

JULY 17, 2020

ARTISTS WE LOVE: RUBY ONYINYECHI AMANZE



INTERVIEWED BY Lindi Brownell Meiring **IMAGES** courtesy of the ruby onyinyechi amanze and Goodman Gallery

US-based, Nigeria-born visual artist ruby onyinyechi amanze, who is represented locally by Goodman Gallery(<https://www.goodman-gallery.com/>), **creates large-scale mixed-media drawings on paper.**

Here, VISI chats to her about creativity, collaborations and how dance, architecture and design influence her work.



What do you love about being creative?

Hmmm... this might seem odd, but I love how tiring it is. Tiring in the sense that it doesn't end and you just have to keep going. You feed it and it asks for more. But that's the joy! Kerry James Marshall said, 'inspiration is generated by work'. I believe that. To be creative...to be an artist is a commitment. And there's responsibility in it. Not necessarily to others, although they do factor in at some point, but to the craft itself. To being honest and staying curious. You can't know all the answers and that's exciting. It's like you have this gift – the initial skill or love or desire – and it continues to grow the more you allow the unknown. I love the possibility of the future and how big it is. Some things have caps to them. Ceilings. But not creativity. You get to be a child forever. There's a purity to it. And simultaneously you get to watch the developments grow into things you couldn't have imagined. Then you do it all over again... and again... and again, until you die!

In what way do dance, architecture and design influence the worlds you create on paper?

Dance appears in two ways. I often reference dance/dancers in the forms themselves. The positions and interactions of the ada and audre [a leopard and an alien] are pulled from stills of dancers performing. I look for moments of tension, balance, an awkward beauty and intimacy. I want a feeling of movement in the work... I want the viewer to gaze in and out of the space. Dance is a portal for that. Secondly, I'm dancing and choreographing as I draw. I am negotiating relationships between objects to create a composition... a feeling... an essence of a place. I am concerned with beauty and timing, gesture and mark. I respond and initiate. While drawing, my body physically moves left, right, pivots, pauses. I crash some things and let others meet tenderly. I'm thinking of dance constantly.

Architecture. Constructing/ed spaces. Again, both as reference images – windows, doors, the suggestion of a floor meeting the wall – in the process of building a drawing and considering how one will inhabit the space.

Design. I'd love to be called a designer. That I'm designing drawings. It automatically removes some of the pressures of narrative – which I'm not interested in anymore. I'm not a storyteller (even though I am). I'm an organiser and a poet, which to me is design. I have seven elements to work with – the paper, windows/architecture, birds, ada (fka ada the

Alien), audre (fka audre the Leopard), bikes and swimming pools. The configurations are endless and that's where design comes into play.



Detail: Swimming Pools (Diver)

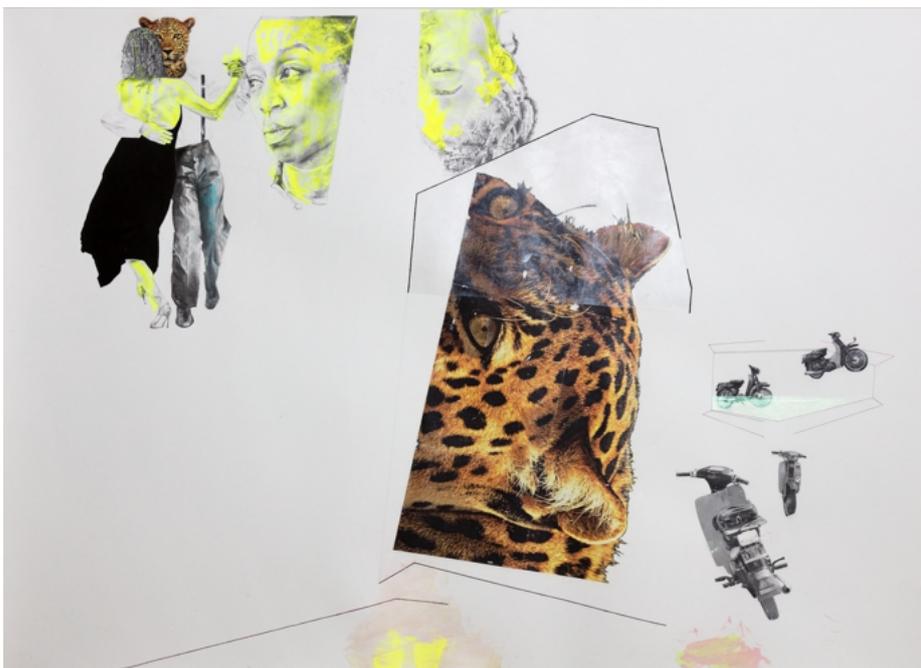
What do you enjoy most about working on paper?

