

An abstract painting dominated by various shades of blue, from deep navy to bright cerulean. The composition is layered with organic, flowing shapes that suggest movement and depth. In the upper portion, there are darker, more defined shapes that could be interpreted as stylized faces or masks. The lower portion is more textured, with visible brushstrokes and a sense of chaotic energy. The overall mood is contemplative and mysterious.

Ruth Ige

Studio Ponderings

Vol 2

HELLO !!!!

Welcome back!!! I hope everyone enjoyed the first volume. It has been an extremely busy time and so there has been a delay in the second volume. Extremely happy to finally send this out and release it. After some deliberation, I might send these out, whenever is possible instead of on a fixed schedule. I believe it is best for it to be released on a spontaneous and flexible schedule. I have so many ideas and experiments I want to try in relation to African and diasporic cultural materials as painting pigments. I will be releasing those findings, experiments, ponderings and research little by little. As well as other explorations in relation to painting forms and structures, poetry, speculative fiction etc. Thank you again for tuning in for this pondering. Hope you enjoy.

Blessings and love to everyone. Sending a virtual hug to everyone reading.

PRE-COLONIAL

And we knew who we were

Scholars of our own lands

Stewards of the soil and all it brought forth

In tune with its rhythm

And with its ways

Knowledge passed down

Wisdom from our elders

Wisdom from the skies

Wisdom from the waters

Honoured in our midst

The oil

The adornment

The bronze

The clay

Our words

Our perspectives

Our songs

Were also of the heavens

We were also of the heavens

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS OF CULTURAL MATERIALS AS PAINTING PIGMENTS

Since I last updated you, I have been further exploring the use of Nigerian dried leaves as painting pigments. In the show **The secret life of plants** I used Ugu dried leaves as a dried powder pigment in conjunction with oil sticks and multiple other materials. For a recent group show called **Dust** in Havana, Cuba I used Nigerian dried leaves with acrylic binder. Creating my own version of acrylic paint. I might later try utilising aspects of the lake pigment technique and then add acrylic binder. However, I have been pondering something. It might be best to utilise the physical plant material in the painting and not just the pigment. In a way I feel that is truly archiving these plants. Allowing these cultural/African indigenous plant matter to be physically present and apparent within the paint is quite powerful. I have been pondering on that, and I believe that is the best choice.

POSSIBLE OTHER NIGERIAN MATERIALS OR CULTURAL SIGNIFICANT MATERIALS TO BE USED AS PAINTING PIGMENTS (in addition to my previous list in the first volume)

- Zobo leaves (African indigenous Roselle/Hibiscus sabdariffa)
- Garri
- Àmàlà
- Aidan fruit (Tetrapleura tetraptera) or Aridan fruit (Yoruba)
- Uda (Igbo name for spice or pods from the tree Xylopia aethiopica)
- Ukwa (Igbo name for African breadfruit/ Treculia Africana)

PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION

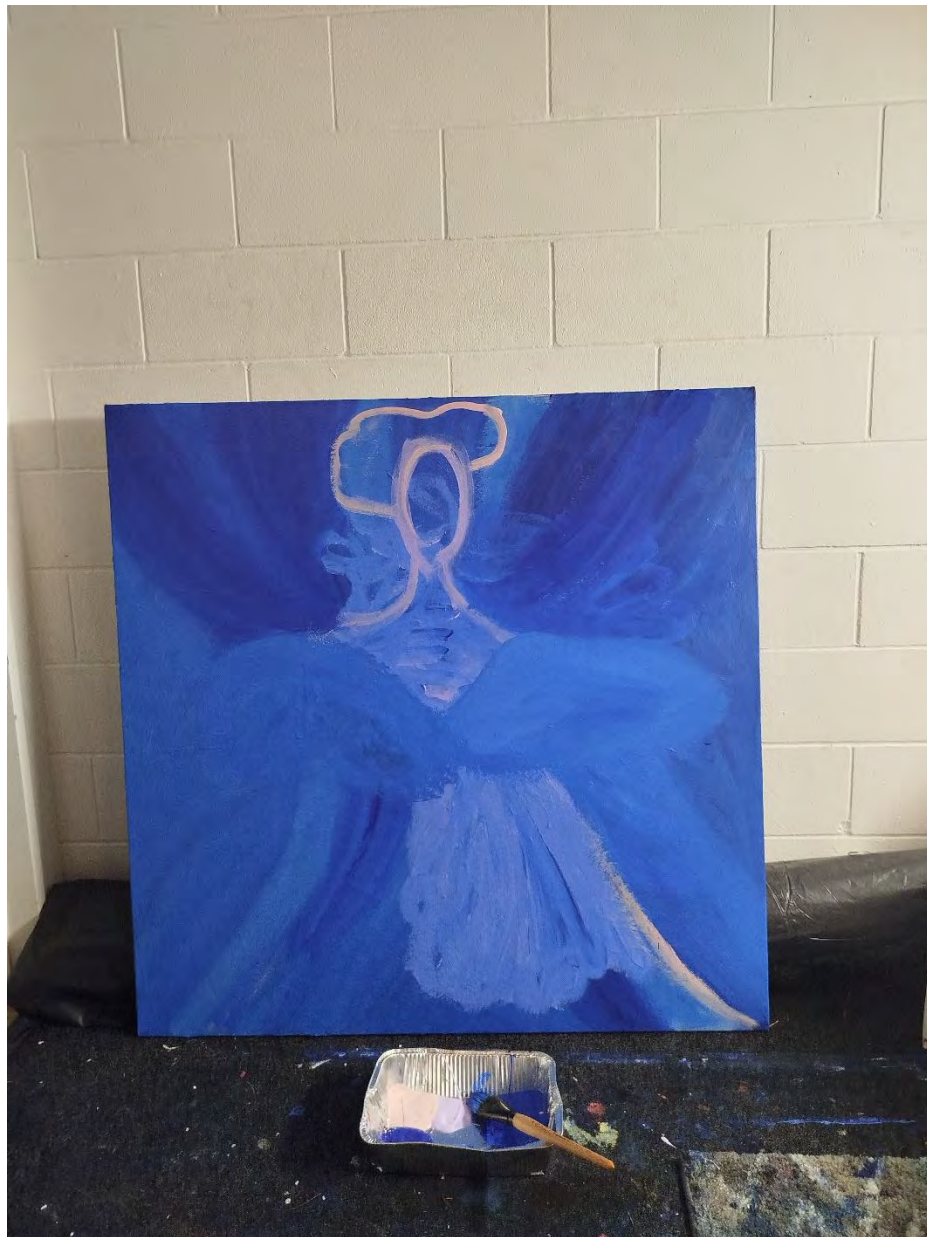
Before we get into my experiments with Nigerian dried leaves and acrylic binder, I thought to share more of the Nigerian old photographs I had acquired last year. In continuation with what was shown in the first volume. The first photo I shared in the first volume was photographed in Abakaliki in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. This info was stamped at the back by the photographer. I am not sure of the date of this specific photograph below. I acquired 5 photographs from a seller who had discovered the old Nigerian photographs in California. I have one I purchased that is dated 28/11/59 at the back. So, there is a possibility this photo is around the same time. As it seems they were found as a collective. The seller also gave me some extra Nigerian old portraits done in Abakaliki in Ebonyi state and Lagos free of charge, which truly made my day. Looking forward to building my collection and sharing it with you all.



