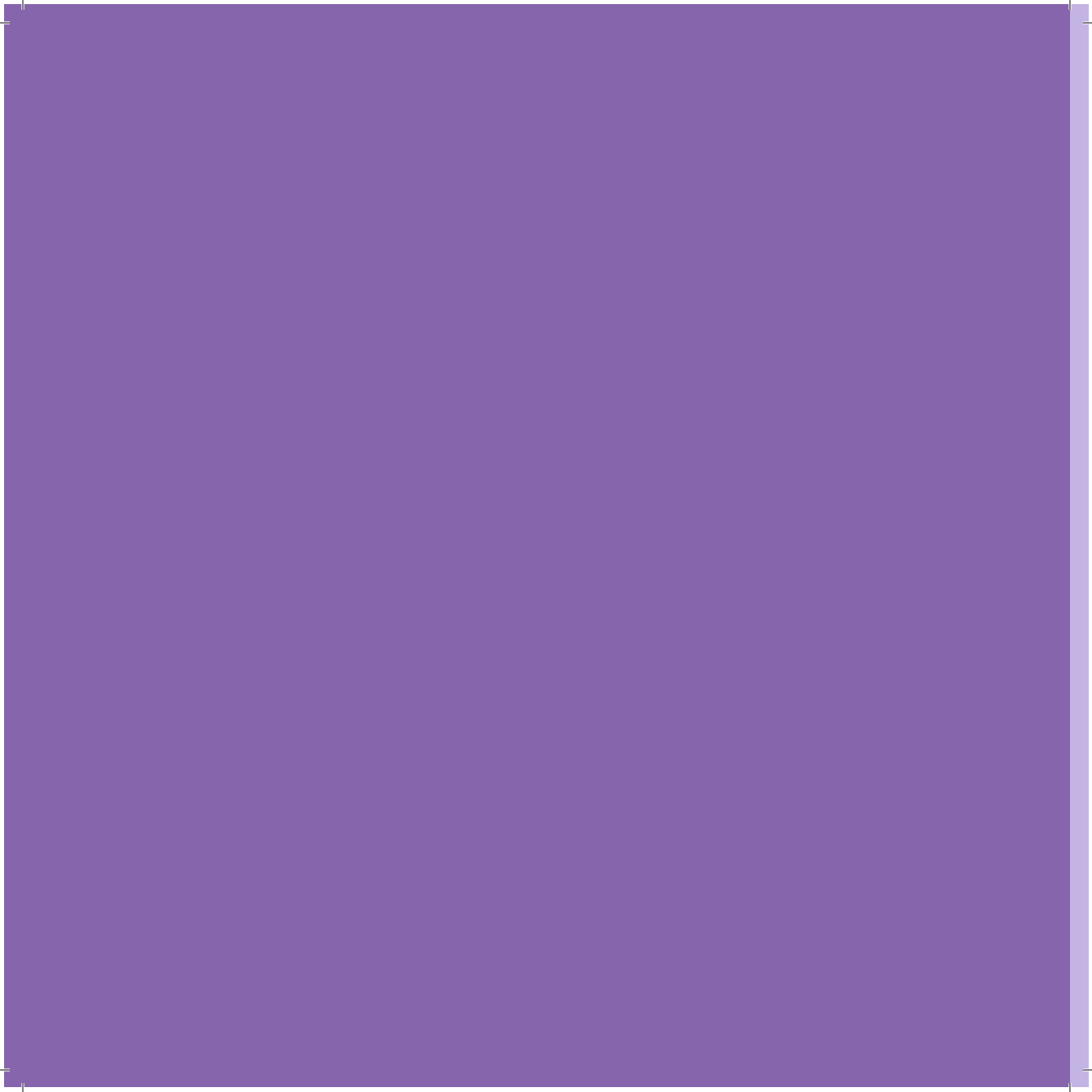


THE AFRICAN ART OF APPEARANCE



**Welcome to NOW LOOK HERE–The African Art of Appearance,
a project curated by Renny Ramakers that takes place from
25 January to 23 February 2020 in a former warehouse
in Amsterdam North.**

The exhibition presents the work of eighteen artists from the African continent who use outward appearances to tell a deeply rooted story. They upend perceptions of Africa through the use of irony, beauty and style. Participating artists come from Togo, DR Congo, Kenya, South Africa, Senegal, Cameroon, Angola, Benin, Uganda and Nigeria. Curator Azu Nwagbogu adds a conceptual layer to this exhibition in the section 'Black Spring–Beauty in Exile', with works by two Netherlands-based artists from the African diaspora.

