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# Intransigence

Okey IBEABUCHI

Joel UTUEDOR

14th - 28th May 2016  
Manchester, UK.

**CHUCK**  
**GALLERY**

# FOREWORD

"INTRANSIGENCE", the theme of the second exhibition of Manchester based Chuck Gallery, evokes many poignant thoughts and images. Uncompromising, stubbornness, are just a few words which come to mind. Two promising artists from Nigeria - OKEY IBEABUCHI and JOEL UTUEDOR – are featured. One features vivid, confident yet warm, toned colours and the other moody with a sense of ambience and intimacy in his paintings.

Africa - and Sub-Saharan Africa in particular - is home to a thriving contemporary fine art culture which has come a long way since it was pioneered in the 1950s. Chuck Gallery with its 'uncompromising' focus to be one of the leading platforms for contemporary African art, is well positioned to achieve its goal of providing awareness and access to modern African art.

Starting with, and building on the successful showing last February (which had as its primary showing, the unique and sensuous works of FIDEL OYIOGU), Chuck Gallery is not only opening up minds but also dispelling and

countering many myths and misplaced prejudices previously associated with modern African Art. This compliments favourably, the deluge of interest and awareness of modern African art in the Western world.

The current exhibition features work by OKEY IBEABUCHI and JOEL UTUEDOR. The works feature the different influences and cultures of the artists reflecting the complex heritage of the region of provenance in Nigeria. They reflect Chuck Gallery's pioneering emphasis on accessibility and at the same time, contribute towards eliminating bottlenecks in finding a market for the artists' works. This uncompromising approach demonstrates significant potential for investment which can only continue to grow stronger and stronger as the word gets out.

*John Butt is a London based energy venture & private equity investor with Conduit Ventures Ltd and has a particular interest in Africa. He has been a keen supporter of Chukwudi Onwudiwe, Founder and Director of Chuck Gallery, for several years, having acquired several interesting works of emerging Nigerian artists in the intervening period.*

## GALLERY OWNER'S STATEMENT

The history of art is replete with shining examples of individuals pushing forward their singular vision of expression, despite the raging waves of opposition that threaten to eclipse their dreams. Many times, it is this unwavering sense of purpose, this courage to join the ranks of the avant garde that propels society to a higher order of civilization.

And this is what Chuck Gallery is celebrating in *Intransigence*: a cast of brilliant works that unveil the stubborn ingenuity of two young artists not afraid to take the road less travelled, even if that would mean walking alone, as both artists strive to refine the message in their hearts and execute the concepts blooming in their minds.

What Chuck Gallery is presenting is an interesting mix of pertinacity from both Joel Utuedor and Okey Ibeabuchi. While the former fearlessly dances around a theme many have stamped as taboo, the latter looks to 'expired' materials as a source and medium of expression.

It is fitting to reveal at this point another highlight of this feast of celebration. Emeritus professor of art, El Anatsui, Ghanaian installation artist with several years of practice in Nigeria, and perhaps the most celebrated visual artist from Africa, coincidentally mentored Ibeabuchi, one of the two artists whose

works will be delighting visitors.

The sculptor has earned renown for trying his hands on a variety of mediums. His early preference was wood and clay, which he organised to tell Ghanaian-based stories, with great sense of craftsmanship. The former academic at the Faculty of Visual Arts of the prestigious University of Nigeria, Nsukka, recently shifted to installation art, some of which resemble woven cloth that can be associated with Kente cloth. The amiable scholar has had exhibitions around the globe including the 8th Osaka Sculpture Triennale (1995); Smithsonian Institution, (2008) and Brooklyn Museum which anchored a massive display of his recent works entitled, 'Gravity and Grace: Monumental Works by El Anatsui' in 2013. Jewel on his crown is the Venice Biennale prize that, "acknowledges not just his recent successes internationally, but also his artistic influence amongst two generations of artists working in West Africa".

Okey Ibeabuchi studied fine art under El Anatsui at Nsukka and it is probably safe to say the Professor's interest in unusual materials—burnt wood, bottle tops, aluminium—to weave narratives has influenced Ibeabuchi. The parallel is palpable with the younger artist's deviant fondness for disused material and general found objects to bring about impressionable artistic constructs on canvass.

It was Picasso who declared that "The artist is a receptacle for emotions that come from all over the place: from the sky, from the earth, from a scrap of paper, from a passing shape, from a spider's web." Now, in Europe, the continent of this famous artist, we bring the brilliant works of two artists from Africa where the famous Picasso once journeyed to and gained inspiration for his now famous intransigent journey to Cubism.

Chukwudi Onwudiwe





OKEJI IBEABUCHI  
2016.

