



The Vanguard Youth Arts Collective Presents:

SPOT ON!

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Interview with Chidera Ikewibe

Edited by Meaghan Sweeney

The Vanguard Youth Arts Collective are a group of creatively driven youth who act as a voice for an emerging generation of the arts within the Windsor Essex region.

'Spot On!' is Vanguard's artist interview series edited by members Meaghan Sweeney and Alexei Ungurenaşu. These interviews offer a spotlight for emerging and established local artists who work in various media to discuss and promote their past and current art projects.



Chidera Ikewibe (she/her), aka CHLIKE, is an Igbo Nigerian-Canadian multidisciplinary artist and poet based in Windsor, Ontario. Her work often incorporates her Igbo heritage, bending cultural motifs alongside Nsibidi (a writing system from South-Eastern Nigeria). Chidera's work spans plays, poetry, a podcast, statues, and so much more. She can be found taking in the works of FKA Twigs, Basquiat, Kendrick Lamar, Kojey Radical, and Joy Crookes, whom she cites as artistic inspirations, or rewatching the Fullmetal Alchemist franchise.

How did you get started in the arts?

I have always had a love of the arts that my parents and my teachers fostered—Ms. Pearce, Ms. Teti, Mr. Conlon, and Ms. Delduca, to name a few. However, I wanted to quit making art when I got into university. It wasn't until I met Alexei that I started back up again and made art within the Windsor community.

How did Alexei inspire you to continue creating?

They invited me to speak on their *First Impressions* series where they interviewed poets in the Windsor scene. I thought it would be odd if I would give up on art but still go on the interview. So I decided to keep going. Additionally, they have been a great mentor to me. They have, on more than one occasion, given me information and advice or invited me to events.

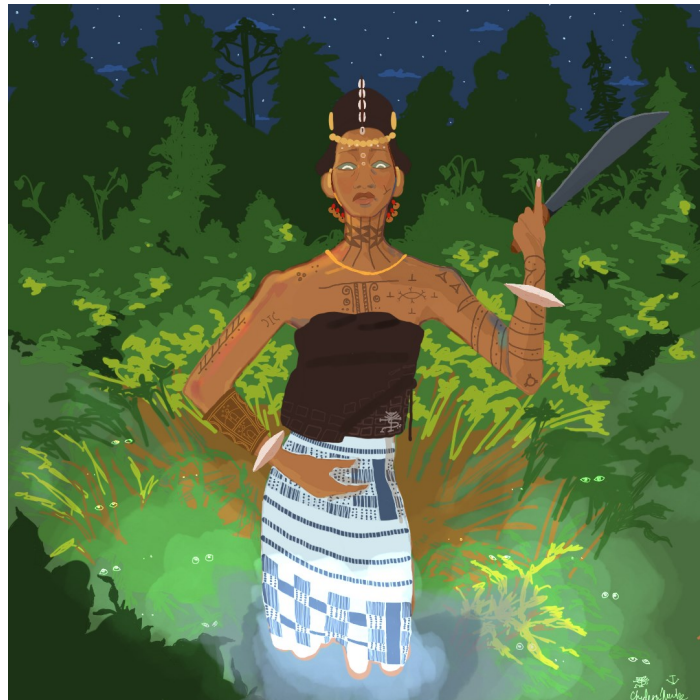
What is your favorite part of being a creator in Windsor?

Everyone knows everyone. Everything is connected.

Do you have any examples? How does being connected affect your personal practice?

Even my experience with the editors of *Spot On!* is a good example. I was volunteering and met you, Meaghan, a local artist here in Windsor. You knew Alexei, and Alexei had just finished a *First Impressions* interview with Binazir Haidari—who is my friend and also a local poet.

Being so closely connected makes it feel like the art scene here is very small, but the more people I find in this web of artists, the more I want to learn from them and pick their brains.



“Ala/Ana Igbo Earth Goddess” (2021)

What are some challenges you see for artists based in Windsor-Essex?

I think the youth art scene is often underappreciated and often tied to the university alone. I would want more substantial funding for long-term youth projects and greater access to the art scene for youth who are not seeking post-secondary education.

What does your approach to the process of creating entail?

