

if a drawing could feel like a dance, what would that look like?

'IT'S NOT THAT I'M BLACK... MY WORK ISN'T ABOUT IDENTITY AT ITS CORE,' SAYS NIGERIAN ARTIST RUBY ONYINYECHI AMANZE

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Ruby Onyinyechi Amanze (<http://rubyamanze.com/>) is tired of people asking about her identity in relation to her work. Sure, she's got an interesting one – the 36-year-old is Nigerian born, British raised, American based – but that's not what her art is about. 'None of this is about me as an individual or about the identity of these characters,' Amanze explains, pointing to artworks that display her signature graphite, ink, coloured pencils and photo transfers on paper, with bursts of colour and suspending figures dancing across expanses of white space.

'I'm trying to be intentional about how the work is talked about,' she adds. 'My work isn't about identity at its core. The part that is more interesting [to me] is how I can play with space; it's not that I'm black. Sure, that's there and of course it's part of my work, but I'm really just having a lot fun on

the paper, moving things around and creating a narrative. That's what gets me into studio every day; that's what keeps me on this paper for hours. That's the story I want to tell.'



Untitled (diver and motorbike)

2018

Graphite, photo transfers, coloured pencils and metallic enamel on paper

Work: 139.7 x 101.6 cm



Untitled (bird and motorbike)

2018

Graphite, ink, photo transfers and coloured pencils on paper

Work: 105.4 x 128.3 cm



Untitled (yellow square)

2018

Graphite, ink, photo transfers and colour pencil on paper

Work: 103 x 141 cm

And story it is: figures and objects dance across her works as Amanze deftly explores movement, space and the medium of paper in a truly thrilling way. 'If a drawing could feel like a dance, what would that look like?' Amanze asks. Her answer is in each artwork she creates.

So why drawing? Why paper? After studying fine art at the Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Pennsylvania, and then her master's in fine art at Michigan's Cranbrook Art, Amanze won a Fulbright Scholarship that took her the University of Nigeria. It was a deeply intentional move. 'I wanted to think about drawing which, for a long time, especially in the Nigerian context, had been regarded as a secondary art form,' says Amanze. 'There's painting, there's sculpture, and drawing was only there to serve as a preliminary study for those two things. So I was exploring what it meant to make drawings that were intended to be finished where, culturally, it wasn't regarded as valid.' It would ignite a love affair with the medium that has come to characterise her work.



'That there are fibres that have literally been forced and woven together that can remember things that have happened is something I find very beautiful and potent about [paper],' continues Amanze. It's also a strikingly juxtapositional medium: strong yet so easily ripped, historical yet so prone to damage and decay.

But perhaps most compellingly for Amanze is how the medium pairs so elegantly with her own method: 'I work on the floor,' explains Amanze, 'sitting inside the drawing [as I make it], which feels important as part of the process. So, for however long the drawing takes, I get to live inside the world of it. And paper is going to remember: it's going to remember my body, the little spill of tea, the mark that didn't quite erase all the way. By sitting in and on it, it starts to build these somewhat invisible layers of history.' How ironic, then, that so many interpretations of Amanze's work are about how clean they are – white space, crisp lines, precise markings. Yet look closely and you will see they are quite the opposite: littered with the soft, gentle footprints (or perhaps more accurately, handprints and bum prints) it took to create them.

'You know,' ponders Amanze, 'I have never known what a drawing will look like until the end.' But take the time to really observe her creations and the faint markings of the journey she took to get there – however unknown the final destination – are clear.

currently showing

There are even moonbeams we can unfold by Ruby Onyinyechi Amanze is showing at Cape Town's **Goodman Gallery** (<http://www.goodman-gallery.com/>) until 16 June 2018.



The Gap [and the beams of sub, special ordered on our behalf]
2017
Graphite, ink, photo transfer, metallic pigment, acrylic on paper
427 x 183 cm



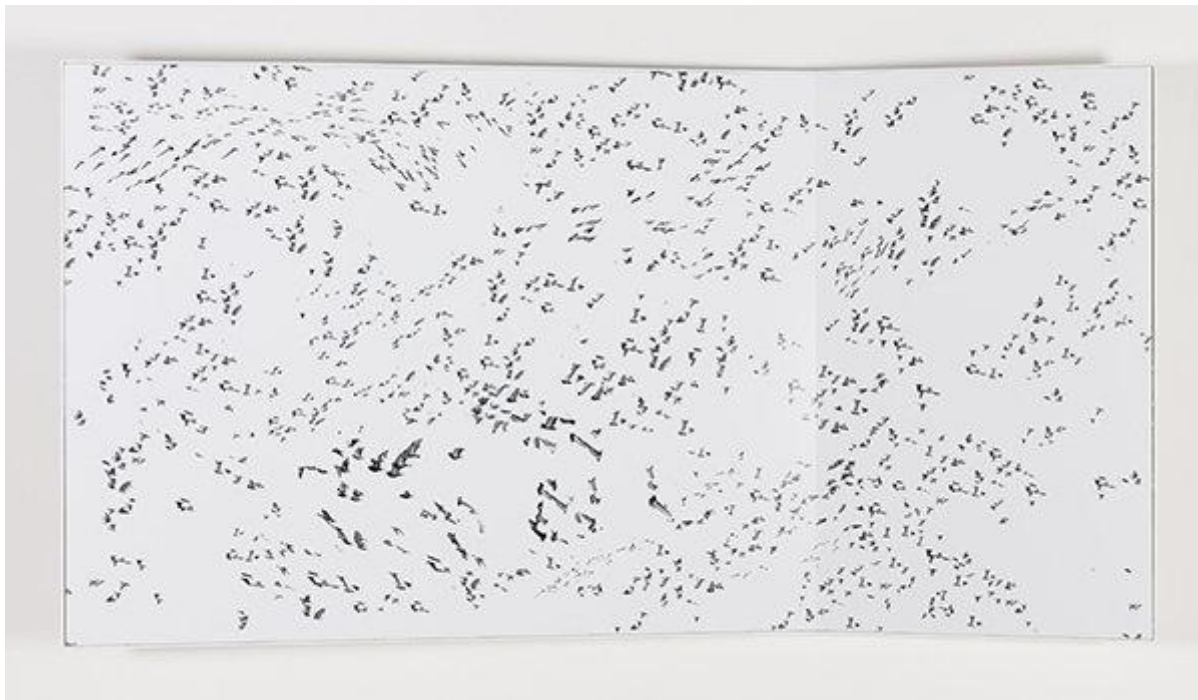
Untitled (diver)

2018

Diptych

Graphite, ink, paper, photo transfers on plaster coated paper

Graphite, ink, photo transfers, resin coating on paper





Untitled (flying and upside-down women)

2018

Graphite, ink, paper, photo transfers, colour pencils

96.5 x 127 cm



Untitled (birds and plants)

2018

Graphite, photo transfers, coloured pencils and metallic enamel on paper

Work: 139 x 99 cm

Sarah Browning-de Villiers (<https://twitter.com/sarahmbrowning?lang=en>) is an art writer who contributes to titles including *House and Leisure* and *Harper's Bazaar Art*.