## CURATOR'S NOTE

### From Materials to Concepts

To this moment, I have never bothered to find out whether works of Okey Ibeabuchi and Joel Utuedor featured for this show actually compliment each other. Though I had followed their individual production closely for this collaboration, I had never felt it imperative to establish a 'rational' basis to breed intercourse. Where I come from, it doesn't matter the place a conversation begins. The aim is always at its arrival. So I am excited to see this duo show their works together in our gallery.

For me, if the plastic tubes, jute ropes, sawdust, wood and rafia assembled to build some of Ibeabuchi's pieces are regarded an innovative response to the way we process and recycle industrial wastes from factories in Africa, Utuedor's selected works—including a sensually provocative image—reposes what seems a voyeuristic lens in retrospect, and appraises the female form beyond erotic naunce.

Sourcing junk from local mechanic workshops, dump sites, and the streets within his neighbourhood in Lagos has been quite rewarding for Ibeabuchi. I could see that it gives him a sense of adventure and fulfillment whenever he talks about his practice and experiences. Junk for him, carries magic of endless visual

possibilities. He tries to look at its essence differently, and as conceptual functionality both as painting on flat surface and as relief sculpture protruding freely onto space.

By the time I had finished surveying his proposed works for this project, I couldn't help but acknowledge his gift of vision over what could be fashioned out from some of the everyday items that may have appeared useless before us.

The related body of abstract works featured here testifies to this fantastic transformation, which captivated me on my first encounter with them. They were primarily composed from discarded sacks and empty tube covers which are a common site in his studio. To give them a life of their own, Ibeabuchi reshapes the items into varying dimensions and textures, before mounting them on canvas and detailing their surfaces with heavy paints. The result in the untitled piece is at once captivating as it references elaborate designs found in contemporary African textiles, while the other has been delicately repurposed to allude to dramatic shapes in fabrics as well as revealing their rich materiality.

As for Utuedor, the second of the pair, there exists a documented history of polarized views over his nude oeuvre renowned for their lascivious forms, so much that conservative

critics describe them as obscene, lewd, carnal and indecent. Nevertheless, they are extolled by admirers, rather sarcastically, as 'voyeur' of the city.

Admittedly, were it not for nude portraitists like Utuedor, whose brushes defiantly move against the tide of public censorship, and rallied by the argument of our humble convictions as cultural brokers, perhaps it would have been impossible for the growing art audience and collectors across Nigeria, to engage his works with the sort of genuine curiosity which drew wide spread ovation from serious observers.

I once asked him what he sees, both in dreams and in real life,

Okey Ibeabuchi  
"Untitled."

24 by 36 inches.

