

Joke uses her platform and influence to give a voice to women and girls of colour



Working striking red yarn on hessian fabric ensures Joke's messages are heard

When London-based artist Joke Amusan began stitching the affirmations she needed to hear, she didn't know embroidery would lead to exhibiting across the world and hosting amazing workshops. In fact, Joke hadn't really seen other embroiderers that looked like her but picking up a needle and yarn felt like home. "I'm very led by my intuition," she says, "but from trying it out and using my hands and needles it was like I didn't even have to learn to do it." It was almost instinctive.

"Yes, I did watch a YouTube video of someone stitching but then I just kind of started doing it, like I was doing it in unison with that person. I already felt that connection from the get-go, whereas with knitting and crochet, it was very much wait, how do I put this loop through? How do I do this? It's like the needles are too big, they don't fit properly, whereas an embroidery sewing needle just fits so perfectly into my hand and it just works."

"To me, it's like you're going on a journey in a way. A constant repetition and I don't have to think too much about it, like my body's in a dance with the fabric. With stitching, I feel free to express myself."

Joke's journey as an artist began in earnest at university, where she studied Art and English Literature. The course allowed her to dabble in different mediums. "I really wanted to share my story as a black woman," she explains, "and I didn't know how to do that through my art. Textiles is something that I tried out and really loved and I kept on coming back to. I was wondering why I had such a deep

connection to it and then upon doing more research, I realised that textiles is really important in Nigerian culture."

"I'm German-Nigerian, and textiles is a really big part of my Nigerian heritage. I remember that growing up, my mum would always mend our clothes. I could have easily gone to get it done by a seamstress or someone else, but the fact that she did it by hand and I saw how much love she brought into it as well resonated with me. I realised that for a lot of women in Nigeria, that was their trade. That's something they learned and passed on throughout the generations. Through my artworks, I've always wanted to share my story but also display my own heritage and culture. In doing more research I realised that textiles is actually a very powerful tool to promote real change and to encourage others to speak up and use their voices as well. And I do that literally through stitching words of empowerment, to empower black women and girls."

Joke now works from her studio in Wembley, creating textile pieces for exhibitions, and hosting embroidery workshops all over. She knows words have power and →

Joke Amusan

MEET THE TEXTILE ARTIST WHO FOUND HER VOICE THROUGH EMBROIDERY. NOW SHE'S USING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF WORDS TO STAND FIRM AND EMPOWER OTHER BLACK WOMEN TO DO THE SAME...



Words by Becca Parker

"What brings me joy as an artist is being able to connect with people through my art."



she chooses them with intention. Tall, stark text in unmissable red yarn, carefully embroidered onto hessian with her own signature typeface. “What I really love about words is that I can use them to lift people up,” she says. “I use my words to encourage because I wasn’t encouraged when I was growing up and I don’t want another black girl, or black woman, to feel the same way I did. I was born in Germany and then moved to England and I found learning the English language was really difficult for me. And so coming across long words or words that were used specifically to confuse me, it really impacted the way that I was able to communicate with people and so I want my communication to be clear and accessible.”

“When I first started my art practice, it was my own words that I would use,” Joke explains. “Almost like I was speaking to my younger self, speaking over that little black girl who needed those words at that time – it was very healing for me. Then the more I stitched, the more I used my artwork as a mouthpiece for myself. When I couldn’t use my own voice to speak, the more I stitched into the fabric and it became part of me. It encouraged me to be powerful and to embody what it means to be a black woman who actually deserves to be here, deserves to take up space. And then, as I continued to make the artworks, it became me paying attention to my black female friends and the words they’re speaking over me or whether it’s a book I read by a black female author, whether it’s music I listen to.”

Joke remembers stitching her first ever piece: “The words said, ‘If you have a voice speak’. I still have it in my room today and when I finished that piece I remember tying the knot at the end to say that it’s done, taking it in and realising that this is what I’m going to do now. Saying to myself this feels like the start of something new. This is the start of me really allowing myself to express who I am

and share my story and be who I feel like I was created to be, which is to help empower other black women.”

“That first art piece I created has shaped the trajectory of my journey, I think. That statement ‘If you have a voice speak’ has carried me to this day, where I’m actively trying to find different ways I can use my voice to speak up for those who are marginalised, for those who are spoken down on and for those whose stories aren’t being heard.” Accessibility and keeping her message personal, clear and tangible, is fundamental for Joke. Whether that’s the immediacy of sewing every single stitch herself, so each piece is a part of her, or creating touchable, more interactive pieces to directly connect with the viewer. Galleries can be intimidating and somewhat overwhelming to some people, so Joke loves to create space for connection through her embroidery workshops too. They’re a safe place for creativity and sharing. She believes it’s powerful when people from all over come together and share their stories and memories.

“What brings me the most joy as an artist is being able to connect with people through my art and hearing how people relate to it,” Joke shares. “Having conversations with people who tell me, ‘Oh, I felt the same way as you did growing up, like I felt like my voice didn’t matter and my story wasn’t being shared’. Being able to relate to people through textiles and seeing their reaction to it and seeing their interpretations – how it empowers them and hearing it from them directly. I think it’s always about the people. Hearing that response, it’s always very encouraging because that tells me that what I’m doing is actually helping, it’s really making a difference.”

See what Joke has been stitching on Instagram via [@ibijoke.img](https://www.instagram.com/ibijoke.img) and find out more about her upcoming exhibitions and workshops at [jokeamusan.com](https://www.jokeamusan.com)

SEE THE WORK
 Joke will be exhibiting her art at the TONE Memphis gallery in Memphis, Tennessee between the 24th May and the 30th August 2025, in a group show called Unraveled featuring textile based works by (self-identified) black women artists. For more details visit www.tonememphis.org