scott**  
Indian-ink on Paper  
30 x 42 cm  
2018

**Billie Holiday**  
Indian-ink on Paper  
42 x 30 cm  
2018







# PROMENADE MINIATURES





**PROMENADE I - II**

Oil on Canvas  
10cm x 10cm  
2017





**PROMENADE IV**  
 Acrylic on paper  
 10cm x 10cm  
 2017



**PROMENADE VI**  
 Oil on Canvas  
 10cm x 10cm  
 2017



**PROMENADE III**  
Oil on Canvas  
10cm x 10cm  
2017



**PROMENADE V**  
Acrylic on paper  
10cm x 10cm  
2017





**PROMENADE VIII - IX**

Oil on Canvas  
10cm x 10cm  
2017





**PROMENADE VII - X**

Oil on Canvas  
10cm x 10cm  
2017



**PROMENADE XII**

Acrylic on paper

10cm x 10cm

2017



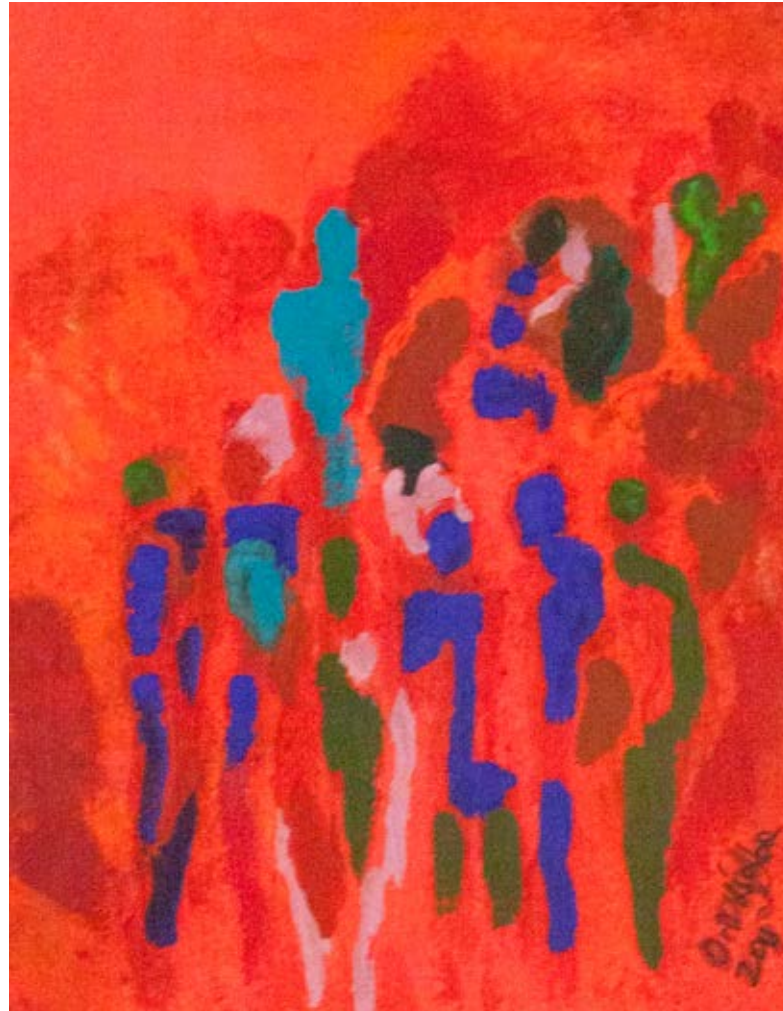
**PROMENADE XI**  
Acrylic on paper  
10cm x 10cm  
2017





**PROMENADE XIII**

Oil on Canvas  
10cm x 10cm  
2017



**PROMENADE XIV**

Oil on Canvas  
10cm x 10cm  
2017

## In Conversation: Obi Okigbo And Sandra Mbanefo Obiago

**Sandra Mbanefo Obiago:** Let's start at the very beginning. Tell me about your childhood and when you discovered you were an artist.

**Obi Okigbo:** Funny enough art came much later. During my childhood growing up in Lagos and attending Queens College, I was more drawn to science and math. I did my A levels in Math and Physics because those were the things I really liked. I then went on to do Architecture because of course Math and Physics were involved. A lot of my architect friends said I've always been an artist. In architecture I loved the drafting. I think that still remains my first love because everything that we need in art like composition, light and shadow, all came to me through architecture. I guess my artistic side was also expressed with my dressing because I was a bit of a weird dresser when I was younger.