Fabric, plastic covers & acrylic on canvas. 2016



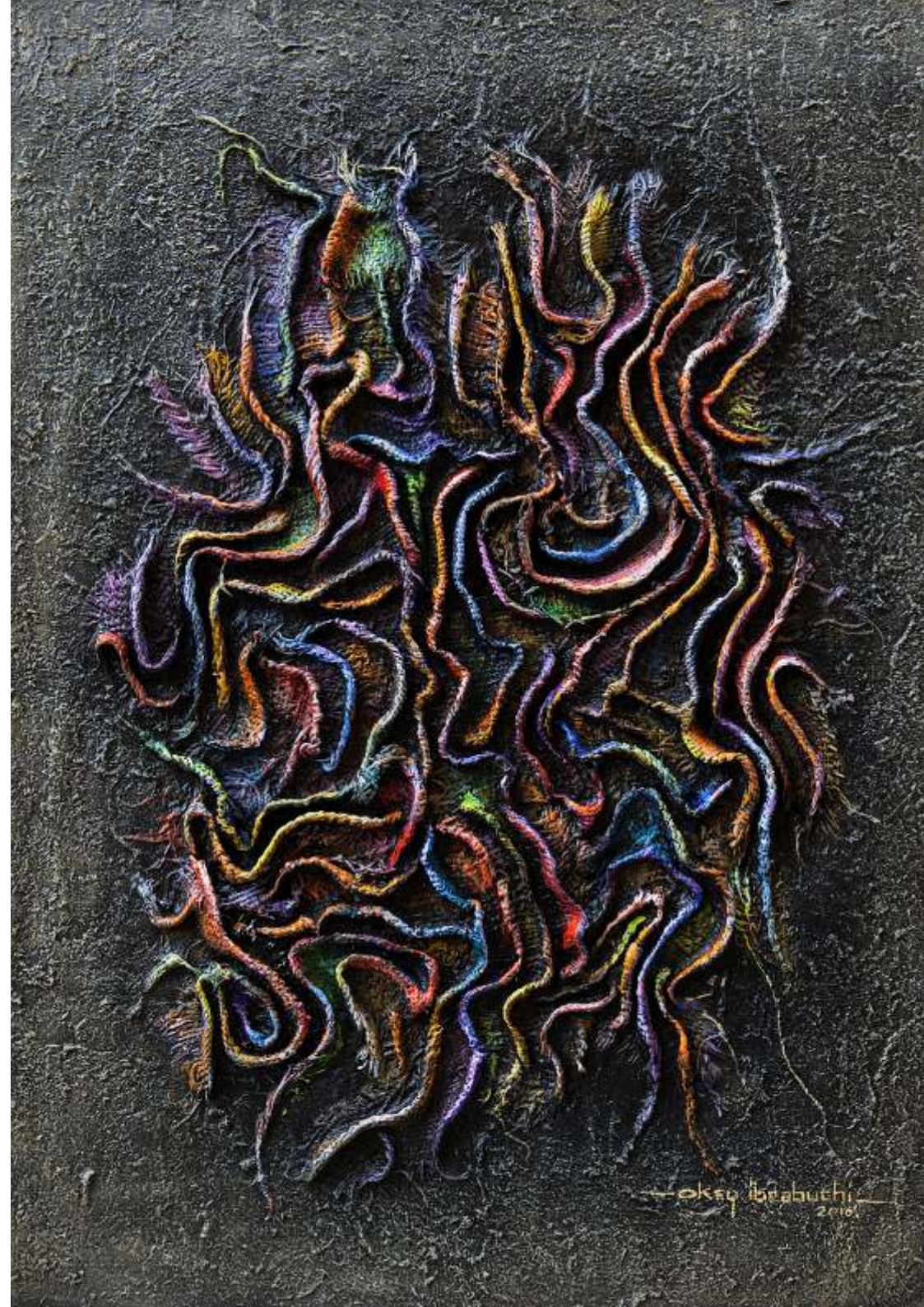


whenever images of the female body is before him. And he said to me: I see forms, I see beauty, I see life. His interest in scrutinizing these physiognomical structures intimately, resonates in the only nude piece featured in this show. From the rear, he presented his sitter and directed emphasis onto her exaggerated backside, thereby reducing its focal point to a single detail below the torso whilst forcefully compelling viewers to adopt an obsessive mind-set towards her.

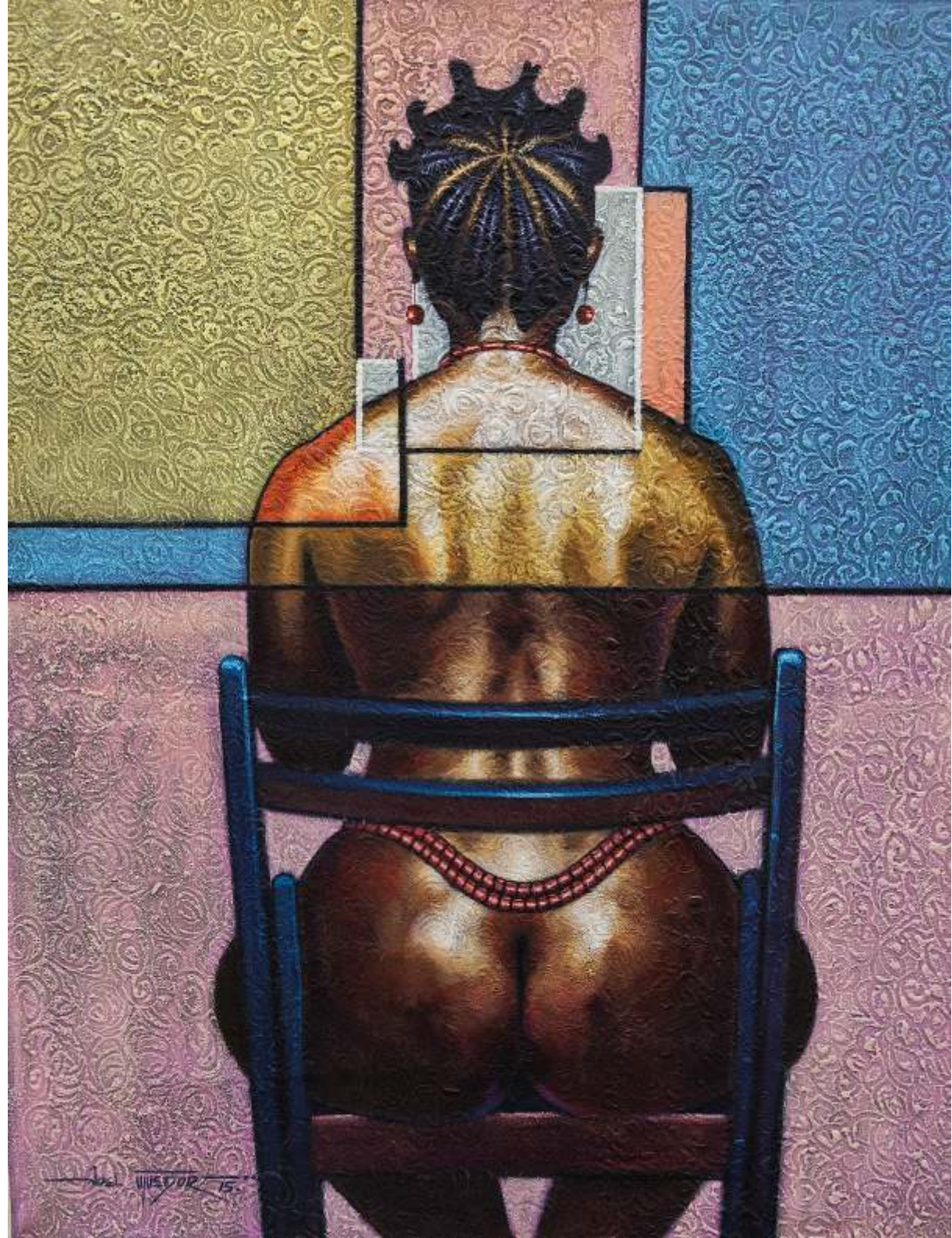
Besides his wit for the unclad, I have come to revere the electrifying and static expression projected by female subjects in his works. He has been stereotypical in their rendition, perhaps for what might seem an attempt to echo sensation in pop art and design. The immersion of simulated stitches to frame the eye and mouth of these figures, altogether work to add substance to my critique of his practice.

