

### *Requiem* by Chris Ofili Review

Have you ever found yourself staring at a piece of art for what feels like forever, unable to make a connection? I certainly have! I always need some sort of context to decipher what an artwork means. That's what made Chris Ofili's *Requiem*, unveiled in 2023, stand out for me at Tate Britain. As a British-Nigerian artist, Ofili weaves his heritage into his work, and experiencing *Requiem* felt like stepping into a life story — it pulled me in and left me inspired, an exciting change from the usual “what the hell am I looking at?” confusion.

What drew me in at first was how the story of *Requiem* unfolded before I even entered the exhibit. Outside of that room, information about the Grenfell Tower fire, a fire that claimed 72 lives and affected many more, was clearly displayed. This backstory set the stage for a transformative experience, preparing me for the mural's emotional weight.

Tate commissioned *Requiem* as a tribute to the Grenfell victims, focusing on artist Khadija Saye, who Ofili met a month before. Their brief encounter clearly left a mark on him. The mural captures the personal and collective grief of those lost. Ofili perfectly sums it up in the audio guide: “Public art can hold spaces of grief and it can keep alive collective memories of events that might otherwise completely just fade away in time, just as life inevitably moves on.” That sentence struck me — art is a power tool we all can use to preserve stories. And I think that was shown here.

*Requiem* has three parts, each painting a picture of what had occurred. The first wall shows an ocean, representing both the tears shed for the lives lost in the fire and the waters of Venice, where Ofili met Saye in 2017. The second wall illustrates Grenfell Tower, with jagged, dark edges and vibrant warm colors that evoke fire and smoke, reflecting the chaos of the tragedy. Finally, the central wall features Saye, drawn from one of her self-portraits, holding an *andichurai* to her ear. This belonged to her mother, symbolizing a deep connection to her heritage and family.

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*Requiem* embodies the spirit of the Young British Artists (YBA) movement, known for its bold and often controversial takes on contemporary art. YBA artists like Ofili challenge traditional British art by tackling uncomfortable subjects, and this mural is no exception. It explores themes of loss, resilience and the complexities of British identity, weaving in Ofili's heritage alongside social issues.

Up close, every brushstroke tells a story, especially in the contrast of warm and cool tones. The brushstrokes aren't perfectly smooth — they're rough, adding humanity to the piece. From afar, the mural looks flawless, but leaning in reveals quirks, like spots where the paint didn't land right. This contrast reminded me that life can feel rigid, but underneath that shiny surface are raw imperfections.

*Requiem* was more than just a mural — it was an experience. Chris Ofili honored Khadija Saye in a meaningful way, capturing her spirit while tackling themes of loss and resilience. It made me feel like Saye's spirit is still very much present, even if she's not physically here. As someone who often feels like I'm staring blankly at a canvas, this piece reminded me that when the story behind the art is clear, even someone like me can feel a connection.

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