THE FIRST STAGES FOR THE GROUP SHOW DUST



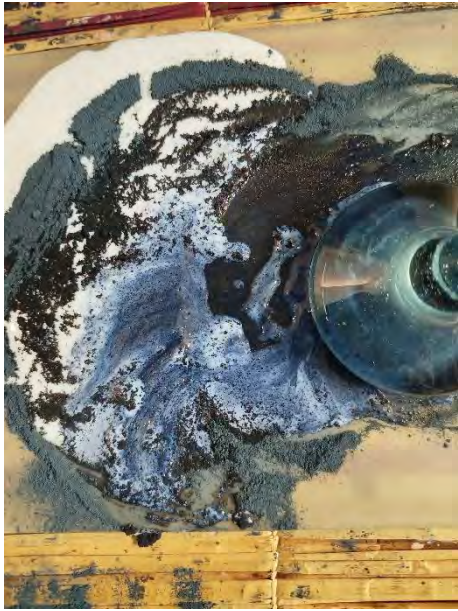
I had an old painting of mine that I had never exhibited or shown. I decided to use it as the base or background for a new painting for the group show in Havana, Cuba. The old painting has a group of people holding this mysterious object. In the painting you only see the hands and not the faces of these people.

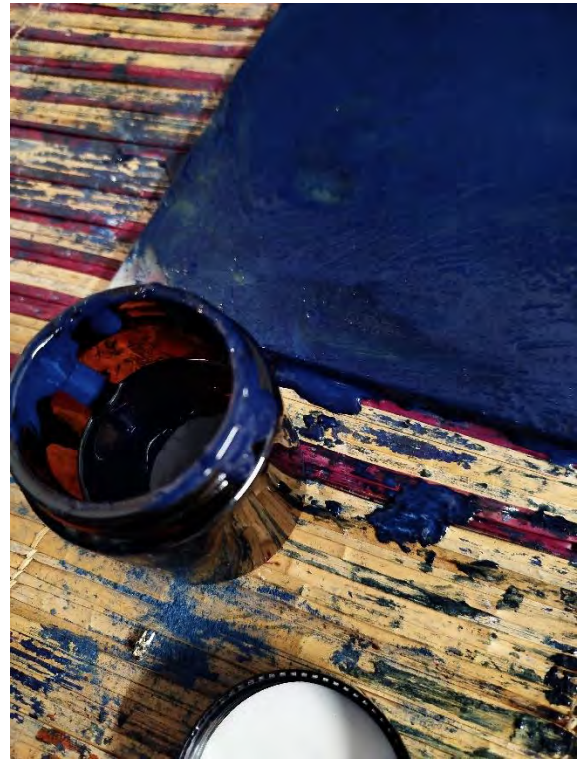


I quickly painted the outline of the figure over the old painting and started to add new forms, but also use the forms that were already there in the old painting. I am happy with how it is going. What do you think?

Wanted to add some West African indigo (*Philenoptera cyanescens*) to the painting. I decided to use it with acrylic binder. I have my glass muller, glass slab, acrylic binder and indigo dry pigment.