Ekiko Ita Inyang  
Chuck Gallery  
Curator

Okey Ibeabuchi.  
"Identity."  
30 by 41 inches.  
Sack & acrylic on canvas. 2016



Joel Utuedor.  
"Back view."  
43 by 55 inches.  
Oil on canvas. 2016



## OKEY IBEABUCHI IN FOCUS

Okey Ibeabuchi would probably describe himself as a multimedia painter, but I would suggest something of an experimentalist or exploration artist in addition to that. This graduate of the University of Nigeria Nsukka (fondly called the Nsukka Art School) has for over two decades, been defining his path in art circles with as much dexterity as required for the process. The artist, who relied almost entirely on his imagination, describes himself as one with a deep-rooted connection with the past and an eye on a very engaging future. He confides that he works essentially at the hybridization of masks and the female facial form.

Going through Okey Ibeabuchi's works, one is ushered into the darkness of an artist's creative soul. These works—alluring, dense, and heavily laden with shapes and forms—are somewhat grotesque as they are refreshing. This product of the University of Nsukka art school has over the years, carved a path for himself through the application of various paint media as well as found material to create bold statements on his canvases. His adventures in the field of sculpture have also resulted in beautiful relief works essentially presented in monochromatic colours and tones. Call him a follower of Africanist ideals, but quite palpable is the artist's strong inclination towards his native heritage and with it, the burning

desire to expand on the prospects offered by ancient African forms and symbols.

Although of Igbo extraction (South-eastern Nigeria), Okey has tapped into the nation's diverse advantages and one can see in some of his works, influences from Uli (South-eastern Nigeria), Benin art, Yoruba human forms and some aspects of Nok culture. His relief works are possibly influenced by the panel works of El Anatsui, who the younger artist has had the privilege of receiving tutelage from. Anatsui is currently Africa's most celebrated visual artist and a voice to reckon with in global contemporary art discourse.

A closer study of some of Okey's selected art reveals a well thought-out vision that sees his work in complimentary capacity to his world view. The painting 'Akwa' Nwa alludes to the beauty of woman, as understood and represented by the traditional Igbo woman's ornamental glamour and gait. The facial form, replete with facial decorations, evokes stylized symbols of reality and the facial mask culture. Also visible are symbolic shapes and forms reminiscent of the Uli writing traditions of Igboland. This multimedia output, essentially dominated by acrylic paints, jute and canvas, attempts a deliberately primordial but aesthetically valuable presentation, drawing us back in time to an era of ingenious traditions.

**Eye of the Beholder** discusses the subjectivity of beauty and how it generally remains within the prerogative of the observer to determine the standards of appeal, irrespective of any other dictates of society. Here, the artist makes a case for the heavily ornamented outlook of the average native African woman and elevates her to the realm of possible global consciousness. My instincts tell me that all art is remotely made for a universal audience and Okey may just be trying to drive his point home by underplaying this very fact.

