

Ndidi Emefiele
Inarrestabile – Unstoppable

Curated by Riccardo Freddo
Ndidi Emefiele's Feminine Universe at Palazzo SUMS, San Marino



Detail: Ndidi Emefiele, *Ball Miners*, 2025, mixed media on canvas, 220 x 270cm

20 June – 3 September 2026

Sisterhood, resilience, and complicity: the Nigerian artist reimagines the female body through a body of work spanning painting, collage, and materials rooted in African tradition.

Presence, identity, autonomy. Sisterhood, resilience, and shared strength. From 20 June to 3 September 2026, Palazzo SUMS will host *Unstoppable*, a major solo exhibition by Nigerian artist Ndidi Emefiele. Bringing together layered and profoundly contemporary visions of womanhood, the exhibition introduces, for the first time in the Italian peninsula, a monographic presentation of the artist's celebrated female figures: presences constructed through material stratification and immersed within vibrant chromatic fields.

Admired internationally Emefiele does not create conventional portraits. Instead, she constructs archetypal yet strikingly contemporary female presences: women who occupy space with confidence, dignity, and symbolic power. It is precisely within this intersection of politics and aesthetics, and through the layering of materials, patterns, and cultural references, that the Nigerian artist brings to Palazzo SUMS a tactile and expanded vision of Black womanhood in global visual culture — one that transcends fixed categories of identity and belonging.

Curated by Riccardo Freddo in collaboration with Rosenfeld Gallery, the exhibition unfolds as an immersive journey in which painting becomes both radical gesture and visual affirmation. Visitors are invited to encounter a multiplicity of voices and presences, transforming Palazzo SUMS into a space of passage and reflection — a site in which to reconsider female identity in the twenty-first century through an international, inclusive, and deeply poetic visual language.

Unstoppable is not only the title of the exhibition, but the very condition embodied by the women who inhabit it: figures who exist beyond imposed limitations and beyond reductive narratives. Within their quiet yet inexorable force lies the possibility of imagining new forms of representation — and perhaps new ways of being in the world.

Across works that combine painting, collage, and textile insertions, Emefiele constructs a visual system in which each figure does not ask to be observed, but instead compels a new mode of seeing. Her protagonists inhabit space with complete presence, resisting any externally imposed logic of representation and asserting identities formed from within. The women in Emefiele's work do not seek validation, nor are they defined through the gaze of others; instead, they create spaces in which they may fully exist, overturning traditional codes of representation.

Born in Abuja and currently working between Nigeria and the United Kingdom, Emefiele interweaves personal memory and cultural heritage throughout her practice, transforming textiles, patterns, and materials drawn from African traditions into a distinctly contemporary visual language. Her use of collage introduces a layered dimension in which each element becomes part of a living archive capable of connecting geographies, histories, and identities. Influenced in part by the language of fashion, her practice generates vibrant and complex surfaces in which material itself becomes narrative, and painting expands into a sensorial and immersive experience.

Ndidi Emefiele (b. 1987) is a Nigerian artist who lives and works in Northampton, United Kingdom. Her painterly practice is distinguished by richly layered figurative compositions shaped through cultural, gendered, and personal references. Dynamic both in brushwork and chromatic juxtaposition, her paintings explore the complexities of contemporary experience and female identity. Emefiele draws upon a wide range of materials — including collage, textiles, and traditional elements - to create an aesthetic deeply rooted in Nigerian cultural heritage.

Her protagonists, powerful and self-possessed, inhabit a universe in which the male figure is perceived only through its absence. Enlarged heads — symbols of control over destiny within Nigerian tradition — together with recurring motifs such as oversized glasses and compact discs, function as metaphors of protection against the outside world. For Emefiele, art is a language through which to challenge stereotypes and create new visual spaces for contemporary Black female identity, in constant dialogue with memory, spirituality, and popular culture.

Emefiele has exhibited internationally in both solo and group exhibitions across Miami, New York, London, Chicago, Los Angeles, Lagos, Johannesburg, and Abuja. Her works are held in major public and private collections, including Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Taubman Museum of Art, The Perimeter, Mint Museum, the Nigerian Exchange Group, and Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, as well as prominent private collections including those of Beth Rudin DeWoody and Jiménez-Colón. In 2022, she was included in the exhibition *Bold Black British* at Christie's and participated in the Art Encounters Biennial in Romania. She received the prestigious Olive Prize for Excellence in Painting from the Slade School of Fine Art and was nominated for the Future Awards Africa in the Arts and Culture category.

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Palazzo SUMS
Republic of San Marino

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