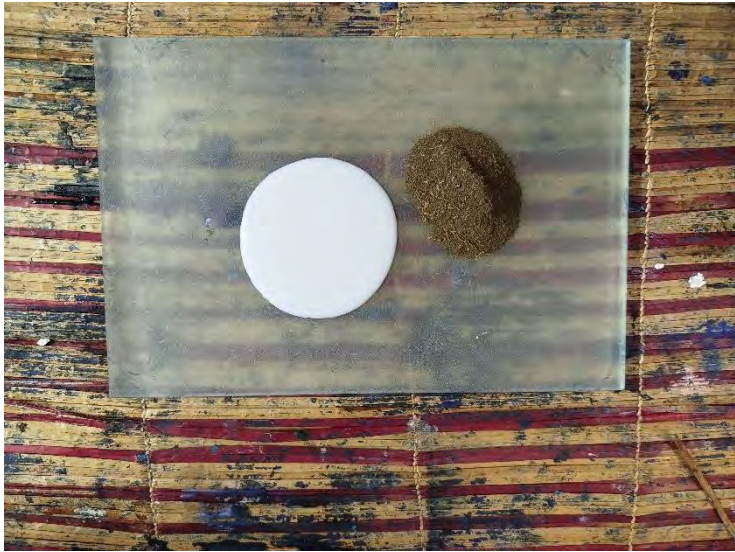


West African indigo acrylic paint has now been made. I then scraped it from the glass slab and put it in an amber glass jar.



I have now added the West African indigo acrylic paint I just made to the painting. You can see it in the bottom half of the dress.





I thought to now try the Ugu powder with the acrylic binder to add to the painting. This is the first try of adding it with acrylic binder. I have crushed the dried Ugu leaves with the mortar and pestle to make it into a powder form. Here is my binder and the Ugu powder I have prepared on the glass slab. Then how it looks after the mulling process. In a way it is an impasto paint. There are other ways I could process the leaves to get a more traditional acrylic paint. However, as mentioned earlier I feel that to have the actual physical plant material within the acrylic paint instead of just the pigment is quite powerful.



I have added the Ugu acrylic paint to the painting **And she carried the glory of distant realms.** These are the close ups of the texture of the first attempt.





I scraped some off the Ugu paint I had applied. It was a bit too impasto for this painting. I will try a different approach for the next batch of Ugu acrylic paint. I am going to be moving on to the next painting for now. I will come back to this painting tomorrow.

WORKING ON THE PAINTING IMMORTAL





SECOND ATTEMPT AT UGU ACRYLIC PAINT

I am not a coffee drinker. I love tea instead. However, I decided to buy myself a coffee grinder machine. Not to drink coffee, but for my Ugu paint. Hahaha. I wanted a finer Ugu powder than what I was achieving with the mortar and pestle. Also, it is quicker and less time consuming. So, I got a cheap coffee grinder. I also decided to add water and use heat on the powdered Ugu, before bringing it to the slab for mulling. Just to reactivate it from its dry state and reawaken some of the pigment.



In the picture above you can see that the Ugu powder is wet and darker in colour due to that.



I decided to put the already mulled mixture back into a mortar to further process it. I am always trying to think outside of the box and find my own way of doing things.



