

Igbo Woman

Ezinma Okwonkwo 1900
Rev.Sister Mary Uzoamaka Okwonkwo 1930
Nneka Clara Okonkwo 1950
Adanna Bridget Okonkwo 1940
Maryann Ginika Okwonkwo 1960
Amuchechukwu Gloria Okwonkwo 1967
Alexandra Daberechi Okonkwo 1972
Adaure Augustina Okonkwo 1981
Regina Ifedimma Okonkwo 1990
Claudia Onyeka Okonkwo 2015

This series was primarily inspired by *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe which traces the evolution of family identity from pre-colonial, through colonial and post-colonial times.

In this series of self-portraits, through the act of performativity, I investigate women from various periods of history, unfolding complex themes of colonialism, identity and womanhood. As fictional characters, I create their identities through costume, performance and the act of naming and dating the images.

The resolution to highlight Igbo women is embedded in my view that She has been grossly misrepresented. I feel that history has not illustrated the Igbo woman in Her rightful perspective. She is customarily shown in images that conform to a supposed African man's world and the idea of feminine submissiveness to the man. The series is a way to confront this mistaken notion and to show how colonialism has further removed feminine freedom from the Igbo woman.

The portraits depict the colonial experience and the effect and impact of Christianity on Igbo women. It shows the female transformation from a virile, half-clad, war-like Igbo damsel to a mundane, all covering and meek-looking woman. This transformation shows both a radical departure and complete alienation from traditional dressing modes. Their lives changed irrevocably when the British invaded the Igboland.

Colonization changed not only the religious, social and political institutions. It also enforces policies that diminished the roles and statues of Igbo women, portraying them as second class citizens. I examine the relationship between fiction, reality and connecting personal and collective experiences. The series is a tangible and physical visual documentation of my Igbo heritage as my stories have been told only through oral traditions.

“It is the storyteller who makes us what we are, who creates history. The storyteller creates the memory that the survivors must have - otherwise their surviving would have no meaning.” - Chinua Achebe