

Mariane Ibrahim, who introduced Boafo to the world: “The reason these paintings are revolutionary in art history is...”

Amoako Boafo's First Representing Gallery An Interview with Gallerist Mariane Ibrahim

When Amoako Boafo moved from Accra, Ghana, to Vienna, Austria, and was deeply immersed in his work, it was Mariane Ibrahim who recognized his talent before anyone else. Ibrahim operates three galleries under her name in Paris, Chicago, and Mexico City.



Portrait of Mariane Ibrahim, 2025/ Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim ©Fabrice Gousset

On the occasion of Amoako Boafo's first institutional solo exhibition in Asia, Ibrahim visited the Wooyang Art Museum in Gyeongju in July and introduced herself as "a true nomad." She described the term not as someone who belongs nowhere, but as someone who belongs everywhere. Surprisingly, it was Instagram that connected Ibrahim and Boafo. The moment she saw his artwork, she felt an immediate connection—and Boafo felt the same. In addition to representing Boafo, she works with over 20 Black and African diaspora artists, including Zohra Opoku and Peter Uka, and actively presents exhibitions throughout the Americas and Europe. In the art world, Ibrahim is known as "the woman who brought African art to global attention." She began in Seattle 14 years ago and expanded to Paris and Mexico City. (Her Seattle space has since relocated to Chicago.)

Ibrahim was born in Nouméa, the capital of New Caledonia, and lived there until she was five. Her father worked for a nickel export company. At the urging of her homesick mother, the family moved to Somalia, their ancestral homeland, but with war looming, they soon relocated again to Bordeaux, France. After graduating from high school in France, Ibrahim studied communications at Middlesex University in London and later worked in Paris's advertising industry.



Amoako Boafo, Earring-Yellow, 2020 /Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim

"I first entered the contemporary art world as a collector, but I kept wondering why the artworks I was seeking weren't found in galleries or museums. I wasn't from a family of art dealers or collectors, which was both a disadvantage and a strength. I realized the field lacked diversity, and I knew there was something I had to stand up for. I was drawn to everything being created by African American and European artists of African descent."

She helped guide Amoako Boafo into the Rubell Museum's artist residency program in Miami and presented his work in a solo booth at Art Basel Miami Beach, which transformed his career overnight. Through this, Boafo's unforgettable art made its world stage debut.

"Both portraiture and Blackness were elements that disrupted the art world. He revolutionized portraiture and gave visibility to 'Black culture,' which had long been marginalized or undervalued in art history. Boafo's works formally resemble classical portraiture, but their color palettes and use of objects are thoroughly contemporary. These layered qualities have opened the door for other Black contemporary artists as well."

Having spent many years in Paris and London, it was President Barack Obama who strongly inspired Ibrahim to open her first gallery in the United States, in Seattle. "I wanted to be able to say that a smart and beautiful Black man was my president. My husband was working in Seattle at the time, so I opened the gallery there."



Amoako Boafo and Mariane Ibrahim, founder of the gallery, at the opening ceremony at Wooyang Art Museum in Gyeongju
Courtesy of Wooyang Art Museum

In 2019, she moved the gallery to Chicago. Why not New York? "Most people think of New York as the center of the art world. But to me, Chicago felt more American than New York—a city of constant change and relentless competition. Chicago has a well-balanced mix of immigrant populations—Latinx, African, Eastern European—as well as deep architectural, industrial, and cultural roots. It felt like a second home. But something was missing: there weren't many galleries in such a vibrant city. I thought, Why not give it a try?"

Ibrahim still holds progressive values. For her, progress means "growing together, hand in hand." It doesn't mean choosing one over the other, but embracing both. Why does she continue to run a gallery in the U.S., even under Donald Trump's presidency? She said, "President Trump seems to want to return to a black-and-white world of the past, almost like a medieval era. That's exactly why I feel it's more important than ever to stay in the U.S. and amplify diverse voices."

Regarding Amoako Boafo's exhibition in Gyeongju, she said, "Korean audiences and professionals in the art world will be able to relate to Boafo's work." Unlike "some Swiss artist" presented at an international summit city like APEC, Boafo has long been recognized within the mainstream Western-centric art world and therefore shares more common ground with Korean viewers.

"Cubism drew inspiration from Africa. Impressionism from Japan. I want to continue opening cracks between the center and the periphery through cultural exchange."

—Kim Bora, reporting from Gyeongju