

Queen Mother
Artist Ovie 1st King Iruru

Musings of a first-time art buyer.

I have been aware of the Chuck gallery for a few years but hadn't managed to visit, until a couple of weeks ago, when I attended a book launch.

I was prepared for an evening of culture and discourse at the gallery, things one would expect with a book launch, but I was not at all prepared for the magnificence of the pieces contained within its walls.

Deep colours, exquisite textures, capturing the beauty of the artists' muse whether that be a person, dancers, urban life drew my eye from painting to sculpture to painting, in utter amazement. I've always known that there is more to African art than, the child-like stick figures that are usually thrust upon us, when African art is alluded to, and to see examples of it in the proverbial flesh, is something I am grateful for.

One piece resonated with me so deeply that I bought her – Queen Mother.

The Queen Mother is a painting of Idia, mother of Esigie, an Oba (king) that successfully overcame his brother in a civil war between two kingdoms. His mother, Idia is revered for her role in his success, and the station of 'Iyoba' (Queen mother) was bequeathed upon her; indeed from then on, iyobas were respected for their political influence, mystical powers and leadership skills in their own right and independent from that of their sons. The image of Idia, immortalised in an ivory pendant, convalesces in the British museum (along with so many other 'stolen, ahem, borrowed' artefacts), and is from where the painting draws its inspiration. A mixture of green, yellow and black acrylic, oil, and perspex gives it a three-dimensional quality, whereby queen mother jumps out from the canvas and penetrates one with her stare. Mesmerised by this, I knew I would have to make her mine. She now rests on my wall at home, and as I marvel at my first art purchase, I know that this is an investment not only in terms of monetary value but of cultural too.

You see, I am all too keenly aware, that art and art history in the western world is predominantly slanted towards the Eurocentric. It is not a stretch to say that, undoubtedly, more value is placed on those pieces, than such in this gallery. Indeed, the price tags on the paintings would be considered affordable, even cheap by a weathered art buyer, however this does not mean that the level of dedication is any less, nor that these pieces are any less sophisticated, quite the contrary, it simply, indicates a lack of knowledge about and promotion of black art.

Conversations are happening now in the mainstream about making art more accessible to 'Joe Public', I feel that the Chuck Gallery is contributing to this, and I would encourage you to venture here and look.

Tosin Idowu
(first time art buyer)