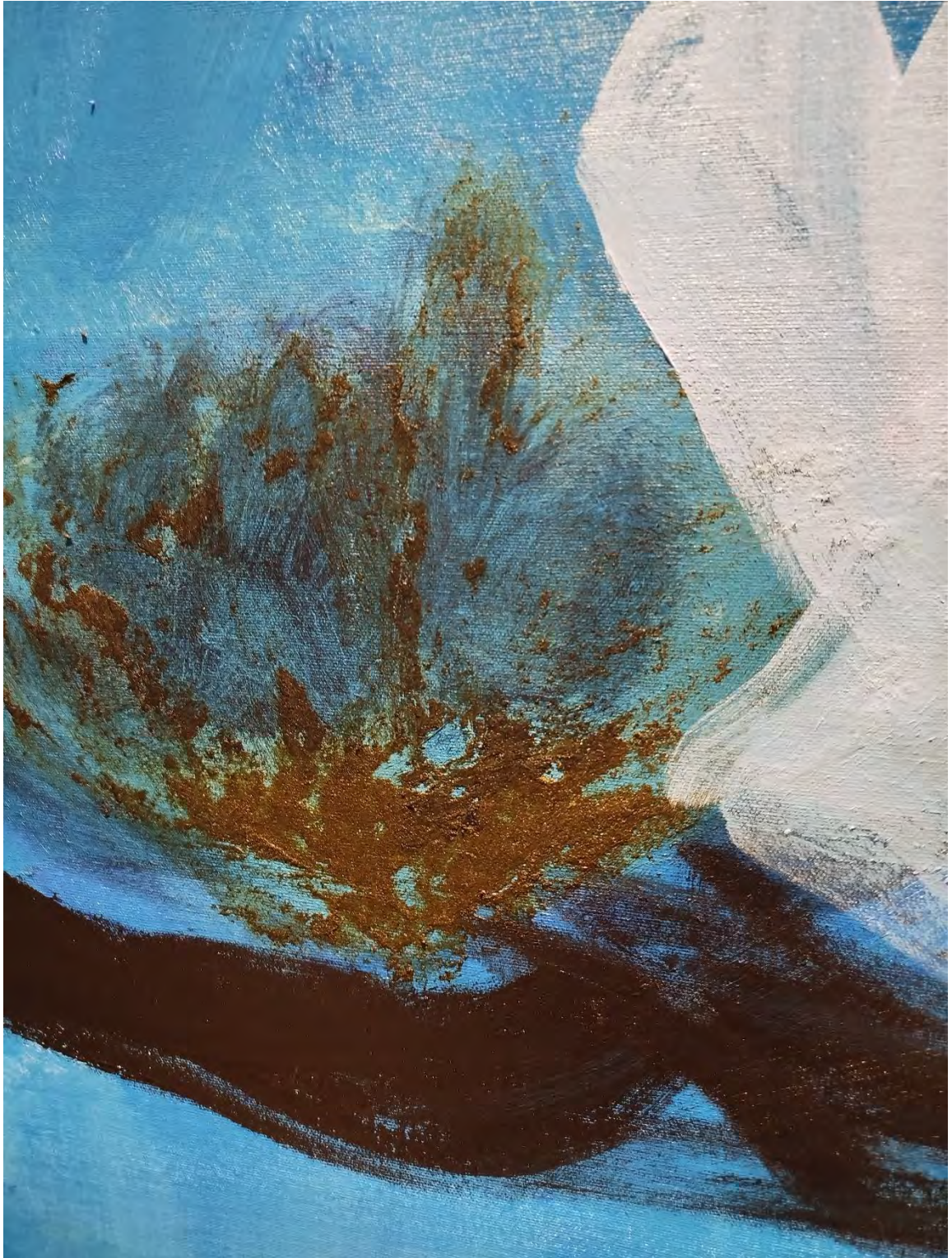
Some swatches of the Ugu paint (on the back of a canvas nearby) after putting it back in the mortar multiple times.



I decided to then place it back on the glass slab and further process it. I think it is done now. I like the consistency better than the first attempt. It also stains more and releases more pigment.



I have now added the Ugu acrylic paint I just created to the painting **Immortal**.

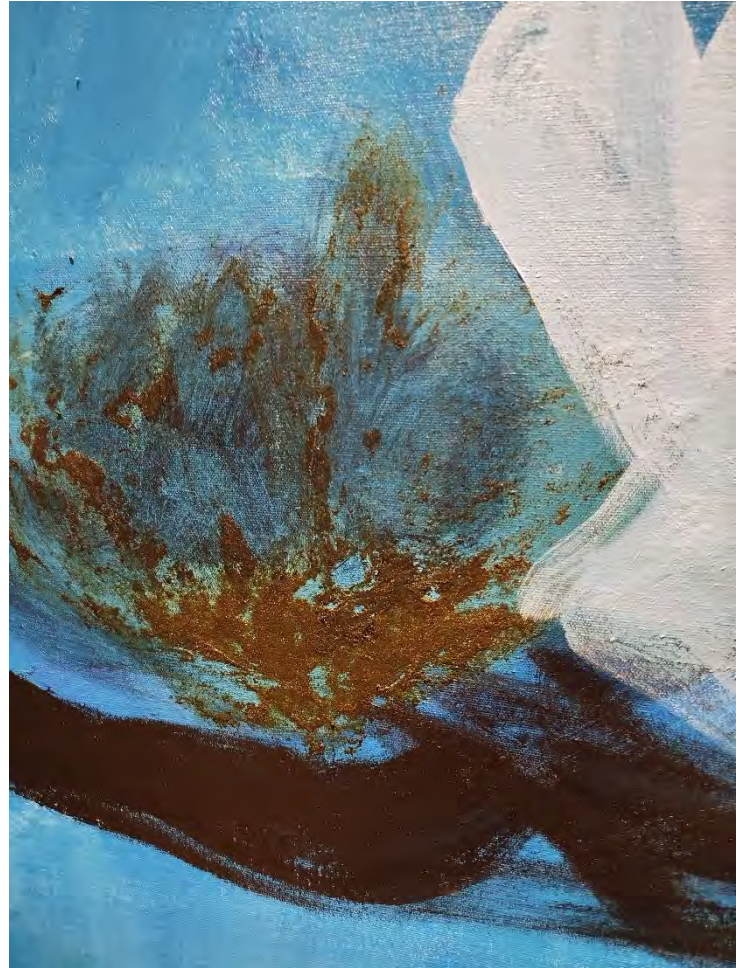


Close up of the Ugu acrylic paint on the painting **Immortal**.



I have also added the Ugu acrylic paint to the painting **And she carried the glory of distant realms.** The painting has changed from the last time you saw it.

