

French-Somali gallerist Mariane Ibrahim splits her time between continents but here she invites us for a stroll around her favourite spots in Paris.

Show and tell

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When we meet gallerist Mariane Ibrahim at the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel, the sunshine has lured half of Paris into the Jardin des Tuileries. Ibrahim, who is wearing a black fine-wool blazer from Sportmax with black suit trousers and white Dior trainers, is not far from her home on the left bank of the Seine. She starts all of her Parisian days here. “My morning routine is always a quick 3km run to help me create structure between time zones and activate my energy reserves,” she says. Ibrahim splits her time between the French capital, Mexico City and Chicago, where her other two galleries are located. “At seven in the morning, I only share the Jardin des Tuileries with a few others.”

It’s mid-morning and today we are moving at a more leisurely pace, strolling next to dozens of walkers, some of whom have taken a seat on the green metal chairs to enjoy the balmy air. We follow the straight path that leads us to one of the park’s two duck ponds and arrive at Nicolas Coustou’s fountain, in whose basin two marble figures seem to be engaged in a wild chase: Apollo, struck by Cupid’s arrow, pursues the shy nymph Daphne in a frenzy of love.

We pass the Orangerie, and reach a baroque balustrade that marks the end of the park and the Place de la Concorde. “The square is my favourite place in Paris,” says Ibrahim. “At night, you feel like you’re floating here when all the lights are on. The obelisk, well, we tolerate it,” she adds with a

laugh. We cross the square and reach the Champs-Élysées, where traffic rolls towards the Arc de Triomphe, and turn right into a small park to find the Club Marigny, a café-restaurant that Ibrahim often visits. We opt for the terrace and take a seat under the black-and-white striped awning. Ibrahim orders a hot chocolate and begins to talk. — k

You worked in marketing before you opened your first gallery in Seattle. How did you come to focus on art?

I founded the gallery in 2012 but had been interested in artists of African descent for years before that. I started collecting art privately from artists of the African diaspora

until I realised that representing them was my calling. Still, I hesitated because I was afraid that I didn’t have what it takes for a career as a gallerist. But then the desire to do justice to minority artists prevailed.

How important is it for you to represent art that speaks of a wide range of perspectives?

Many narratives about the African and African-descended population in the US and Europe misrepresent their participation in culture, science, architecture or art. An ongoing process of reconstruction and reparation is under way. It’s a collective endeavour and I am happy to be a part of it. Many museums have recently taken a closer look at their collections and realised that minorities – though I don’t like this expression – are absent. To tell the full story of a country, you need all different voices. Otherwise the narrative remains one-dimensional. For instance, the work of the Kenyan-British painter Michael Armitage tells emotionally charged stories from East Africa, allowing his detailed knowledge of European art history to shine through. Amoako Boafo studied under Kirsi Mikkola in Vienna and his works are sometimes associated with Egon Schiele.

What interests you about art that’s influenced by different cultures?

The ability to adapt. We Africans are global and speak many languages. We are like sponges that absorb cultures and can mix and

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1. L’Air by Aristide Maillol in the Jardin des Tuileries
2. Ibrahim on the pedestrian bridge at the Musée d’Orsay
3. By the Musée de l’Orangerie
4. In front of a painting by Peter Uka, a recent acquisition
5. Choosing a perch at the Tuileries

recombine them. African artists also look at Western art. For Amoako Boafo, for example, it is just as natural to connect with the painters of the Secession as it was for Picasso to create paintings inspired by traditional African artefacts. It goes both ways.

Does art have the power to change society?
Art has the power to change everything.

The artists you represent all belong to your generation. How does this influence the way you collaborate?

It is a unique opportunity. We share the same aspirations and the same language, if I may say so. I feel connected to them and part of their mission.

Your relationship with big-name creatives, such as American artist Clotilde Jiménez and Ghanaian painter Amoako Boafo, began early on. How did you meet them?

Clotilde Jiménez was still completing his master’s in fine arts when I saw a post of his on social media. We met for the first time in Mexico City in 2017. Who would have thought that six years later he would be the first to exhibit in our new gallery in town? I also became aware of Amoako Boafo online. I was fascinated by his location. Vienna? Why there? We got talking and when I saw an incredible painting of his, I knew that we were destined to work together.

In 2021, in the middle of the pandemic, you opened your gallery in Paris. How did that come about?

I wanted to be closer to my family, who live in Bordeaux. I also had the feeling that it was time for the City of Lights to shine.

How does the European art market differ from the American one?

A lot. First, because of its size. In the US there are more collectors, more institutions, more artists. People are more spontaneous in the US market, they buy more emotionally than intellectually and know few restrictions. US art collectors support both their local and the international art scene.

You opened your Mexico City gallery in 2023. Why did you choose this location?

Mexico City is the largest city in North America and an art metropolis. It has a fantastic history, marvellous museums and magnificent architecture. It is also a world-class culinary centre.

How does a city inform the artists who live there? What’s distinct about Mexico City, Paris and Chicago?

In Mexico City, it’s the vibe, the energy of the people, the lush nature and the history. Chicago is where I feel at home. For me, it is the epitome of Americana – in its diversity, excellence, coolness and progressiveness. Paris has great symbolic power for artists, historically, mainly due to the art of the turn of the century. For me, these three galleries make for a perfect formula.