**Difference** is a monochromatic and brilliant piece that examines the concept of uniqueness and ingenuity amongst a multiple. An interesting assemblage of jute, wooden filings, sticks, leaves and other organic matter and found objects in general, this more or less abstract presentation evokes an aura of a wealth of ideas locked within a mental casing of the reserved individual. The artist must have taken himself into account in making this art, being one of endlessly formless ideas and imaginations.

Okey Ibeabuchi.

"Difference."

24 by 36 inches.

Sack, wood, plastic junk & acrylic on canvas. 2016



On the broader sphere is every individual's constant struggle against other differing opinions and contending voices. Perhaps a case is being made for a steadfast definition of one's ideas, ideals and goals in the face of these constantly abrasive social features. Individuality is a fundamental right that should be upheld by any individual of considerable self worth. It is a phenomenon only debated in unusual social climates.

The predominantly abstract painting, **Impact**, also contains symbols and shapes easily identifiable with African formalistic traditions. The entire message of the work speaks differently though, in a manner suggesting a meeting point of various contending forces. In the middle is a less chaotic, more serene ambiance, like that found within a room where negotiations are taking place, while the contending forces outside, whom the indoor participants are representing, continue to make their impact felt through unsettling activity, be it demonstrations, or even violent protests.

**When Heaven Smiles** takes us to the metaphysical. Heaven (which is primarily a spiritual Eldorado) is brought to bear on a reality, or an experience replete with rewards and positive outcome. Many times, such a phrase comes as a response to years of toil and hard work. This is primarily a canvas painting primed with a mix of wood filings to give a textured finish. A

symbolic painting done in vertical bars placed in simultaneous fashion, it reminds one of the earlier works of Anatsui and validates the artist's claim to the older artist as one of his great inspirations. This work comes as an unusually bright variation of Okey's pieces, as it deals with symbols of Igbo traditional wall paintings and motifs. There is also a slight reference to fabric and floor mats as part of the perks of a new decorative symbol of success and achievement.

**We Must go Someday II** carries a very powerful message on different human phenomena including migration, pursuit of greener pastures, xenophobia and, of course, mortality. Irrespective of our desires to mix and relate with each other, there is always the self-other reality that constantly militates against a smooth transition into multicultural bliss.

The drummers pictured in this art piece are on their way home after a day's adventure playing for their audience for the earnings that would accrue. The excitement is palpable, the audience is trilled, and of course the trill gets to the drummers too who reciprocate with even more dexterity in their beats. But then there comes a time when the hands and limbs get tired, the audience gets weary, the songs get played out. The only thing facing the musicians and their audience is a retirement to their abodes. It is a moment of mixed feelings. An eventual release



Okey Ibeabuchi.  
"Adamma."  
30 by 41 inches.  
Sack & acrylic on canvas. 2016



Okey Ibeabuchi.  
"Identity."  
30 by 41 inches.  
Sack & acrylic on canvas. 2016

from an exhausting exercise, and the disenchanting realization that it is back to the blandness of everyday living, work, school etc., and every other thing that does not represent leisure or recreation.

The bigger picture reveals the ambitious migrant who travels to settle in a land far away from home. There is always a tinge of remorse that is felt at having to leave your place of childhood and comfort to a place of strange faces that sometimes make it clear that you are probably not welcome. The longing for the day you will 'return home' becomes a part of your musing—that country home you will retire to, that moment you sit with your relatives at the bonfire narrating your travails in the lands of yonder.

Yes, home always beckons, no matter how far one goes into the world in search of fame and fortune. We may also have to remind ourselves once a while that we have a certain time to spend in this life, after which we return to where we come from.

Going home is inevitable, as we can see; that ubiquitous reality that stares at us from the future, that reality that we must face some day in our hopefully lengthy and fulfilled life...

**Affection** deals with motherly compassion. In this mixed media work (done with acrylic and charcoal on canvas) there is the

picture of a nursing mother with her newborn baby in her arms. The two seem in a half conscious state, signaling an ethereal bond between them. The artist renders his forms with Uli motifs in a move that blends the human forms with the background and turns them into one unified body.

Motherhood will always be celebrated, perhaps beyond every other human activity or phenomenon, because it is the utmost embodiment of love and the permanent insurance of the continuity of the species. The near monochromatic effect also serves to pass a message of subtlety and reserve, as is ordinarily experienced in the relationship between a mother and her new offspring.