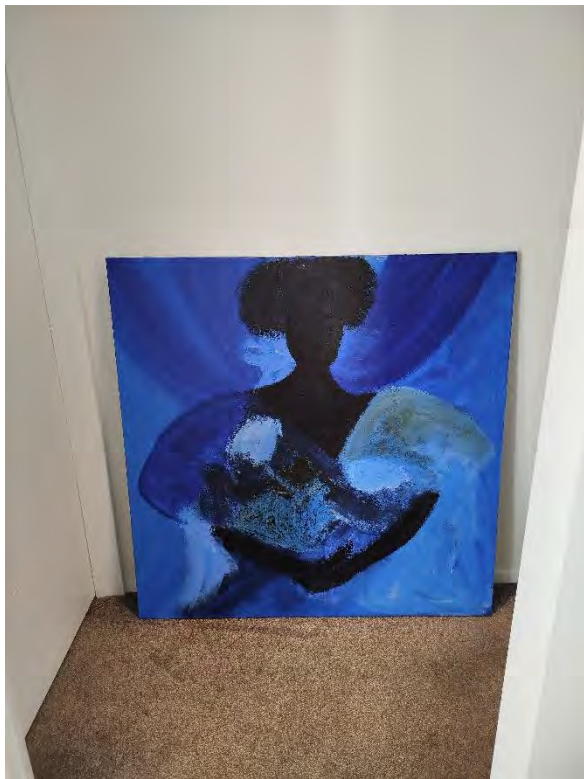
COMPARE



Side by side comparison of the Ugu acrylic paint I have made. Which do you prefer? First attempt on the left and second attempt on the right. I prefer the second attempt on the right.

BITTER LEAF(VERNONIA AMYGDALINA)

I have been working mostly with Ugu and decided to add another plant used in Nigerian traditional food and medicine. Of course, in its dry form. It is called Ewuro in Yoruba and Onugbu in Igbo. It is also known as bitter leaf. I added it to the painting, **And she carried the glory of distant realms.** I really love how it turned out. Love the colour, tone and texture.



I also added bitter leaf to the painting **Immortal**. Some major changes made to this painting since the last update. Wanted a more minimalist background then the busy background it previously had. To give this sense of stillness, meditation and eternity. Teetering between water and sky. Where the figure is almost translucent and boundless within the blue.

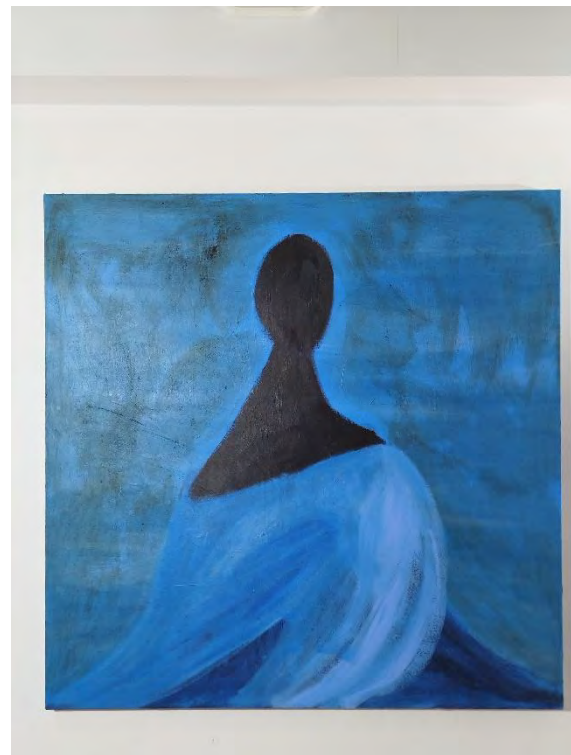


Next day preparing bitter leaf acrylic paint for the painting Behold.



MAKING OF BEHOLD

For this painting I wanted to have the background be mostly bitter leaf. However, sticking to the blue palette is extremely important in my art practice. It is something I have been trying to balance as I continue my exploration with cultural materials. In this instance I decided to paint the background blue and then paint a thin layer of the bitter leaf acrylic paint I had made. I also decided to leave a slither of blue around the figure to give this ethereal and almost holy feeling that this figure carries. A sense of reverence.



SOME OF THE PAINTINGS IN HAVANA, CUBA (BODE GALLERY)









ABSTRACTION IS A CULTURAL PRACTICE

I have also been researching rare Nigerian and West African plants. Some that are almost extinct. I was thinking I could translate those specific ones into a visual symbol. In a way a visual translation or abstraction of the physical form. Visually immortalizing it. It is something I might start to explore. Just something I have been pondering. It might not lead anywhere. However, I began to marvel at the role of Abstraction within the context of Africa.

Language is always being created, both visual, spoken and written. Language holds. It materializes our ideas and inner worlds. Through a shared emergence and assemblage of modes of communication and expression culture begins to form.

Abstraction or symbol making has always been part of African culture. We see that through the symbols that though abstract in form hold deep meanings, around heritage, history and belief. These are seen in the fabrics across the continent, jewellery, walls, buildings, shrines and bodies.

Abstraction is not a western invention. Abstraction is also very African. It is part of our daily practice and daily ritual. Abstraction (symbol making) is how we communicate to our communities, ourselves and God. Abstraction is not just an art practice. Abstraction is a spiritual practice. Abstraction is a beauty practice. Abstraction is a self-care practice. Abstraction is a cultural practice. Abstraction is a holistic practice within the African context. It is also our mother tongue. We speak it. We pray with it. We dream with it. We document our lives and beliefs through it.