I was already forty years old when I started painting as I'd already had a career as an architect. When my first child was born and we moved to Brussels in 1994, I couldn't really speak French and the European Commission required an extra

two years of training for me to practice as an architect. I was a bit upset about that and decided not to do any training and instead started doing drawings of my daughter. In her nursery school the other mothers liked them and asked me to do paintings and drawings of their children. So I actually started off as a portrait artist. Then I thought that I'd like to use this medium to see how much further I could take it. So I gave myself a challenge to take two years off architecture and plunge myself into Fine Arts to discover and explore.

**SMO:** I think it's always very encouraging for people who have the artist buried deep inside, to hear stories like yours.

**OO:** Between 1996 and 2001, I did one exhibition in Brussels with four other women. I was still really doing portraits and architecture. A curator looked at my work and said she was doing an exhibition with five women from five continents and wanted me to join as the African artist. I was panicking when the date came because I'd really never painted so I did some collages. That was kind of the beginning of my artist voice and it was



through that deconstruction process of bringing architecture into another kind of vocabulary that I had the idea of turning towards the visual arts.

Ultimately it was my father's poetry that was the key. In 2002 I embarked on an "intellectual" project to illustrate my father's poetry. I thought I would start by going to Ojoto and going to the River Idoto where the poetry started. I did my pilgrimage to Idoto and coming back from there, my project stopped being intellectual and became a conversation between his poetry and my paintings. I'll admit to you that I'd never really understood his poetry and it was as if I had to be open to see and feel things differently as an artist; to be able to have that conversation with my father. It was like going through the labyrinth initiation for me as a painter.

**SMO:** Do you mean a philosophical labyrinth?

**OO:** Yes philosophically. Looking at myself, going back to creation myths and existential questions like who are we, where are we from, who is our maker? The theme

was seven colors and the seven parts of his poems that spoke to me came out in paintings as a conversation. That was really the first time I'd done artwork that came from my soul and my experiences.

**SMO:** Can you describe what happened in Idoto?

**OO:** It's difficult to describe without it sounding mystical. I put my feet in the river and took some photos. On coming back it's as if I had a deep understanding about nature, the earth, our ancestors, as if it anchored me to my roots. That's when I started thinking about mother earth, the earth goddess Ala and that took me to the divine female and connecting my love for science with all that. It seemed like everything I'd done before then was leading up to that moment. That got me deeper into other mythologies, cultures and ideologies that I hadn't really looked at before.

**SMO:** Let's go back a little bit to your connection with your father and grounding the work that you did in a poem called 'The Passage'. How does 'The Passage'

Speak to you?

**OO:** For me it's like a prayer, a cleansing, a moment of opening up and beginning. All the dark waters of the beginning and I chose the green color because it represents potential and so I see it as a cleansing rite and an opening to the universe in order to start one's journey.

**SMO:** How did you grow through your father's legacy and develop your own voice? What did that conversation give you as a person and as an artist?

**OO:** It gave me a vocabulary to put on things I was always interested in. It opened my perspective and gave me confidence to bring out that paint brush and follow my intuition.

**SMO:** I think often children of famous people struggle to find their own voice.

**OO:** You're right Sandie. When I actually understood the poetry I felt so ashamed because it took me so long. I phoned Chinua Achebe and said he wouldn't believe that it's just now I'm making this discovery and he said "We have an Igbo

saying that *whenever one wakes up, that is your morning*". I explained to him the conversation and he said "that's A real father" because he waited till I was mature. I felt very fortunate because I already had my own experiences that were not linked to him or his work. That helped me to engage with him without being intimidated. I think if this had happened to me in my twenties I probably would have been overshadowed and not mature enough to have a conversation rather it would have been emulation. I have seen and spoken to children of famous people and it's very difficult especially if they are in the same field. People expected me to be a poet and even sent me poetry to review. The fact that my medium is painting and not poetry has helped me to distinguish myself from him and to develop my own vocabulary and voice. But he is ever present in the titles and in the spirit of my works.

