

LEGACY

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G A L L E R I S T S T A T E M E N T

With passion and inspiration, the gallery's newly discovered artist has explored a difficult and complex inquiry- the West Indian experience- an experience I first encountered as a student of Caribbean Literature at the University of Ibadan. The illuminating books of Derek Walcott, V.S. Naipaul, Claude Mckay with other creative writers of Caribbean origin and that entire literary tradition, greatly helped to reveal that painful history with inherent dislocations, including the struggles of moving away from the traumatic past and ahead to a more reconcilable future. Taking a backward look is not a bad thing, but a good step in re-education and possibly regeneration, which certainly happens when we celebrate the strengths of that cultural experience.

So it gives me deep pleasure to present the visceral works of Manchester's Josephe Cocles, a Guadeloupe native, educated at the prestigious Ecole Nationale Superieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris at the age of 19, married to a Nigerian and with three children. She has dug deep into her heredity to extract and make meaning of that cultural experience. With a background in anthropological and philosophical studies, interests that were first stirred in young Josephe by her immediate family, she taps from the lenses of symbolism, totemism and pre-Columbian vestiges, to interpret current realities.

I trust you will have a splendid and a satisfyingly reflective time as you immerse yourself in Josephes' Legacy collection.

Chukwudi Onwudiwe

CURATORIAL NOTES I

CATHARSIS

Inner truth, the search for the essential, is a bigger subject than pop culture and a noble pursuit for art. Josephe Cocles' journey has seen her art evolve in tandem with a deeper meditation. Spirituality is engraved in her art-work. Carl Jung rightly stated that 'there is no coming to consciousness without pain' and so Dogon is a means of catharsis. 'Catharsis' Aristotle said 'is the purging of the emotions of pity and fear that are aroused in the viewer of a tragedy.' The tragic fall of Timbuktu as informed by a 2012 newspaper article inspired the mixed-media work. Many Dogon people, in the animist tradition, believe all life is spirit as opposed to matter, and, importantly, instead of writing, communicate with their ancestors through art-works. Her own art practice shares similar characteristics. The theme of mother cradling child is popular in Dogon sculpture but she highlights tension by breaking with the traditional mirror image and off-setting the symmetrically placed spirals usually found in Dogon culture. This charges disharmony into the work to create silhouettes. According to Robert Hobbs, profile in Platonic terms got 'closer to the level of ultimate forms' impacted by the divine spirit, so, the silhouette, he reasoned, went 'beyond capturing a ...physical likeness to convey a sense of ... essential being.' The release of colour is truly overwhelming and cuts through all the disharmony to remind us of the temporal nature of tragedy. She purges pity and fear to provide relief from the tragic events that have consumed her by reminding us of resilience.

Analogously, Cocles' most vibrantly painted series, Medu Neter 1-111, also a means of catharsis, additionally assists in a healing process. Her estranged father after falling seriously ill became the subject and plant life becomes representative of suffering in this natural tragedy. Medu Neter; the classical language of Africa, and the oldest spiritual teachings, are widely believed to be words of nature. Plant life, the recurring theme in this series becomes more than an indoor reminder of the outside world, it represents an indigenous culture that has a more intimate relationship with nature. Through its living presence and familiarity it has also transitioned into

a subject that acts as a stand-in for human beings. Although the forms derive from her drawn studies of plant and tree hieroglyphs of Egypt, the lotus flower to the bottom right of Medu Neter 1 resembles the form of a trumpet. The trumpet has always been used for rituals to pass messages from our world to the spirit world. The sounds produced by the trumpet were said to possess magical powers which enabled them to bridge the divide between the two worlds, so, music, although invisible, is spiritually engraved in this work. Music and colour choices empower her art-work. The primordial colours that dominate this acrylic series of paintings read as a manifestation of life itself and cut to what is essential. Yellow is the light giving sun, red is the blood, and blue the water; all necessities for survival. Significantly, green is nature itself. By giving life to such forces she purges pity and fear from this natural tragedy by reminding us both of our temporal place in one world, and of our permanent place in another.