African masks were a major source and visual language that created the western emergence of the abstraction of the figure in painting. Though people try to avoid acknowledging that. The function of African masks is not monolithic. Each country and further each people group within that country have their own beliefs pertaining to masks. Though in general masks are a bridge between the physical realm (earth) and the spiritual realm (which I call realms beyond our understanding). African masks are seen as tools of communication, celebration

and activism. I could go on, but I will stop here for now and continue this in my next studio pondering maybe.

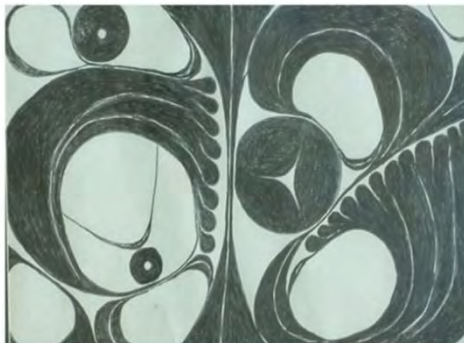
ULI: IGBO ABSTRACTION

Uli an Igbo long held tradition and cultural practice of drawing on the walls of places of dwellings and other buildings and the body. Uli is the name for both the substance used to draw and the drawing practice itself. The drawings are abstract, sleek, elegant and minimalistic in line and form. On the next two pages are Uli on the body. During precolonial times there were not done on paper. Uli is usually traditionally only done by woman. However, men started to incorporate it into their art practices as well. Below are some drawings by Eziafo Okaro a woman Uli artist.

Figure 5. Uli drawing by Eziafo Okaro, Ogidi, Nigeria.



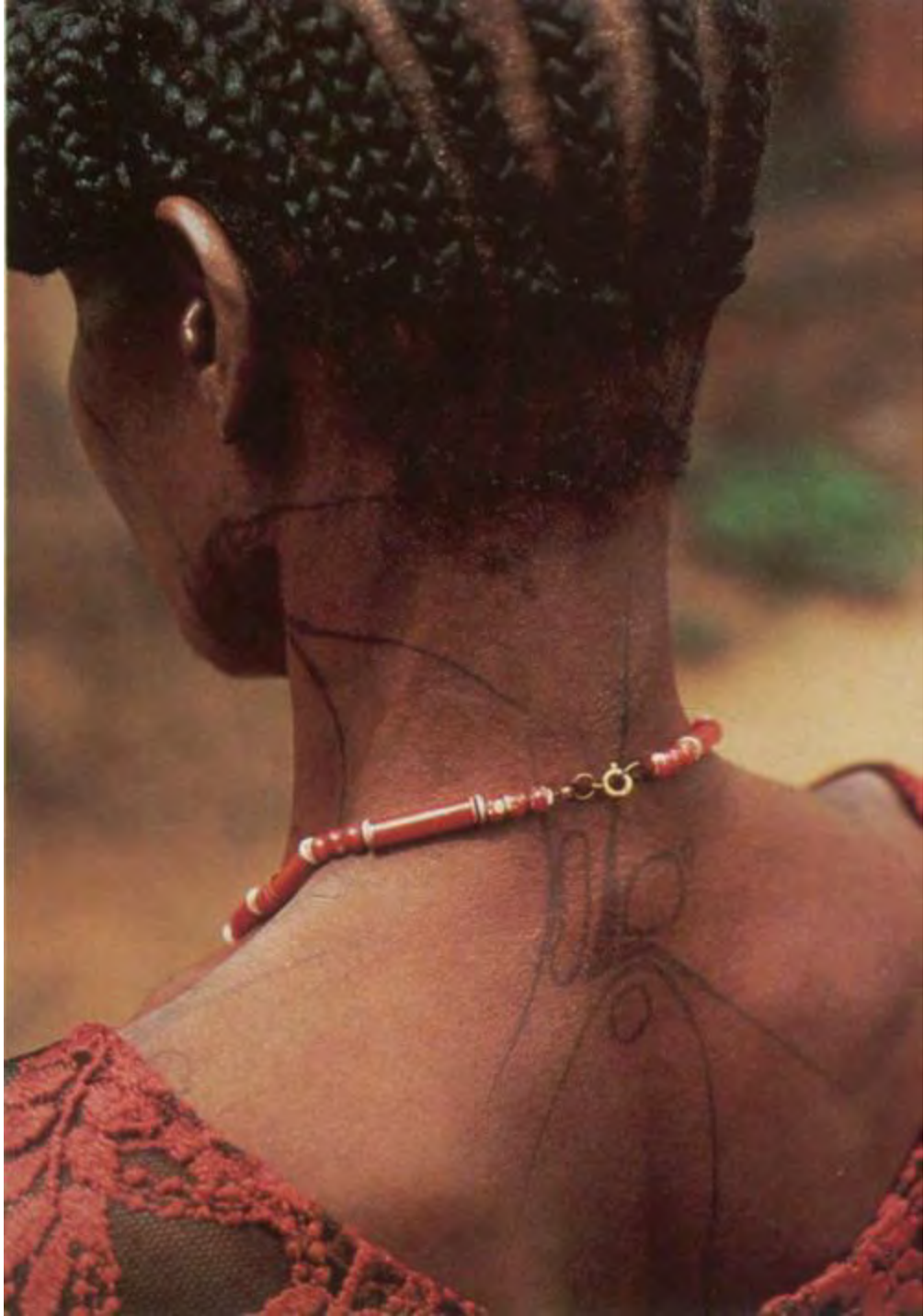
Figure 2. Uli drawing by Eziafo Okaro.



