

# THE NEW ZEALAND HERALD

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### WHAT'S ON THE WALL? FIVE ARTISTS TALK ABOUT THE ART THEY LOVE



Emerging artist Ruth Ige with one of the many works she keeps on a virtual wall. Photo: Dean Purcel

#### RUTH IGE:

Ruth Ige is a Nigerian-born abstract figurative painter, based in Auckland. A graduate of AUT, Ige appears at the Auckland Art Fair's 2019 Projects Programme Whanaungatanga (kinship) which highlights new and emerging artists. All works in Projects 2019 have been commissioned especially for the Fair.

*Choose a particular work you have on your wall at home or that inspired you as a young artist, why did you pick this particular work?*

Most of the time, my own paintings are on my wall but not in a self-indulgent way. It helps to be constantly exposed to my work and to think of new ways to push it forward. Also because the art that I want to own is miles away and worth a lot of money! I have had more of a virtual wall on my computer where a bunch of artists I was inspired by are archived for inspiration.

*Who are these artists?*

Years back, when I made a major change in my art practice, Jacob Lawrence was one of the artists who inspired me particularly his The Migration Series. I loved the message he was relaying and the way he presented African American life was inspiring. His style of figuration caught my eye; his use of shape, colour and form to represent the figure was something that clicked with me because it connected the style I had already. It wasn't hyper-realism so I felt I could approach figuration with my abstract visual language and it also inspired me to pursue exploring the black figure within art.

Another African American artist, Kerry James Marshall, inspired me early on. He's famous overseas and has shown in all the major museums and galleries you can think of but he isn't known here in New Zealand. When I first discovered his work, I

was shocked I didn't know someone like that existed within major spaces. The way he presents black life and experiences and the black body was - and is - quite life changing for me. It inspires me and makes me happy to see an artist of colour being taken seriously, being treated equally to other artists and being included in the mainstream and into art history.

I have also recently discovered Charles White, another African American who was finally given a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. His drawings are quite moving; he portrays people of colour with such dignity, grandness and sensitivity. I think that something I want to push in my own work and seeing his art made me want to do some drawings of my own. His drawing Seeds of Love in particular is a drawing that is inspiring me right now but to be honest my list of inspirations is really long!

*How does it make you feel?*

It makes me feel like I belong; it makes me feel like artists of colour who look like me exist and existed and, in general, that all people of colour both here and abroad have made a beautiful contribution to the art world but it has been hidden for various reasons. People down play representation and think someone is just being dramatic or sensitive but it is important to see representation of people who look like you in the world. But also a normalisation within that representation is important. In a way to say we have the same dreams, desires and fears.

*What do you hope to show with your work?*

I want to show in general that the stories of people of colour, their way of thinking and them as people are deserving of being within the mainstream and within contemporary art. We are also a part of contemporary life. I hope to show people new narratives of blackness. I think that is my main goal - to create and show images that are different, boundary pushing and expansive. In way honouring the past and bringing it with me to the future.