BLUES

Titian was uncompromising in his use of ultramarine, a very expensive pigment, and, that is when the colour blue first took on emotional and spiritual significance. Kandinsky reinforced this by stating it to be 'the most spiritual colour' adding 'the deeper it is the more it awakens human desire for the eternal.' However, Picasso problematizes this notion when he found expression in a series of sentimental paintings known as his blue period during a personal trauma. Consequently, the colour is also synonymous with melancholy. For Cocles, the colour blue in Unity, adopts the former definition by evoking an infinite sky. Meditation is a trust in something bigger than oneself and also demands that one clears the mind but not by a process of emptying it. Studies conducted by Masaru Emoto concluded that water exposed to positive words, music and thoughts formed beautiful crystals but water exposed to negative words, music and thoughts formed fragmented crystals. Although contested science, she believes that sacred music modifies her own DNA, and, importantly, that such music is an invisible but spiritual element in her art-work. Analogously, the colour blue now becomes spiritual by representing water on an invisible level. This belief that we are all unique in one universe resonates strongly in this acrylic painting as the faces are divided by an architectural

structure, weaving harmoniously but asymmetrically around them, suggesting that nothing is fixed. Crucially, Unity assists in a process of seeing one's self as a site of potential change whereby fluidity occurs. A spiritual site.

Symphony, channels this idea of music more visibly into Cocles' work. A fairly nomadic life has left her open to a myriad of influences from across the globe and this near symmetrical acrylic painting was inspired by listening to Bach whose church music is often cited as a symbol of divine order. Alex Ross recognizes his works as 'feats of synthesis, mobilizing secular devices to spiritual ends.' Her meditation on music and symphony was never going to be a sky at night. Symphony is a smaller representation of the universe with songs as forms and not planets, so therefore a better reminder of our place in it. The colour blue once more evokes an infinite sky and the red and blue dots, primordial forms, mark out what is sacred. Continuing her theme of invisible visual art, a restitution of particular images captured in other dimensions of her reality, these different songs of the universe correlate with the sacred music she hears to create a work which reiterates her belief that God is also present in her art-work.

LEGACY AND BEYOND

Laura Cumming asks, 'how is an artist to represent fertility when it is an unknown quantity - an entirely invisible state? Nobody knows who has it and who doesn't, at least from the outside.' In Legacy, Cocles fuses her knowledge of pre-Columbian art with spirituality to properly examine the subject herself, expressing something deeper that can not be discerned in the visible world. This mixed-media painting contains many ancestral symbols that illustrate the invisible state Cummings refers to yet also emphasizes the unchanged meanings attached to them. Many legends and traditions live on still and without written languages we can only understand ancestral relationships with nature through their rituals and art-works. The Baluba motif, a woman supporting bowls, was popular and represents a guarantor of fertility. Analogously, the faithfully depicted Bakuba mask found to the bottom left was placed next to the kings' wives during childbirth to ensure safe delivery. The top right scrolls date back to West African Voudoun religious practice and refer to Papa Legba, a gatekeeper to the spirit world associated with creation rituals.

The centre-left design dates back to indigenous Arawaks, the Ignere, deeply spiritual animists who lived in Guadeloupe, her birthplace. The carvings; a rock art, are realized by removing part of the rock surface before making incisions became synonymous with fertility rituals as women descended on them to give birth. Bottom right, the Trois Pointes, also found in Shaman dates back to the Taino, an indigenous Caribbean people whose ceramic pieces were used to fertilize the soil. Channeling fresh voice through these ancestral symbols engraves spirituality into the work. What could easily be an overactive composition has instead been tempered with her calming palette and there is also meaning and a balancing of form in the structural ordering which is realized fully in Divine. What unites all these symbols is that they are all in the ancestor-based, theist, animist tradition. I have already explained examining Dogon how her own art-work shares similar characteristics and how by examining her Medu Neter series she prizes out the essence of life by introducing other representative elements. Elements that also open up lines of communication between this world and the ancestral world.

Cocles states that 'between abstraction, myth, symbol, colors, memory and cosmogony... something is taking place; an image.' I have illustrated that this is an exciting way to create art-work, and by contrasting the pre-2014 with the work thereafter it is possible to discern a deeper meditation taking place. The very early works although a little crude in comparison are also exciting to view as they capture the zest of influences. Influences not as clearly visible in many later works. In an age when pop culture blinds so many people to inner truth this exhibition offers people a fresh way of seeing and thinking.

Curator David Tindall, is a UK based blogger, writer and record aficionado, specializing in world-music and the social functions of art, after pursuing an MA in art history. He engages with artists directly and chiefly promotes their work via his own blog 'Sock Free Hideaway' or freelance writing for Trumpet media.

Josephe exhibits a beguiling cultural and artistic heterodoxy within a core hieroglyphic Africanity. Her paintings are replete with pathways, meridians, crossings, navigations, parallels and tunnellings; they hold aspects of the sombre and the joyous, of the occult, the overt and the playfully modern brash.