Uli drawing by

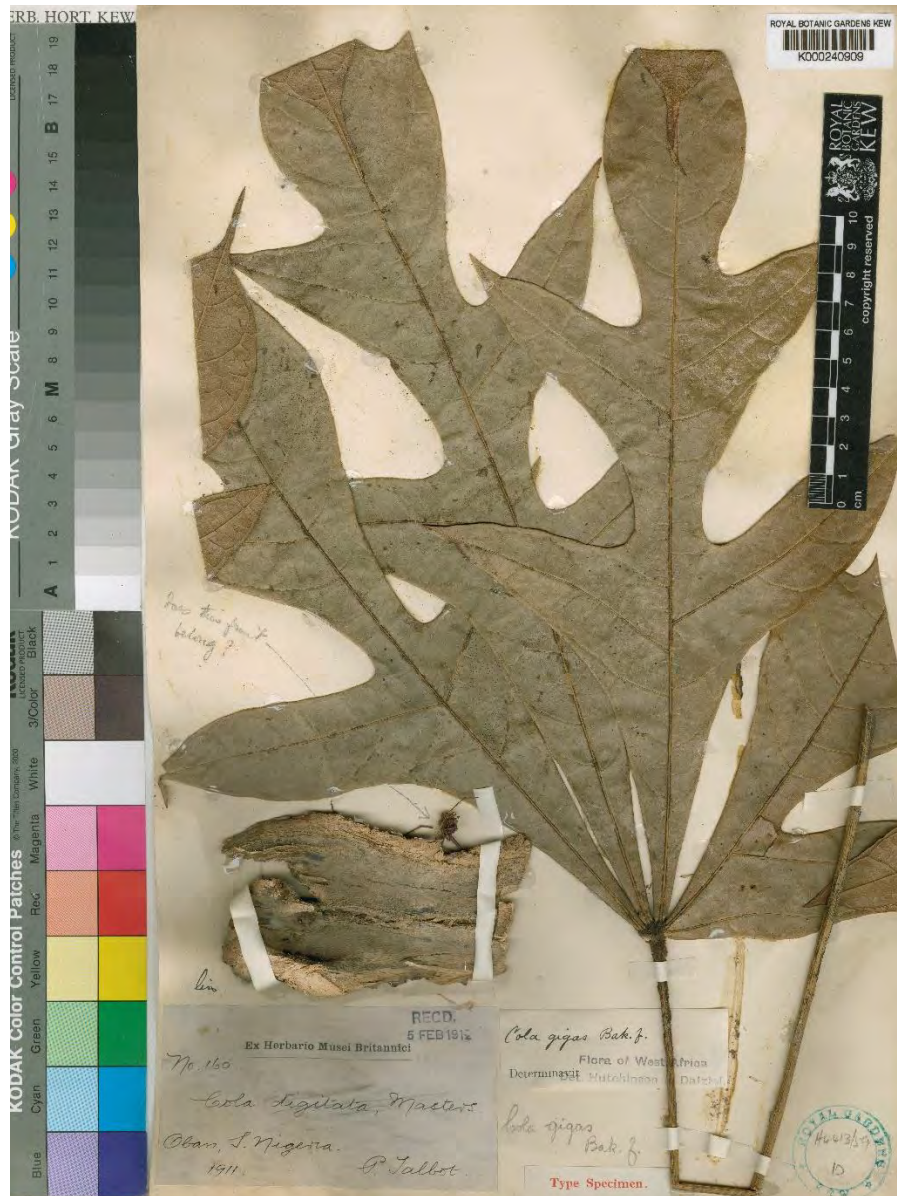
Jessie Uche, Inyi, Enugu State





COLA GIGAS PLANT SCANS

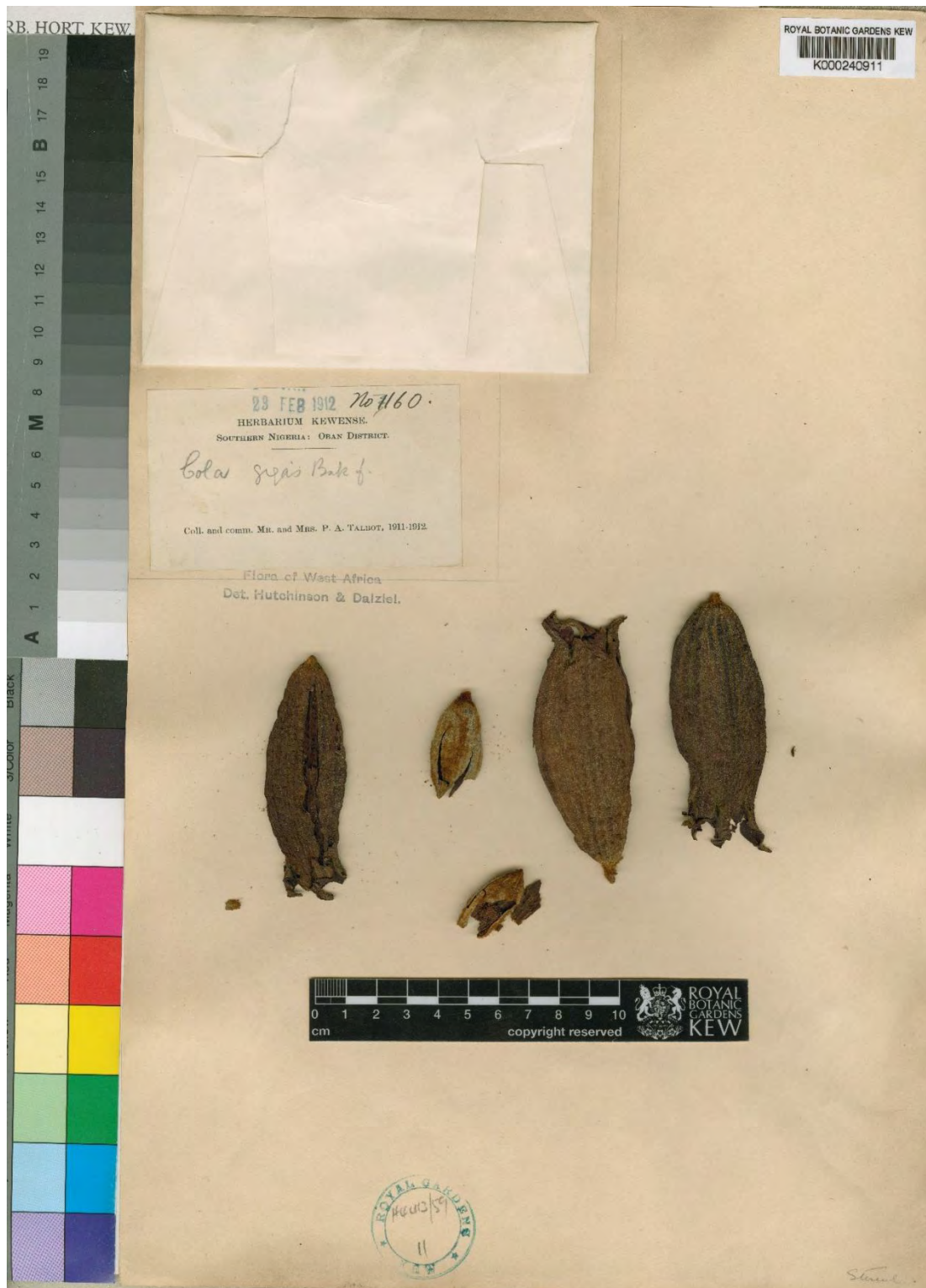
There is a plant called the Cola gigas that, according to my research, is only found in Nigeria. I reached out to some people who had scans of the physical archives of this plant. This is the plant I was thinking about making symbol or abstracting as mentioned earlier. However, as stated it is just an idea at this point.



Plant scan K000240909 © RBG Kew



Plant scan K000240910 © RBG Kew



Plant scan K000240911 © RBG Kew



Plant scan K000240912 © RBG Kew

UPDATE: INDIGO



I was able to get some indigo leaves from Nigeria. So, ecstatic! I got in contact with the amazing Gasali of the company called **Yoruba Indigo**. He is an incredible Nigerian artist and expert on Indigo and Adire. He runs workshops imparting wisdom on the artform. Exhibits his works and has even designed the batik attire in the movie *The Woman King*. He is based in Sante Fe.

He also sells Adire clothing and fabric. I have several items of Adire clothing from him that I bought for me and my sister. In Nigeria Indigo leaves are stored in these ball forms (there is a process done to get them like this). I bought ten balls. I am still deciding how I am going to use them as I am not using them for dyeing. I have so many possible ideas.