It normally starts with a feeling or a question and then research. Anything can spark inspiration. Then, I make the first draft out of the inspiration and quickly dispose of it. I then rework it into the second draft where I question what is the best medium to deliver the message of the piece I am working on.

Could you walk us through an example of this process you've used for past work?

An example of this process in my past work is my *New Voices* exhibit. I first wondered how we use language in our day-to-day lives. Then, I thought of using an Igbo idiom on the billboard, but the ones I liked were too long to fit. I then thought of how we address one another and remembered all the times my name had been mispronounced. I realized our names are often one of the first things we offer about ourselves to others. And it's a very weird experience to have another person instead try to say your name to the best of their ability—try to rename you or belittle your name or call it weird or odd or laugh.

Lastly, I thought about how important names are in Igbo culture. In Igbo culture, we have naming ceremonies, and names carry these great meanings that at times can feel like fragments of poetry.

That was how the idea came about and I wrote down:

"My name does not translate into English well and it too is a part of me."

Next, I combined my sentiments about how Igbo names are an art form and reflected that in the poem to get the final product that went on the billboard.



CHI.IKE's *New Voices* exhibit at ACWR, 2022

By attending local creators' events. The biggest gripe I hear from fellow creators is that not enough people show up to support their work. The art scene in Windsor is full of wonderful creatives who put a lot of passion into their projects. However, when people do not show up to these projects, it can often feel demoralizing. Additionally, artists and creatives want to be paid and should be paid for all work they do—from the smallest painting to the committees they are on.

Who has not inspired me would be a much shorter list. Jean Michel Basquiat is the first person that comes to mind. He has this great mix of poetry, painting, and politics that blends together so well. He directly inspired my poem "To the Black Student Body."

crafting a poem or an artwork. More specifically, they are the ones I listen to when I want to try something new or push myself.

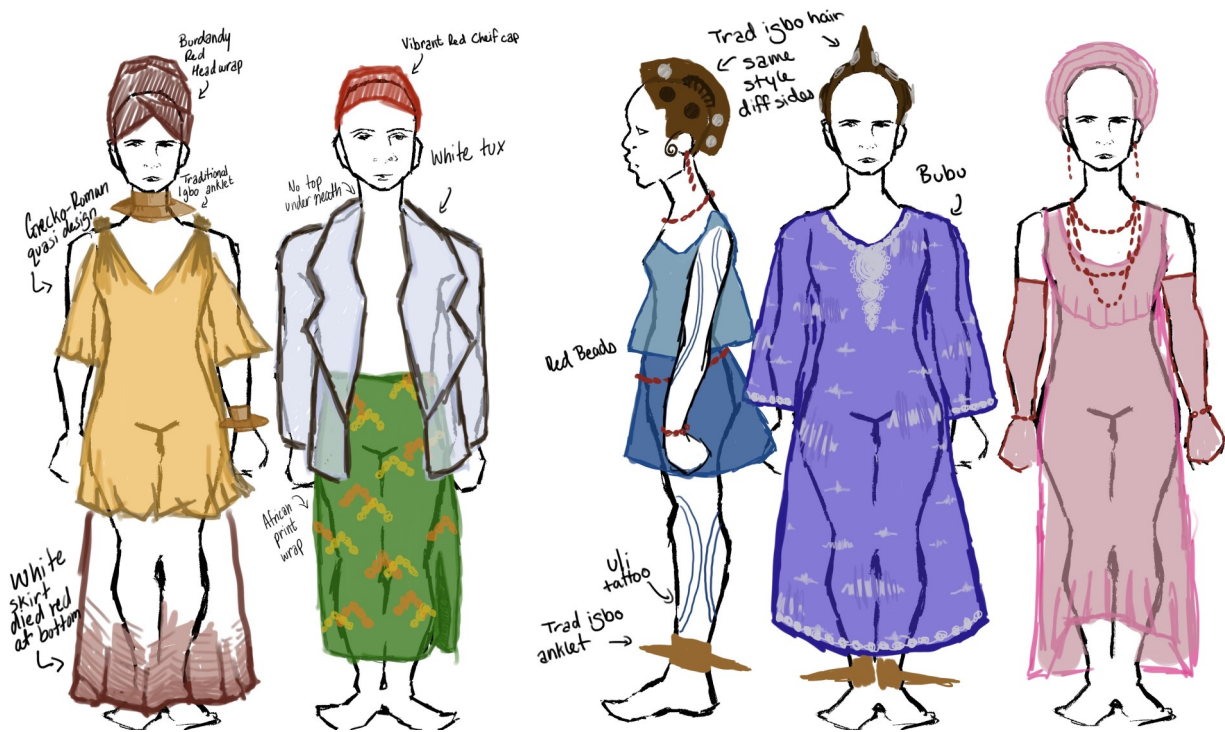
There's also Michaela Coel; I was told once that I reminded someone of the main character from her show *Chewing Gum*, and I've been following her career and shows ever since. She really inspires me to keep dreaming to be a screenwriter.