**SMO:** So your dad was part of the legendary *Mbari Club*. For this exhibition you quoted the following excerpt, "The Mbari encouraged writers to find inspiration for their work in their own context rather than



in a colonial stereotype about Africa and it was a gallery of Nigeria's great and good from all forms of art, culture and literature; so it was Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Demas Nwoko, Uche Okeke, Langston Hughes, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and others from the sub-continent and the U.S." I know you've been mentored by Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe. How did this community of your dad's peers help you find your artistic voice and how has the Mbari community influenced your work and maybe given you a platform to interpret your dad's voice from a fresh perspective?

**OO:** When you asked what happened in Idoto, I realized that I knew nothing about my father then and I thought I would go and ask and knock on the doors of all these people to find out who he was and build a portrait in absentia. One by one I went to see them and that's how I got to know Achebe, Soyinka and his entourage. More than anything it made me understand the bond of friendship, brotherhood and intellectual respect that they all shared. I listened to recordings of my father's voice talking about the Mbari and how they

would criticize each other's work but they were determined to encourage each other, to be in control of publishing and exhibitions rather than leaving it to others to decide. They were not just artists, they actually took control of the platform and that really encouraged me to set up the Christopher Okigbo Foundation which I'm still working on making into a platform to publish, give prizes, have plays and create an environment that is ripe to encourage different forms of art. It was nice to not separate painting, theatre, writing, video, photography and for me, who has always been interested in science and art, I thought it would be nice to bring those two things together. I thought that was what was rich in the Mbari group. It was all the disciplines brought together.

**SMO:** I think that's definitely a big gap in Nigeria because we've got a very vibrant film, music, literature, visual art scene but there aren't that many cross conversations going on. Do you think that this is needed?

**OO:** Yes I do. Even in my own little way, that is how I would like to contribute by creating a place for this to happen. The



original idea was for it to be in Ojoto so it is linked back to my father but wherever I can find land will be fine. I did a fellowship at the Wole Soyinka residency and there were mostly writers and I was the only painter which was interesting.

**SMO:** What year was this?

**OO:** That was in 2016 and for this exhibition I have works that were inspired during that time because I was reading Fagunwa's *A Forest of a Thousand Daemons* while I was there and I was in that forest while working with my indigo and ink with a young writer and a musician who were also there. It was very interesting and stimulating.

**SMO:** I think that particular literary work has inspired a number of artists to create; Titi Omoighe and Bruce Onobrakpeya have both done a whole series of works inspired by that book.

**OO:** Of course! It's got such a fertile and rich vision and vocabulary that I think many generations can be inspired by it.

**SMO:** Moving on from your dad, you have written that you "find inspiration from

all aspects of human culture, our belief systems, behavioral patterns, aesthetic values, amongst others. My ongoing interest in ancient mythology has led me to a process of juxtaposing archetypes from different cultures and epochs within my own personal experience". How do you do that?

**OO:** I see myself as an apprentice and so I learn from the masters. I am not inventing anything. I use for my art technique things that have touched me and moved me. It looks like my work but I'm copying them. My final year architecture project was looking at nomads and I was fascinated by people that move and how they move and how they settle also because the nomadic culture was how human beings were before they settled. I was making architecture that was less permanent and more transient and through looking at the nomads and their cultures I started looking at how humans settle and sacred sites like the Nazca lines in Peru. I realized that everything that has ever stayed in civilizations as they come and go is the art and culture. The pieces that I learn from are renaissance art, art related to churches,



**Jacob's Ladder,**  
Indian-ink & pigment on linen

Igbo Ukwu, the ideologies of the Mbari and using that iconography. I can take a painting or sculpture that is known, like the Pieta, and make it my own voice. I was brought up Catholic so the first images I saw growing up were of Mary, baby Jesus, the nativity and recreating those scenes but using myself or my grandmother as the model. I was really interested in what Wangechi Mutu said about making our own stories and narratives; by using the biblical influence which was one of the biggest influences in my life growing up, I now relate it to Hindu, Persian and different kinds of religions and cultures to develop a different kind of alphabet with myself always at the center and my experiences as a black woman today but which link always back to the existential questions. I have themes like in the work '*Jacob's Ladder*', which explore the connection between the vertical because you see that most ideologies involve us humans trying to connect to a higher realm. Another important piece is '*Maria Magdalene*' and all the evil that is attributed to her and by extension, to women. This really touches me, as well as the friendship between her

and Jesus. I've put it as the archetype of love that transcends the everyday and is a bond that can transform and make us better. In parallel, we have Ram and Sita in the Indian mythology about a god and a human woman who were a couple and through this bond of love and friendship they can conquer all. I'm also very inspired by the 3 Mary's; the mother of Christ, Mary Magdalene and Maria who I see as Isis or Ala. They are constant figures in my paintings.