- Peter Kalu



35 x 35 inches

COSMIC

Acrylic on Canvas
2007



39 x 20 inches

UNTITLED

Oil, Mixed Media
1992



39 x 20 inches

THE SUN IS BACK

Acrylic on Canvas
1997



24 x 24 inches

ENIGMA

Oil on Canvas

2013



35 x 35 inches

DIVINE

Acrylic on Canvas
2013



24 x 35 inches

UNITY

Acrylic on Canvas
2013



39 x 20 inches

LEGACY

Mixed Media on Canvas

2006



24 x 24 inches

SHAMAN

Mixed Media on Canvas
2005



35 x 35 inches

SYMPHONY

Acrylic on Canvas
2007



35 x 35 inches

MEDU NETER III

Acrylic on Canvas
2014



10 x 8 inches

HARMONY

Mixed Media on Canvas

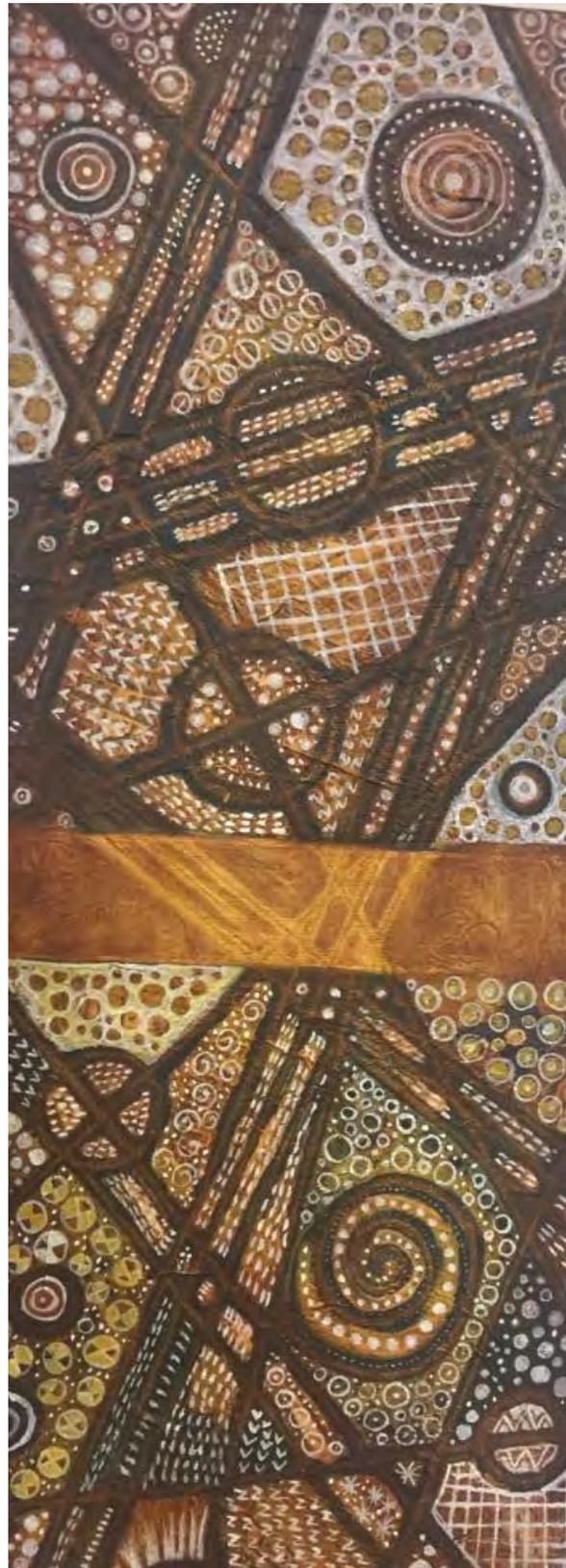
2010



24 x 24 inches

DOGON

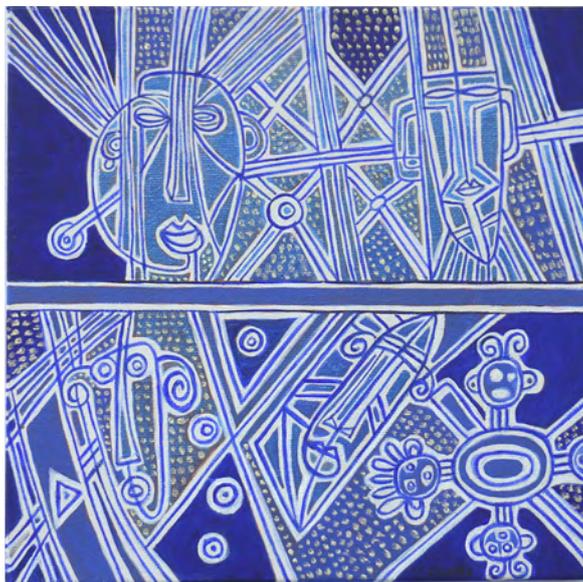
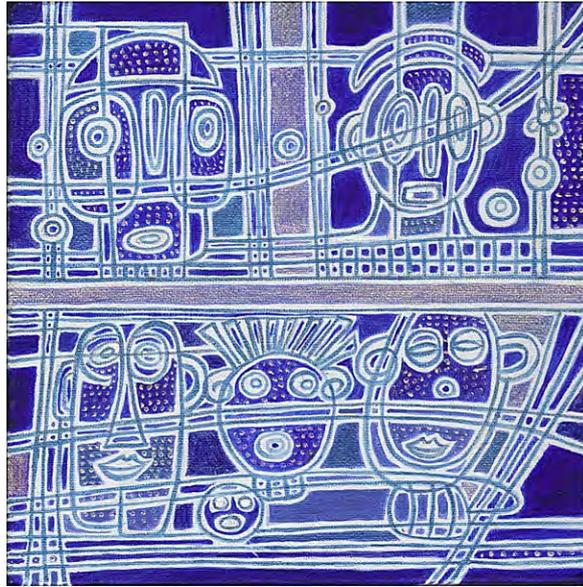
Mixed Media on Canvas
2013