The opening programme includes a performance by Buhlebezwe Siwani, a fashion performance curated by Sunny Dolat, who also conducts a workshop at the Rietveld Academy with the theme of Cultural Appropriation, and an afternoon of artists talks moderated by Ama van Dantzig.

We invite you to look, here, now.

IMAGE CHANGERS

Renny Ramakers
Curator **NOW LOOK HERE**

Now look here. Consider the work of these eighteen imagemakers. What you see are extravagant grannies, proud dandies, and a perfectly dressed historical figure with a football under his arm; all colourful, radiant, smooth and aesthetic images. The exhibition draws your attention to appearance. However, on closer inspection the seductive surface proves to be a lure that draws visitors into a deeper story, in which perspectives are reversed: white becomes black, stigma becomes beauty, a skivvy turns out to be a high priestess, and apparent footnotes to history are revealed to be prominent figures.

Directly or indirectly, the artists address the historical abuses and present-day troubles that tend to dominate the media image of Africa. But they take charge of this image,

and in doing so, set a completely different tone. What connects the art works in NOW LOOK HERE is a sophisticated game of clichés and prejudices, in which humour, beauty and optimism challenge daily reality. Individually and collectively, they upend perceptions of the continent.

It began in 2015 with an invitation to come to the African island republic of São Tomé and Príncipe for a design commission with Droog. In 2018, this led to the assignment to curate the VIIIth biennial of Arts and Culture of the island, the N'GOLÁ biennial, which was held from 26 July to 18 August 2019. During my research for that event I was struck by the extent to which fashion, style and beauty act as manifestations of dignity, identity and self-realisation in the work of many African

artists, and this became an important theme for the exhibition. Seeing these works united at the biennial highlighted their shared qualities. This sparked a dialogue, between the artworks as much as between the artists, which I thought merits continuation. By bringing these works to Amsterdam I hope to involve an audience in The Netherlands in this conversation.

To my mind, what links these works is a narrative of a dynamic, self-confident Africa, embodying strength, optimism and hope for the future, particularly among younger generations. This speaks to me, because I am convinced that we need to continually reimagine today's world, to offer alternative perspectives. And I believe in the power of art as a catalyst for social change, because art has the ability to transgress borders, upend existing definitions, and challenge the status quo. Finally, for me, there can be no meaningful social change without beauty at the heart of it.

Case in point are the flamboyant photographs of Kenyan artist Osborne Macharia, a key figure in the Afrofuturist movement. His elaborately staged photographs celebrate fantasy and fiction while at the same time conveying outspoken messages about the complicated realities of daily life. Macharia embraces history, present, and future in a fictional narrative in which forest rangers

are dressed in stylish suits with a hyena or monkey at their side. Former female circumcisers, who have taken up ethnic fashion as an alternative livelihood and shelter young girls escaping early marriage, shine out as powerful old ladies.

Transformation is also key to the practice of Congolese Sapeurs in Brazzaville and Kinshasa, documented here by DRC artist Yves Sambu. These men dress to perfection, either in self-made or dearly purchased clothes, as proud dandies flouting their poverty-stricken circumstances. Togo-born, US-based artist Tabi Bonney documented a disappearing culture of adornment. His spontaneous decision, while travelling through Ethiopia, to photograph the beauty rituals and ornamentation of semi-nomadic tribes had nothing to do with exoticism or an anthropological gaze. On the contrary: he saw beauty, pride, and ingenuity, shapes, colours and textures, in short: a sense of fashion transcending time and place.

Cameroonian artist Samuel Fosso has been subverting archetypes and codes over the past 40 years, taking the liberty to transform himself into a diverse set of personages. He altered his studio into a performance theatre for these self-portraits, which can be fictional or actual, ranging from 'Liberated American Woman' of the 1970s in 1998 to, recently, 'Black Pope'.

With similar attention to details of clothing and backdrop, South-African artist Mary Sibande puts herself on stage, overturning the traditional image of the black South African housemaid, by transforming her into a powerful persona with dominion over her future, or a high priestess with universal strength. Another 'power woman' is her compatriot Sethembile Msezane: in protest against the ubiquitous representation of white male colonial figures on statues and monuments in the city where she lives, she climbs onto pedestals herself. The powerful image of Msezane's 'Chapungu–The Day Rhodes fell' during the 2015 student protests at the University of Cape Town quickly went global: after standing on a pedestal for four hours, she raised her winged arms at the exact moment Cecil Rhodes' statue was lifted away.

Senegalese artist Omar Victor Diop rewrites history, overwhelmingly and passionately. With his Diaspora series, he pays homage to notable Africans who played important roles throughout history but by now have largely been forgotten. His portraits of these historic African figures radiate style, dignity and power, while bristling with an uncanny familiarity.