**SMO:** I love the representation of nature in your work. There's a very strong Asian style or inspiration like in '*Jacob's Ladder*'. The landscape looks almost like old Japanese or Chinese landscapes.

**OO:** I was drawn to Indian ink for my paintings because even as an architect being a painter, choosing my material was important. Oil was interesting and a challenge but Indian ink is much more of a challenge because it stains. Every mark is indelible so you have to be present and in the moment. I'm of the old school mentality where I am more interested in the craft, technique and skill of painting. With Indian

ink I could really learn and build up my skill and I guess that's the draughtsman side of me. That technique and discipline helped me to develop my skill off the line, stains, light, shadow and those kinds of abstract things. This technique really helps me to restrain myself and the added constraint of painting on linen. Painting on paper is absorbed in a different way; painting on linen is very difficult because of the way the paint moves. In 2004 I discovered the works of a 14<sup>th</sup> century Korean painter called 'Ohwon' Jang Sueng-Ub (1843-97) and he's kind of become my guide or master so I just watch his paintings over and over again. I've applied to go to Taiwan and master Chinese to take it further but for now I train myself with the help of videos.

**SMO:** That's really great because we opened Emeka Udemba's exhibition 10 days ago and we had the honor of Yinka Shonibare saying a few words; he spoke about what African art is and where we get our inspiration from. He encouraged artists here to really look widely at what they are interested in. Just like Picasso and his peers were inspired by African art,

we too can take our inspiration from the world. We must not limit ourselves.

**OO:** Thank you very much. I get some criticism that my work doesn't look like African art and that's their problem. I know I'm African and I have the right to be influenced by everything. We have the whole world to be influenced by. As we say in Nigeria "I claim everybody" and I truly claim it all as mine. This is the life of an African woman who has lived in England and loves Asian art and wants to be a master craftsman and I hope that all the richness of these layers are apparent. I don't have to prove anything because behind it all is my African Naija soul.

**SMO:** Speaking of inspiration you've been working on a series called '*Mystic Lamb*' which was inspired by the Ghent altar piece which is a polyptych by Hubert and Jan van Eyck from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In it you are trying to create 200 portraits of protagonists that are an inspiration to Africans and you're calling it a work of devotion to those who have paved the way. Tell me a little bit about that journey and story.





**Christopher Okigbo**  
Felt-tip wash on paper



**Florence Nwapa**  
Felt-tip wash on paper

**OO:** It came after the culmination of the conversation with my dad and the resulting exhibition in 2007 where I did 12 portraits of martyrs like my dad and that was a real success. Then I realized that was just the beginning and there were so many more that I would like to pay homage to. Seeing the Ghent altar piece with its assemblage and composition was so incredible, I thought I already had the composition to bring together all my own perfect humanity and also pay respect. I can't call it historic because if that was the case I would have chosen more key figures, so I call it a personal selection but since it spans 2,000 years, there is an aspect of history in it. The van Eyck helps with the composition and a way to bring all these people together on one plane. In the end it's wonderful and it's been 10 years in the making.

**SMO:** How many portraits have you done so far?

**OO:** About 350.

**SMO:** And how have you grouped them?

**OO:** They've been grouped for example by the sixties, because we had a lot of revolution and independence movements in the 1960's and van Eyck called theirs 'the Martyrs' so I've called them 'the Martyrs' as well. They are all grouped and are mainly from Africa and America. I have all our kings and queens and ancestors in 'Kings and Queens', and I have 'the Amazons' and it's all the women and you're one of them Sandie. I've done many portraits of women who have inspired me and they are more of my generation and not the older ones because I'm influenced by women living with me today so that section is a bit more contemporary. There's a whole load of poets and musicians and rappers because music is a very big part of my world. I've put all the poets, musicians and rappers in the category of 'the Prophets' because they are the ones who speak and vocalize. Then the sacrificial lamb is me and that's my cameo in the whole thing.