**Identity Thumbprint** is a multimedia exploration dealing with issues of nativity and citizenship. It also narrows down to problems and complexities of individualism. In managing citizen identity and security, government security and immigration agencies have over several decades, devised means of capturing and storing thumbprint data of citizens for purposes of easy identification and access. Thumbprints are perhaps some of the most unique and personal features in the human physique as no two human beings are similar to, or match each other in this regard. One can, therefore, aver that thumbprint identity is perhaps nature's ingenuity in identifying



okej iteabuchi  
2016





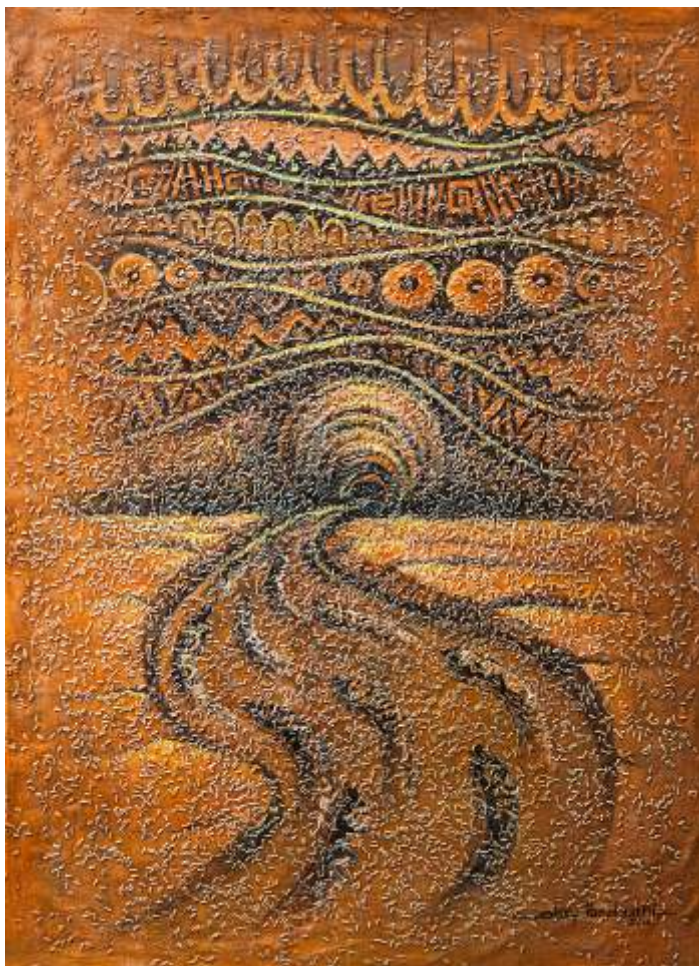
each and every one of its human creatures, something that has become increasingly fundamental in the gathering of human population and migration statistics.

**Compromise** examines female elegance and sexuality, especially within the African context. The subject, a female dancer, is well ornamented in traditional Igbo regalia. The textured background works to add flavor to a mix of acrylic and charcoal engagements on canvas. Traditional Igbo culture (just like many other cultures around the world) celebrates the female form through the highlighting of various bodily contours, and this is achieved by the painting of facial features and the ornamentation of protruding parts.

In all, the purpose is to allure as well as transfix the audience, even as they move their bodies in most suggestive manners with great wit and poise.

Obi Nwaegbe 5/16 Artist, Analyst

Okey Ibeabuchi.  
"Affection."  
24 by 36 inches.  
Charcoal & acrylic on canvas.



Okey Ibeabuchi.  
"Journey into the Unknown."  
30 by 41 inches.  
Beads & acrylic on canvas. 2016



Okey Ibeabuchi.  
"Untitled."  
30 by 40 inches.  
Acrylic on canvas. 2016

## JOEL UTUEDOR IN FOCUS

Joel Utuedor is a graduate of the renowned Auchi Polytechnic School of Art. Painting from both figurative references as well as from imagination, he produces images of humans as well as other natural and artificial objects placed within surreal backgrounds. Joel, who declared foremost realists **Abiodun Olaku** and **Ben Lustenhower** as his principal role models in a recent online chat, also works studiously with oils and acrylic paints as his major mediums on canvas.

One may not credit his art with so much philosophy, but Joel passes his message in subtle yet deep allegories and innuendos that suggest a vision beyond the ordinary. True to his Auchi training, he achieves this effect through the application of the brightest colours and most vivid forms. Particularly profound is his near obsession with the female figure including its sexuality.

**One Good Moment** is a venture into the cultures of the Benin Heritage. The deep and revered civilization that peaked in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, (and continues to epitomize the sophistication of black intellect and civilization) seems to be his inspiration for this work. The costume worn by the reference subject is the dominant feature of Edo royalty in traditional ceremonies, but also a feature of the affluent even in modern times. The woman wears a big smile, and yes, it is a smile that

signifies pride in her outlook, and a feeling of accomplishment.