MORE CULTURAL MATERIALS CURRENTLY IN MY STUDIO

Trying to organise my cultural/African indigenous materials in a more systematic way. Bought more Ugu and Bitter leaf as well as bunch of other Nigerian materials recently for my kitchen and my studio. Recently introduced Utazi and Uziza dried leaves into my paintings for my recent show in Wellington. So, I bought more Uziza leaves to replenish what was used. I also bought the cultural materials mentioned earlier on in this pondering. I bought Aidan fruit (Tetrapleura tetraptera) that has already been cut in smaller pieces. Not in its full pod state. I also got Ukwa. Igbo name for African breadfruit or Treculia Africana. Also bought Zobo leaves (African indigenous Roselle/Hibiscus sabdariffa) and Uda (Igbo name for spice or pods from the tree Xylopia aethiopica). Will speak more about the culturally significances of Aidan/Aridan (Yoruba) and Ukwa and Uda when I begin to experiment with them in upcoming paintings. I also got Ewedu dried leaves (Yoruba for Corchorus olitorius).





From left to right: Uziza dried leaves, Efirin dried leaves, Utazi dried leaves, Aridan fruit and Zobo leaves.







From left to right: Bitter leaf (Ewuro in Yoruba and Onugbu in Igbo), Ukwa, Uda and Ugu dried leaves.





Still need to get a glass jar for the Ewedu dried leaves. However, thought to show you a sample.

SEE YOU NEXT TIME!!!!!!