**SMO:** So this is your opus.

**OO:** Yes, almost to the point that I've already kind of moved on. I want to write,



**The Champion – Mohamed Ali**  
Ink-wash print on 100% silk satin



**Wole Soyinka**  
Felt-tip wash on paper

make films ... I'll always paint but I'm kind of excited looking beyond.

**SMO:** But you have to finish it.

**OO:** Yes I have to finish it.

**SMO:** And as you create these portraits you're also maturing into the deeper story of this particular body of work. Which portraits are your favorites? And which ones were the most difficult to create?

**OO:** Mohammed Ali was very difficult. I must have done at least 20 of him before I was happy. And some miraculously, like our lady Frances Ademola, just came out once. I like the portrait of Wole Soyinka which was one of my first ones and was part of the original 'Last Supper' that I created in 2002.

'Out of the Ashes' is about finding my own voice and like the phoenix, leaving an old self behind and emerging anew. I discovered my own ink technique, my own vocabulary and my own research. That's when the portraits and the subjects became more focused on my interests rather than going along with the poetry. So

I would say it's about rebirth and renewal.

**SMO:** Tell us about the new projects and artistic platforms you are working on.

**OO:** In fact during the research to do 'Mystic Lamb', I was reading a lot of history books and through that research I began to write a story of the hero's quest. It is going to be a children's book about a story that investigates what this dichotomy of good and evil really is. I want to look at that from the perspective of a child's eye to make sense of the different mythologies while trying to invent an African one that will last through time. When you think of Sherlock Holmes, James Bond, or Harry Potter people think of living characters. They have museums and streets named after them. I'd like to invent a character that becomes part of our narrative, imagination and future that reminds us of the good and moral side of us especially in Nigeria. I'd like to work with Nollywood because I think it's a powerful way to reach the masses while putting out a deep message. The next residency I do will involve me creating a visual storyboard of this idea and to see who I can work with.

**SMO:** That's exciting. So that's for 2020?

**OO:** Yes. I'd like to do a residency for the storyboard and I've already begun to look at young Nollywood directors and writers because there are some really good young filmmakers coming out of here.

**SMO:** You are an artists based in the diaspora but you come quite regularly to Nigeria because you have your mom still here as well as other family and friends. How do you feel coming back?

**OO:** It's always mixed feelings because I'm always happy to be home. But there's the frustration of all the potential that we have and seeing our society regress. Going to school here in seventies we had everything, so why now, in the millennium, are we regressing and becoming more bigoted and tribalistic? When I was growing up in Lagos in the seventies, we were Lagosians regardless of what part of the country we originated from. Today people actually ask me how my name can be Zeinab and my last name Okigbo. I feel sorry for our young people today because people are more closed rather than open

mind. So there's always that frustration to see things going backwards instead of moving forwards and feeling helpless to contribute. But always without fail, this is where I feel at home, where I speak the same language with everybody and we understand each other. That's why I made the conscious decision in 2016 to make my name here, have an identity here, exhibit here, interact here and be involved in the art scene here.

**SMO:** What's your prayer for this exhibition?

**OO:** My prayer is that it will be well received. I am interested in the feedback people give and to dialogue. I pray that it's sold out and people will be queuing saying "Ah! Sandie give us more of Obi Okigbo!" and that it has an impact and is appreciated.

**SMO:** Thank you so much.





# C.V

## Obiageli Annabel Okigbo

Born

**October 3rd 1964** Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

Art Training

**1987 - 1991** Post - graduate studies in Architecture at the Architectural Association, London, England (AA Dip, RIBA Part II)

**1983 - 1987** Oxford Brooks University, Oxford, England (BA Hons Arch)

Awards

**2016** Fellowship for painting - Wole Soyinka Foundation, Abeokuta Nigeria

**2013** Artist in Residence, COMPEUNG, Thailand

Membership

**2014** Member, Nigerian Society of Art, UK

Employment

**2002 to Date** Independent artist

**2005 to Date** President, Christopher Okigbo Foundation. Belgium/Nigeria

Selected Exhibitions

Group shows

**1996 & 1997** 'Songs for Idoto', National museum, Enugu, Nigeria & Didi Museum, Lagos, Nigeria

**2001** Group exhibition; 'Des Elles des Femmes', Centre Culturel d'Etterbeek - Espace Senghor, Brussels, Belgium

**2001** 'Viva la muerte!', Festival of world music, Couleur Cafe, Brussels, Belgium

**2002** Group exhibition at the 7th International Group Show and Art Festival, National museum, Enugu, Nigeria

**2004** 'Mythological landscapes', Espace Alizees, Brussels, Belgium

**2006** Conflict Culture: Exhibition/ Colloquium (L-ARN/M.A.P initiative), Brussels, Belgium

**2011** 'AS IT IS'; Contemporary African Art

Series, Mojo Gallery, Dubai UAE

**2012** Galerie Lumières d'Afrique,  
Brussels, Belgium

**2012** "The Future of Emotional  
Investments: Art as an Asset", Citi Group  
/ Bank of America Meryl Lynch, London,  
UK