24 x 8 inches

UNTITLED

Oil, Mixed Media on Canvas
2009



8 x 8 inches

TRIPTYCH

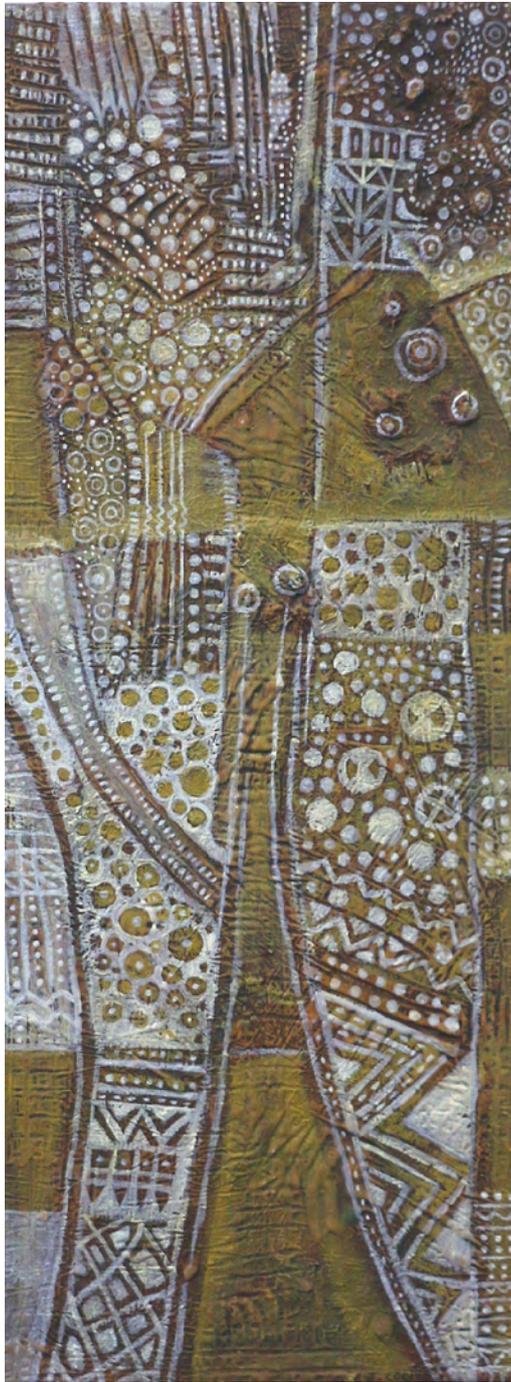
Acrylic on Canvas
2013



35 x 35 inches

MEDU NETER II

Acrylic on Canvas
2014



24 x 8 inches

UNTITLED

Oil, Mixed Media on Canvas
2009



24 x 24 inches

UNTITLED

Oil on Canvas

2012



39 x 20 inches

ANCESTRAL PASSAGE

Mixed Media on Canvas

1997



35 x 35 inches

MEDU NETER I

Acrylic on Canvas
2014

ABOUT JOSEPH COCLÉS

NATIONAL EXHIBITIONS

2013 Open studio AWOL, Hope Mill French, Greater Manchester

2012 Open studio AWOL, Hope Mill French, Greater Manchester.

2011 Art show, studios AWOL, Hope Mill FRENCH, Great Manchester

2009 African Business Conference and Exhibition, Manchester City Stadium, Great Manchester.

2008 African Business Conference and Exhibition, Easter Pearl Banquet Hall, Great Manchester.

2005 Exhibition to 16 Art show, in Sidney Bechet Centre, Grigny.

2004 Group exhibition, ECCOA Association, Pajol, Paris 18.

2003 Group exhibition : Cultural Centre Christiane Peugeot, Paris 18.

2002 Pablo Picasso's Cultural Centre, group exhibition, Montreuil.

- Theatre " Air Nouveau" group exhibition, Aubervilliers.

- Marcom Society , crafts compositions, Paris 12eme.

- Katanga, "Baifall Dream ", group exhibition, Paris 17.

1999 "Moulin neuf" crafts compositions, Stains, France.

1997 Individual exhibition, Gallery ARCIMA, Paris 5.

1994 Dance Theatre, Epinay-Sur- Seine, group exhibition.

1993 International Campus University, Paris 13.

1992 Culture's house Paris 18.

1990 Fresco's group for Bouadoubout's school, Guadeloupe.

1989 Group exhibition at the National Workers's Association, Paris 11.

1988 African Caribbean's Festival, Epinay, Cultural Center.

INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS

2004 Group exhibition, Festag Trade Fair, Badagri - Lagos, Nigeria.

1998 Group exhibition, Gallery 198, London, Great Britain.

1995 Exhibition to the ethnology Museum Nimegue, Neederlands.

- Exhibition to the Gerardus V.D. Groningen, Neederlands.

1985 Exhibition of the first Show of Young Painters in Guadeloupe.

EDUCATION

African Studies

- Certification in Religion: Afro- Brazilian
- Certification in History: Africa Sub - Saharan
- Certification in Geography: Tropical Africa
- Certification in Anthropology: African movie