Then, of course, my Igbo heritage also inspires me. I say I am Igbo every chance I get because I am so proud of my people and because I use motifs of our history so often in my works. I would not be the person I am today both artistically and characteristically if I were not Igbo.



What are potential projects you dream of being able to create in the future if there were absolutely no limitations?

I am currently working on a play about the Aba women's protests in Nigeria. I want to make the play with lavish costumes and masks with an all-Black cast.



Chidera's character sketches from her upcoming play (2022)

What would it mean to you to be able to realize this project?

It would mean the world to me! I think plays are truly collaborative works of art. And I want to be a collaborative member of the art scene here. Additionally, I think that BIPOC actors and performers are disadvantaged in Windsor because the plays that are produced are rarely works that are written by BIPOC artists. When I say this I mean that works by established BIPOC artists (i.e. Wole Soyinka, to name one example because one of his plays is currently being performed in Stratford as we speak) are rarely performed in Windsor, which upholds this single narrative of what a play looks like or who writes plays. This feeds back into a loop of few productions having BIPOC characters or leads, and this of course results in few BIPOC actors in productions.

This, in the end, harms everyone. We are deprived of worlds, storytelling, and ways of exploring stories. When most of the world's art is left off the stage, we continue to recycle and draw inspiration from few sources and deprive ourselves of the riches of humanity.

The Westerners

Ikenga
By Chidera Ikewibe

From my suffering, from my suffering
can you feel it from here?
My strength I offer, share my last name
and if I see you distant cousin
guide me to your owner's grave
and I will free you in our ceremonious way.



~~_____~~

Soul

~~_____~~

Strength

~~_____~~





"The Igbo Have No King" (2021)

Can you tell us more about your upcoming plans and events?

I am currently doing a podcast on CJAM 99.1 FM. It's called *University Redacted* and it centers around weird events that take place on a university campus. All the stories have a grain of truth to them but are still a few degrees removed from reality. As people listen, they might be able to pinpoint the real-life influences from around Windsor. You can find it on the CJAM 99.1 FM radio or on the iHeartRadio music app.

"Aba Women's War" is a working title for the play that I'm writing. I am only in the writing stage, so I don't have much else to report about it for now.

There's a chapbook draft that I wrote a few years ago—just before the pandemic started—and I am now editing and adding to it. The chapbook reflects on what it's like to be in the Igbo Nigerian diaspora—or at least my perspective

I would also like to do more collaborations.

Who would you like to collaborate with?

I would love to work with Teajai Travis and Artcite, maybe even for the play that I'm working on—if he wants to, of course. He just brings this wealth of knowledge with him wherever he goes.

I've only really interacted with Bilal Nasser online. I listened to his music once and wrote some poems what are in my drafts; I should probably send them to him. I'm just blown away by his talent, especially considering how close we are in age. I just keep imagining combining poetry with his guitar playing.

We thank Chidera for being our guest in the Spot On! interview series, and we can't wait to see her upcoming work!

If you would like to see more of CHI.IKE's work, you can find her on Instagram @its_just_chidera and @chi.iike.png.

For more artist interviews and other Windsor-based projects, follow the Vanguard Youth Arts Collective on Facebook and Instagram @vanguard.collective and stay tuned for our next issue as well as our first print volume of interviews in early 2023!