**2014** "Nigeria at 100" Nigeria Art Society,  
WAC gallery, London, UK

**2015** "Ariya" Nigeria Art Society, WAC  
gallery, London, UK

**2015** "Platform" ART 21, Lagos, Nigeria

**2016** "Aurora" Nigeria Art Society, WAC  
gallery, London, UK

**2016** "STANDING OUT", Temple Muse  
Galley, Lagos Nigeria

**2017/18** « Legacies of Biafra » Brunei  
gallery, SOAS, London UK

**2017** "Biafra's Children: A Survivors  
Gathering", Documenta14 - Public  
Programs, Athens Greece

**2019** "Women & Migration" La Tricoterie,  
Brussels BE

#### Solo Shows

**2003** Solo Exhibition; 'Tapping into the  
known', Nimbus Arts Center, Lagos,  
Nigeria

**2007** Solo Exhibition; 'Tapping Into the  
Known', Brunei gallery, SOAS,

**2016** Solo exhibition "Lament of the Silent  
Sisters" ARTX Lagos Contemporary Art  
Fair, Lagos Nigeria

#### Architecture:

**1998 - Present:** Freelance architectural  
consultant specializing in residential  
renovations

**1994 - 1998:** AMS L'ESPRIT DU LIEU  
sprl, Brussels; Multidisciplinary practice  
including; architecture, interior design,  
fresco painting, furniture & lighting design

**1992 - 1994:** CHRISTOPHER SMALLWOOD  
ARCHITECTS, London; Architectural design  
& Landscaping - hotel complex for Java  
Express, Bali, Indonesia

**1991 - 1992:** TEAM ENGINEERING, Roma;  
Working drawings for La Ferrovia del  
Stato; a large scale engineering project  
for new railway stations in Rome.





As we say in Nigeria "I claim everybody" and I truly claim it all as mine. This is the life of an African woman who has lived in England and Belgium and loves Asian art and wants to be a master craftsman; I hope that all the richness of these layers are apparent. I don't have to prove anything because behind it all is my African Naija soul

► Ode to Remembrance: film, teaser, synopsis - FEB 2019  
 → Private **PREVIEW** with participants - MARCH 2019  
 SUAL POETRY/VIDEO ART → Public **outing** - JUNE 2019  
 LAUNCH

► Out of the Ashes: ① POLYPTYQUE - 12 panels - (JUVI JUDICES)  
 ② CHRISTI MILITIS ③ PANNEAU DE L'AGNEAU ④ LES JESUS INTEGRES  
 ⑤ LES ANGES MUSICIENS ⑥ LES ANGES CHANTEURS ⑦ HERMITES SANCTI  
 ⑧ PEREGRINI SANCTI ⑨ ADAM ⑩ EVE ⑪ ST JOHN THE BAPTIST  
 ⑫ LA VERGE ⑬ CHRIST/GOD  
 « MYSTIC LAMB »

LARGE PAINTINGS - « GODDESS TRAIL »  
 ① LA PIETA ✓  
 ② NARCISSUS ✓  
 ③ PRINTEMPS - "my own private mbari" ✓  
 ④ ~~DEATH~~ MARIANA  
 ⑤ EZEWANYI - NUT - EWEAL GRAND MOTHER  
 ⑥ OXUN ✓  
 ⑦ IDOTO  
 ⑧ ALA

WORKS ON PAPER « Fragments out of the Deluge »  
 mbari revisited - collage, Ink, oil paint







# ELEY FOR ALTO

(With drum accompaniment)

AND THE HORN may now paw the air howling goodbye...