Elsewhere in this publication Nigerian curator Azu Nwagbogu stresses the importance of the conversations and collaborations sparked by diasporic conditions between artists with African roots. He was invited to curate a section that would add a conceptual layer to the

exhibition which elaborates this theme. This has become 'Black Spring–Beauty in Exile', with newly commissioned works by Netherlands-based artists from the African diaspora, Raquel van Haver and Buhlebezwe Siwani. The idea of the diaspora being a home away from home was his basic premise. Nwagbogu is fascinated by the cross-pollination of ideas in a fecund environment, nurtured from other spaces but with roots at home.

The diaspora was clearly manifest in Kenyan fashion curator Sunny Dolat's performance for the 2019 São Tomé biennial opening weekend. Called 'In their finest robes, the children shall return', it was inspired by a speech by Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo, who had declared 2019 the 'Year of Return' for Africans in the diaspora, claiming that 'the time is right' for people of African descent to make the journey back. For an audience gathered on the beach at dawn, the models appeared to step on land from the sea, each wearing an outfit representing one of the fifty-five different fashion cultures of the African continent, and one to represent the diaspora. NOW LOOK HERE shows the video of this performance.

For NOW LOOK HERE Sunny Dolat has curated the fashion section Give Dem!, which looks at traditional and contemporary dress practices across the African continent, and the playful competitive encounters that happen when these dressed bodies interact in public spaces.

As Dolat says, aesthetics and the performance of appearance in public space have always been integral to African cultures. Elsewhere in this publication, Dolat notes how cultural misconceptions and lack of knowledge can lead to accusations of being 'not African enough'—an issue he addressed in his eponymous book with the Nest collective—and at the same time pave the way for cultural (mis)appropriation, which is the theme of his workshop this January at the fashion department of the Rietveld Academy.

It has been a great honour and pleasure to work with all of the artists and curators involved in NOW LOOK HERE—The African Art of Appearance. Whether through humour or unexpected twists, through poetry or fantasy, these image makers are definitely image changers. As I was inspired, so do I hope others to be.

Renny Ramakers is an Amsterdam based art historian. She is co-founder and director of Droog, the renowned experimental design initiative from the Netherlands that started in 1993 as an anti-statement; a down to earth design mentality with a human touch that opposed the high style and form-based world of design. Today, Ramakers works as an independant curator, critic, writer and lecturer, and initiates projects worldwide, reaching beyond the realms of design.



Five questions to Kenyan creative director Sunny Dolat who has curated 'Give Dem!' within NOW LOOK HERE.

1. What do you think of the theme of the exhibition: the African Art of Appearance? Is it relevant at this time? What could it add to current debates?

There is no real debate; just significant gaps in knowledge and history because of purposeful erasure. People are becoming more and more aware of what they don't know, and there is increasing hunger for these new knowledges, not only on the continent and in the diaspora, but everywhere. People want to know the things that were kept from them. There have been plenty—and this is an understatement—of aesthetic explorations. Additionally, many exhibitions about the continent, and about us, the people of the continent, have dealt with racist spectacle, scandalised for effect to make others feel more 'civilised'. But we are now positioning ourselves in new ways, which are about our dignity, our power, our truths, beyond imperialist propaganda.

2. In your projects you use fashion to ask cultural questions. Your work for the N'GOLÁ biennial commented on the return of the African diaspora. What is the narrative of the

presentation you have made for NOW LOOK HERE?

Aesthetics and the performance of appearance in public space have always been integral to African cultures, from the enchanting displays of the Woodabe men during the Gerewol festival to the electric struts of the Sapeurs in contemporary Kinshasa. This sort of peacocking has always been, and continues to be, a part of traditional and contemporary cultural expression. For NOW LOOK HERE, I am exploring and reflecting on these elaborate performances of appearance, and some of the authors that feed into this process.

3. In 2017, with The Nest Collective, you published the book 'Not African Enough'. Can you explain this title?

We heard from Kenyan fashion designers that people—from the country, the region, the continent, and internationally—would tell them their work was not 'really African' or didn't 'look African'. We were interested in the juggernaut, this super-concept, in the term 'African', and who gets to decide what it means. Africa is the

second largest continent in the world, with around 2000 languages spoken by well over a billion people, not to mention the number of ethnic groups and the fact that each culture alone can fill a volume of encyclopaedias. How, then, can anyone even imagine that one or a few small things are the definition of what looks 'African'?

4. The theme of your workshop at the Rietveld Academy is Cultural Appropriation. Do you think there is a lot of cultural misappropriation?

