

Kemi Onabule is a British artist of Nigerian and Greek descent. Her paintings respond to a present world in chaos characterized by unravelling economic structures, ecological destruction and the overturning of societal norms. Her work engages with this narrative by showing a slightly utopic yet layered view of humanity. The artist is interested in looking at the close ties within non-western societies to the environment and the visual languages that are used to embellish these ideas and mythologies. The lush, undamaged vegetation in her paintings - often painted from direct observation - creates a (back)ground enabling the viewer to re-imagine the role of the person when all indicators of modernity are taken away.

In her recent work, Onabule puts a heavy emphasis on the importance of women and their significance in linking humanity to nature. The female deity Oshun, a river goddess of femininity, beauty, and love among Yoruba religions, serves as key figure for the artist's approach. The works are a way of exploring our often-uncomfortable relationship to femininity as expressed by women, especially women of color. By avoiding the tropes of the historical male gaze, the paintings place the viewer in a different world, closer to its origins. Using the female figure, she aims at reimagining a world unburdened by the demands of modernity and an overworked capitalistic framework. The human figure, therein, acts as a method to express the connections between us.

"I try to reimagine the world as untouched by modern notions of commerce and the constant need to develop that which could be left alone. The figures that populate my work are often naked and ... have a mystical quality. I use imagery and stories from ancient culture such as the Yoruba people and Greek mythologies to engage with older understandings of what our connection to the planet is, in this current moment of upheaval and difficulty."

Kemi Onabule was born in London in 1995. In 2016, she graduated from Wimbledon College of Art with a BFA in Painting. Her work has been shown in both public and private galleries in London and the UK.