For the Eagles are now in sight:  
Shadow in the horizon –

THE ROBBERS are here in black sudden steps of showers, of  
caterpillars –

THE EAGLES have come again,  
The eagles rain down on us –

POLITICIANS are back in giant hidden steps of howitzers, of  
detonators –

THE EAGLES descend on us  
Bayonets and cannons –

THE ROBBERS descend on us to strip us of our laughter, of our  
thunder –

THE EAGLES have chosen their game,  
Taken our concubines –

POLITICIANS are here in this iron dance of mortars, of  
generators –

THE EAGLES are suddenly there,  
New stars of iron dawn;



So let the horn paw the air howling goodbye...

O mother mother Earth, unbind me; let this be  
My last testament, let this be  
The ram's hidden wish to the sword the sword's  
Secret prayer to the scabbard –

THE ROBBERS are back in black hidden steps of detonators –

FOR BEYOND the blare of sirened afternoons, beyond  
the motorcades;  
Beyond the voices and days, the echoing highways, beyond  
the latescence  
Of our dissonant airs; through our curtained eyeballs,  
through our shuttered sleep,  
Onto our forgotten selves, onto our broken images;  
beyond the barricades  
Commandments and edicts, beyond the iron tables,  
beyond the elephant's  
Legendary patience, beyond his inviolable bronze  
bust; beyond our crumbling towers –

BEYOND the iron path careering along the same beaten track –

THE GLIMPSE of a dream lies smouldering in a cave,  
together with the mortally wounded birds.

Earth, unbind me; let me be the prodigal; let this be  
the ram's ultimate prayer to the tether...

AN OLD STAR departs, leaves us here on the shore  
Gazing heavenward for a new star approaching;  
The new star appears, foreshadows its going  
Before a going and coming that goes forever..