**Nkiruka** also presents another female facial rendition, but this time, it is a subtle contrast to the first painting. The woman in view wears a somber look, like one in deep introspection or mourning, and this in addition to a plaited hair style that is synonymous with peasants of the region and other areas extending eastwards into Igboland and environs.

There is something elevating here though, and that is the subject's understanding of her state, as one who has suffered untold deprecation for centuries, for the virtue of being both female and African. This presentation is deep and elevating, and projects a subject from a civilization that is in a mood of revival; it pointedly shatters the popularly held stereotype of a suffering and smiling African lady, which is a more alluring feature that attracts enthusiastic response from a prejudiced audience. The concept of an unambitious and aloof African is the norm. This picture shatters all such stereotypes and ushers in a new angle of introspection, determination and focus.

**Take Me As I Am** is an invitation into the sensual. The artist has conveyed no innuendoes but rather offers a glaring invitation into the anals of the subject, and all the accompanying accessories. This robust female figure, typifies the embodiment



of what the African female represents—well fed and rounded in the presumably 'right places'. There is a little bit of colour play in the background, and then the attempt to merge the figure with the wall before her. This artistic play creates an environment of transparency and opaqueness in one mix. Apparently the ultimate purpose is to give the mind something to ponder about, swinging it between the affirmative position of availability, and the subjective position of probability.

The mystery of womanhood has remained unraveled for centuries and millennia, so that one could continue to probe, as would be done with an endless void, or hole, and never get to the bottom of it.

**Back View** offers a frontal perspective of similar subject with an essentially same mission: to offer the African perspective to sexuality and allurements.

**Our True Image** is an interesting work that deals with education and the Child Spirit. These two children (a boy and a girl) looking to their shadows, have been able to fill in their minds the gap within them. This gap, defined by society to prevent unwanted incidents, becomes a mental burden for

Joel Utuedor.

"Take me as I am."

32 by 25 inches.

Oil on canvas. 2015



José Uruñidor 15'



Joel Utuedor.  
"One Good Moment."  
40 by 52 inches.  
Oil on canvas. 2015



Joel Utuedor.  
"Nkiruka."  
43 by 55 inches.  
Oil on canvas. 2016



many. A school of thought avers that the estrangement of the sexes essentially mystifies them and makes the male and female see each other as territories or fortes. This unwittingly turns both sexes into rivals and in cases where love would rather prevail, we have in its place suspicion and discord.

The preponderance of sexual and psychological abuse can be linked to this phenomenon of sexual alienation. Apparently, in the mind of the artist, children should be taught to respect each other regardless of their sex. And in the end we will have in our hands adults communing in love and compassion, rather than in bitterness and rancor.

**United We Stand** takes us into the abstract and surreal, as well as the symbolic. This unique piece (particularly in relation to the fundamentals of Joel's work) takes us into the artist's imaginative

Joel Utuedor.

"Watch What You See."