1983-1986 Art Centre, Art Design Certificate, Guadeloupe.

1987-1991 " Ecole Nationale Superieure des Beaux -Arts of Paris ".

1988 University Paris VIII, Bachelor equivalence in Arts.

1989-1992 University Paris VIII, Graduate in Art Graphic. `

- Certificates in African Studies.

1996 Skills in P.A.O. Quark Express, Photoshop and Illustrator, CNA- CEFAG.

2007 Esol : Certificates, Entry 3 - English, Mancat.

JOSEPHE COCLES (FRENCH, BORN 1967)

Josephe's discovery of art began with a curious investigation into her identity after she discovered Senegalese masks that her mother had acquired on a trip across Africa. With most of her immediate family having keen interests in various artistic mediums from visual arts to pre-Columbian archaeology to storytelling of myths and legends, her curiosity for the arts was piqued from a young age.

Selected to study at the prestigious Ecole Nationale Superieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris at the age of 19, she began an exploration into the themes of history, archaeology and pre-Columbian influences that now reflect in her dynamic and mystic approach to artistic expression. Paradoxically describing invisible visual art as her philosophy, Josephe is passionate about making visible the internal explorations of the human mind leaving her predominantly abstract work created with acrylic, oil and pottery open to a motley of interpretations.

With pieces that draw from the hieroglyphs found in ancient Egyptian tombs and prehistoric cave markings, Josephe has continuously used symbolism and the African legacy to elevate herself and her viewers in over 20 national and international exhibitions. She is married to a Nigerian with three children.

Artist's Statement

I am fascinated by the power of music, sounds, mantras, colours that can literally change our DNA. media that can be used to evolve spiritually or for healing. What I would like to achieve is creating art which can have a high degree of aesthetics but most of all art that has meaning.

Art is sacred and so I would like to have a work environment where I am able to explore 'sacred geometry' i.e. find a symbolic pictorial language which is resonant with sacred music and alchemy of colours. This is particularly why I like to work on medium and large canvases to express myself.



CHUCK 
GALLERY