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07/27





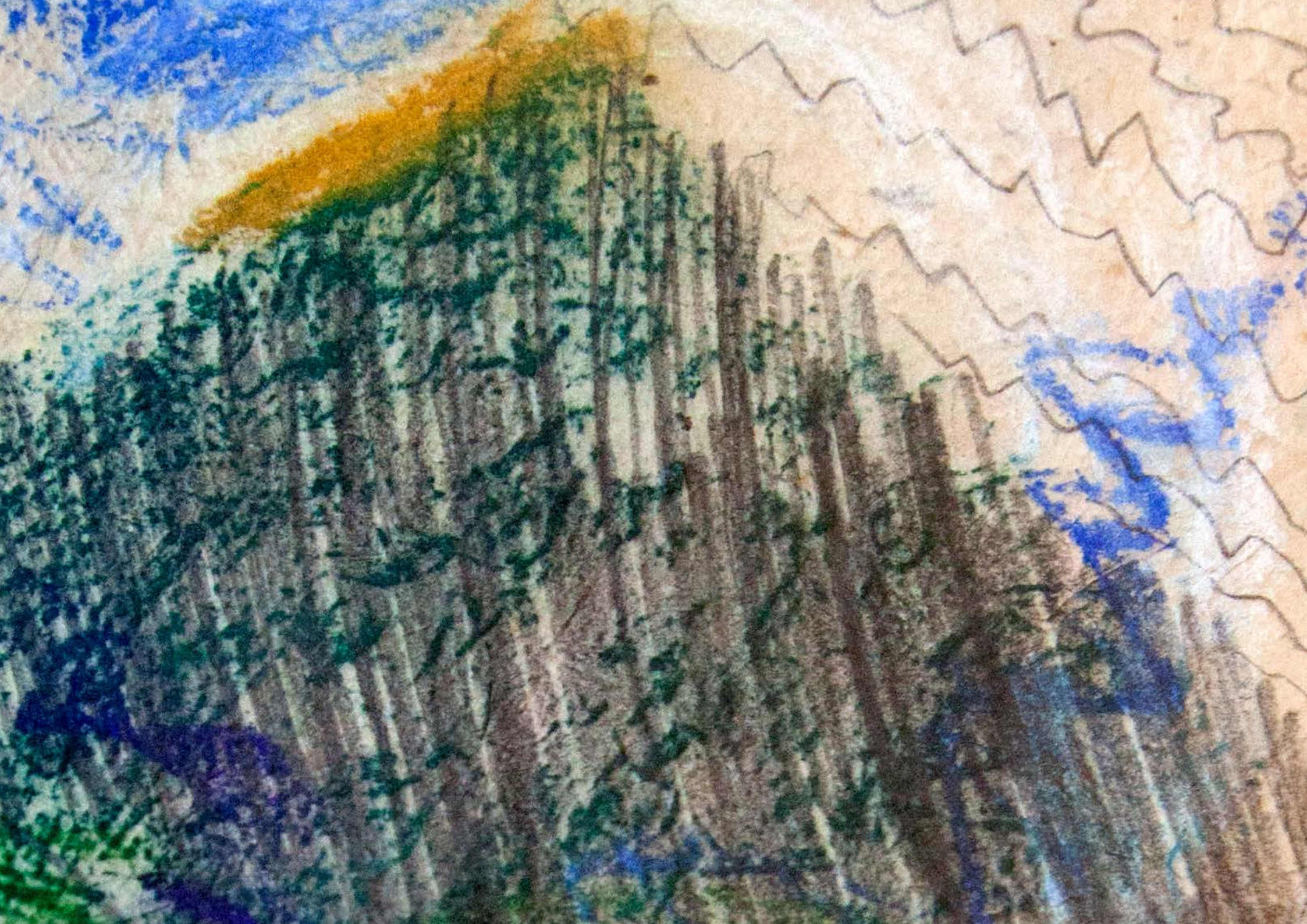


# Curator

Sandra Mbanefo Obiago is an art curator, photographer and award winning filmmaker who is passionate about strengthening the creative industry to develop the African continent. She is Founder and Artistic Director of SMO Contemporary Art, curating art exhibitions in non-traditional gallery spaces to promote the best of African art. She started her career in 1988 as a technical director and video editor at the European Business Channel in Zurich, Switzerland. Two years later she joined environmental group, WWF International, and covered environment and development projects in Sub-Saharan Africa as a photo-journalist for eight years. In 1998 she founded Communicating for Change (CFC), a media for development social enterprise based in Lagos, which became an important content provider for local and international television stations. Her award winning films and radio programs focused on human rights, women's empowerment, HIV & AIDS, environment, democracy and good governance, and art for development. Obiago is a Fellow

of the Aspen Institute's African Leadership Initiative for West Africa (ALIWA). She has a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Manitoba in Canada, and a Masters of Arts in Telecommunications from Michigan State University, USA. Obiago focuses on using creativity as an avenue for wealth creation and inspiring a positive narrative about Africa for local and international audiences









The Wheatbaker as part of the Legacy Hotel Group, has keenly supported Nigerian arts and culture since opening its doors in 2011. The hotel's commitment to celebrating the best of Nigerian creativity saw it dedicate its walls to showcasing exceptional traditional, modern and contemporary art. The Wheatbaker has hosted world class art exhibitions including the *Collectors' Series* (2011), *Making History* (2012), *Recent sculptures* (2012), *the WW Independence Series* (2012-13), *Flow, Here & There* (2013), *photography by Lakin Ogunbanwo, Duality, Unfurling*, (2014), *Eko Moves* (2014), *AKALAKA, The Contemporaries, Save Our Art! Save our Heritage!*, (2015-2016), *Equal Rights, Evolving Currents, Mental Space, Freedom* (2016), *Permutations, Standing Out II, Wanderlust* (2017), *The Wheatbaker Permanent Collection* (2017-18), *GBAM!, The Contemporaries II* (2018), *Recent Works, Eni! You Can Always Tell Where The Elephant Has Passed By*, and *If Walls Could Speak* (2019)







LOUIS GUNTRUM

Louis Guntrum was established in 1648, and eleven generations later, Louis Konstantin Guntrum has elevated the wines to fresh new heights. With their commitment to artistry, tradition and excellence, the Guntrum family is proud to introduce these new wines that represent the tradition and vision of a rich wine-making legacy in Germany's Rhine valley.

Louis Guntrum award winning wines are enjoyed in over 80 countries worldwide. A newcomer in the Nigerian market, Guntrum wine is pleased to support African creativity.









SMO Contemporary Art specializes in showcasing contemporary art in non-traditional exhibition spaces, focusing on established and emerging artists based in Africa and the Diaspora.

SMO priority areas include art curating, research and documentation, valuation, events, film and photography, training and artist talks. SMO has expertise in organizing exhibitions & events which provide a platform for the creative industry to inspire and strengthen humanity's aspiration for the good society.

[www.smocontemporary.com](http://www.smocontemporary.com)



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