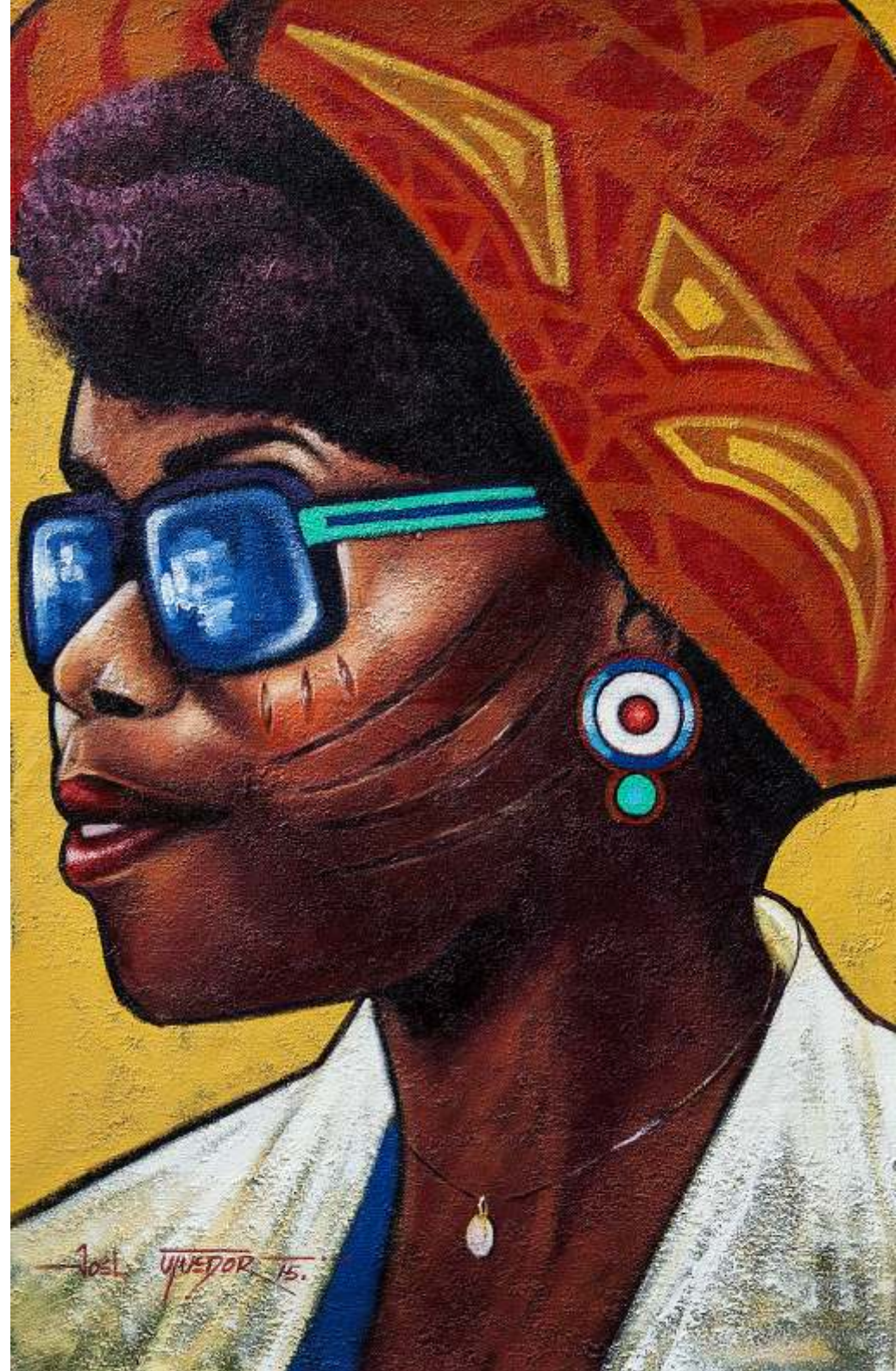
40 by 25 inches.

Oil on canvas. 2015

fantasies. Perhaps we await a journey into another realm of his realities, or perhaps it is just one aspect of his artistic narratives that would be thrown at us occasionally; but one thing can be established here, and that is the aesthetic appeal that this different direction represents. The prospects envisaged in his new suggestions are not in doubt, and that is as long as they are vigorously pursued, as in his other subjects, to a point deserving of extensive discourse.

Obi Nwaegbe 5/16 Artist, Analyst

Joel Utuedor.  
"Mistaken Identity."  
26 by 40 inches.  
Oil & acrylic on canvas. 2015







Joel Utuedor.  
"United we Stand."  
25 by 39 inches.  
Oil & acrylic on canvas. 2015



Joel Utuedor.  
"It's a Blue Day."  
33 by 53 inches.  
Oil on canvas. 2015

# PROFILE OF OKEY IBEABUCHI

Okey Ibeabuchi, b. 1971; Painter, sculptor

## Artist Statement

There is no limit to the possibility of materials, medium and techniques to be employed in spilling my innermost creative juice. Obviously, the search for the next materials, for the next paintings, is my greatest challenge. The question continues . . . .

## Education

Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri

1987, Fine & Applied Arts

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

1994 (B.A), Fine & Applied Arts

## Selected Exhibitions

2009 *Cultures*, Lagos

2010 *The Way We Are*, Lagos

2011 *Techniques & Sculptures*, Lagos

2012 *Master Strokes*, Lagos

2014 *The Way We Live*, Lagos

# PROFILE OF JOEL UTUEDOR

Joel Utuedor, b. 1972; Painter

## Artist Statement

From the beginning of creation, darkness and light have shown significant importance because they compliment each other. My art strategically portrays the importance of these two unique elements of creation. The beauty of every art work derives from the fusion of light and dark. Without these two principal elements of art, creation cannot be complete.

## Education

Auchi Polytechnic

1993 NCE, Fine Arts

1997 HND, Fine Arts

## Selected Exhibitions

1993 – 1997 *Department Exhibition, Auchi Polytechnic*

2013 *Art Monaco, France*

2013 *Tribal Art Africa, Lagos*

2014 *Off the Bin Project: From Thrash to Treasure, Lagos*