So many things! I worked with fabric for a very long time and then seamlessly transitioned to paper in grad school. They feel like the same thing somehow – fabric and paper. Both absorb actions, they hold memories like skins. They're strong and fragile all at once. They're living and breathing.

In the moment of drawing, maybe I most enjoy the surface. I draw on a heavy-weight, cold pressed, machine-made, white, 100% cotton paper. In the past I've enjoyed somewhat of the opposite – light, translucent, handmade, textured and never white paper. Though I can't imagine drawing on that now, I still love it.

I've learned a lot about the medium and I do think of it as such – a medium – and not just as an arbitrary surface. It's as much a part of the drawing as the drawing itself. They work together... we all work together. I guess I've spent a lot of time on the page now! Laying on it, sitting on it... we've become quite intimate. I love the way it feels in my hands and in conversation with a pencil or with ink. I enjoy the vibrancy that's possible, but also the subtlety. I can hide secrets in it and then there are things that happen that I can't escape.

Paper feels like a wizard. A wise and old trickster that is both gentle and ruthless.



Pas de Deux

What do you feel is your greatest achievement to date?

So, I read this and immediately clenched my teeth... I have no idea! I try not to think in those terms. I'm as ambitious as the next person and as an athlete, quite competitive (with myself). But I stay rooted in the fact that I have to just do the work – that's my forever job. To show up and be honest. How that's measured beyond the studio can, of course, feel amazing, but on the other hand, it doesn't matter – I'll still do what I need to/have to do, regardless. There are many things or places I'm yet to reach. I can see and feel them and that, for the moment, feels like enough. The visualisation of it, can be quite satisfying! I think for now, I'll just say, I'm here. I can be counted. I have integrity. And I'm not going to leave. That's an accomplishment.

If you could collaborate with any artist, who would it be, and why?

Oooh, there are so many brilliant minds I'd love to create with. Through written words, [Akwaeke Emezi](https://www.akwaeke.com/) (<https://www.akwaeke.com/>). I'd love to be a back-up dancer for singer and musician [EL Tsid](https://www.instagram.com/eltsid/?hl=en) (<https://www.instagram.com/eltsid/?hl=en>). Or to sing a song with [Terence Nance](https://www.instagram.com/terenceetc/?hl=en) (<https://www.instagram.com/terenceetc/?hl=en>). Choreograph and dance with [Mor Mendel](https://www.instagram.com/mormendel/?hl=en) (<https://www.instagram.com/mormendel/?hl=en>) or [Emilee Lord](https://www.instagram.com/emileelord/?hl=en) (<https://www.instagram.com/emileelord/?hl=en>). Co-chef with _____ (?). I have an ongoing relationship with [Wura-Natasha Ogunji](https://wuraogunji.com/home.html) (<https://wuraogunji.com/home.html>). She's my art wife and our paths will continue to intersect.

Maybe the question was visual art centered, but when I think of collaboration I think of all the creative outlets. Things I don't generally have access to in my drawing-based studio practice. I'm connected to all of the artists above and to these various other worlds of expression. I just want to visit their worlds. Be challenged. Expand... and then come right back to the drawings. Magical things happen when artists come together 'cause we see things differently, but there can be lovely parallels across forms.

Do you have any exciting projects coming up that you can share?

I'm working on a commissioned piece for the [Collezione Maramotti](https://www.collezionearamamotti.org/en) (<https://www.collezionearamamotti.org/en>) in Italy. They showcase artists at pivotal points in their career... encouraging them to create a work that 'takes risk'. I have time to think and to push the work. It's a privilege to have support in that way – both for what you've already done and for what the work can become. There's room there, which is a little scary, as well exciting. Plus, it's not a gallery so certain boundaries are gone. I'll be making a multi-layered drawing that's approximately nine-metres wide. I'm interested in building up the surface so the paper has weight to it. I get to experiment and play!

To see more of Ruby's work, visit [goodman-gallery.com](https://www.goodman-gallery.com/artists/ruby-onyinyechi-amanze) (<https://www.goodman-gallery.com/artists/ruby-onyinyechi-amanze>) and follow ruby on Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/ruby_onyinyechi_amanze/) to keep up to date with her latest projects.