Cultural misappropriation is not a feeling or a subjective opinion: it is an evidence-based fact. Because of the ways power works in this world, people who have been the subjects of imperial powers are not allowed to manifestly wear their own cultures. Once, under colonial and other rules, this was illegal. Now, it is coded as 'unprofessional', 'showy', 'too ethnic', and 'political'. Meanwhile, when it comes to the artistic practices of people from these former imperial powers, things are completely different. These same cultures are distilled for parts, and called 'inspiration', or 'trends': something new, hot and popping to dazzle the public with. Not unlike their ancestors who ran circuses in public places, inviting people to stare at the novelty of black folk and people of colour. Frequently, cultural elements that are part of real life for some people are repurposed as edgy visuals for others. And yet,

when African artists do anything that is not an explosion of ankara fabric, beads, shells, and bright colours, their work is labelled unoriginal and, ironically, 'not African enough'.

5. If fashion is a language, what stories will be coming from Africa in the coming years?

One of the most beautiful things about this moment that we are in, is the honesty and freedom with which people are designing. For a long time, designers felt extremely restricted and under a lot of pressure to comply with this singular global definition of African fashion aesthetics. This new freedom paves the way for some truly breathtaking explorations by African designers. The work of many African designers remains rooted in traditional skill, technique, knowledge and philosophies, and it's been interesting to see designers interrogate some of these and even elevate them in some instances, like Nigerian designer Kenneth Ize whose core brand textile is an adaptation of the traditional Nigerian aso oke. I think in the next couple of years, we will see a lot of designers holding up mirrors to themselves and the communities they belong to, and tell stories about how they see themselves.

Sunny Dolat is an independent fashion curator and creative director based in Nairobi, Kenya. In 2012, he co-founded The Nest Collective, a multidisciplinary Kenyan squad working with film, fashion, visual arts and music.



Five questions to Nigerian curator Azu Nwagbobu who has curated 'Black Spring–Beauty in Exile' within NOW LOOK HERE.

1. What do you think of the theme of the exhibition: the African Art of Appearance? Is it relevant at this time? What could it add to current debates?

It's very interesting and relevant. I think the idea that fashion and a certain sense of individuality and style have a particular significance and appeal in contemporary visual culture is catching on—but not just as it relates to Africa, it has a much wider confluence. You might have seen the new Aperture book by Antwaun Sargent 'The New Black Vanguard: Photography between Art and Fashion'. It demonstrates an active participatory youth movement that has influence beyond Africa.

In terms of debates, then we speak of geography as it relates to the viewing audience. Who will see the exhibition in Amsterdam? What is the level of debate that can be had around these ideas? The ideas that the artists present are subtle and not always obvious. In my view, an exhibition like this in the Netherlands is still relevant, because the audiences of both diasporic Africans and native Europeans still retain a narrow view of

contemporary Africa, and an exhibition such as NOW LOOK HERE is a great starting point.

Appearance for Africans goes beyond identity politics, it is a radical statement of resistance. Resistance to conform and yield to socio-economic circumstances—to adversity, a way of making a mark, of expressing a sense of individuality and solidarity. It is the way we say, 'we may be under the same dark cloud of failed leadership and poor infrastructure, but we retain a sense of individuality of thought and aspiration.' Dressing up is the only cultural form that everybody in the world partakes in.

For the longest time, Africa has been misrepresented and artists today are doing a lot with the agency they have to make their presence felt. I also observe that the fashion within art is gaining much wider understanding and approval and these elements are well represented in this exhibition. However, as a cautionary note, more black bodies in the visual art space without agency or activism can become really tiresome. Yes, we know we exist, we know we look good, but we've got a whole lot more to say.

2. You have often stressed the importance of photography as a medium for African art. Can you explain?

Photography is the most immediate artistic medium and it comes, in today's digital world, with an ease of sharing. It has opened up the rest of the world to the African continent and the reverse is true. It has also challenged the Western art world hegemony. It has given others a chance.

3. Why did you select these artists for 'Black Spring'? How does their work relate to the theme of the exhibition?

The artists I have selected are artists with African roots who have found a home in the diaspora. I have always been interested in the networks that artists nurture outside their home countries. Throughout history, artists in diverse fields—actors, musicians, writers, painters, sculptors—have found a home away from home in Paris, New York, Amsterdam, London, etc. It seems easier to meet and connect, working and living away from home. This fascinates me—the sense of alienation and consanguinity, kinship and the generosity of the host countries. I'm interested in investigating all the contradictions within this narrative.

The idea of diaspora being a home away from home was the basic premise of the selection. I'm fascinated by the plurality of ideas that is nurtured from other spaces but with roots at home. Cross-pollinating ideas in a fecund environment gives birth to work that has a dissimilitude that is atypically African but still undeniably so.

4. Do you think it is important for artists from the African continent to meet artists in the African diaspora?

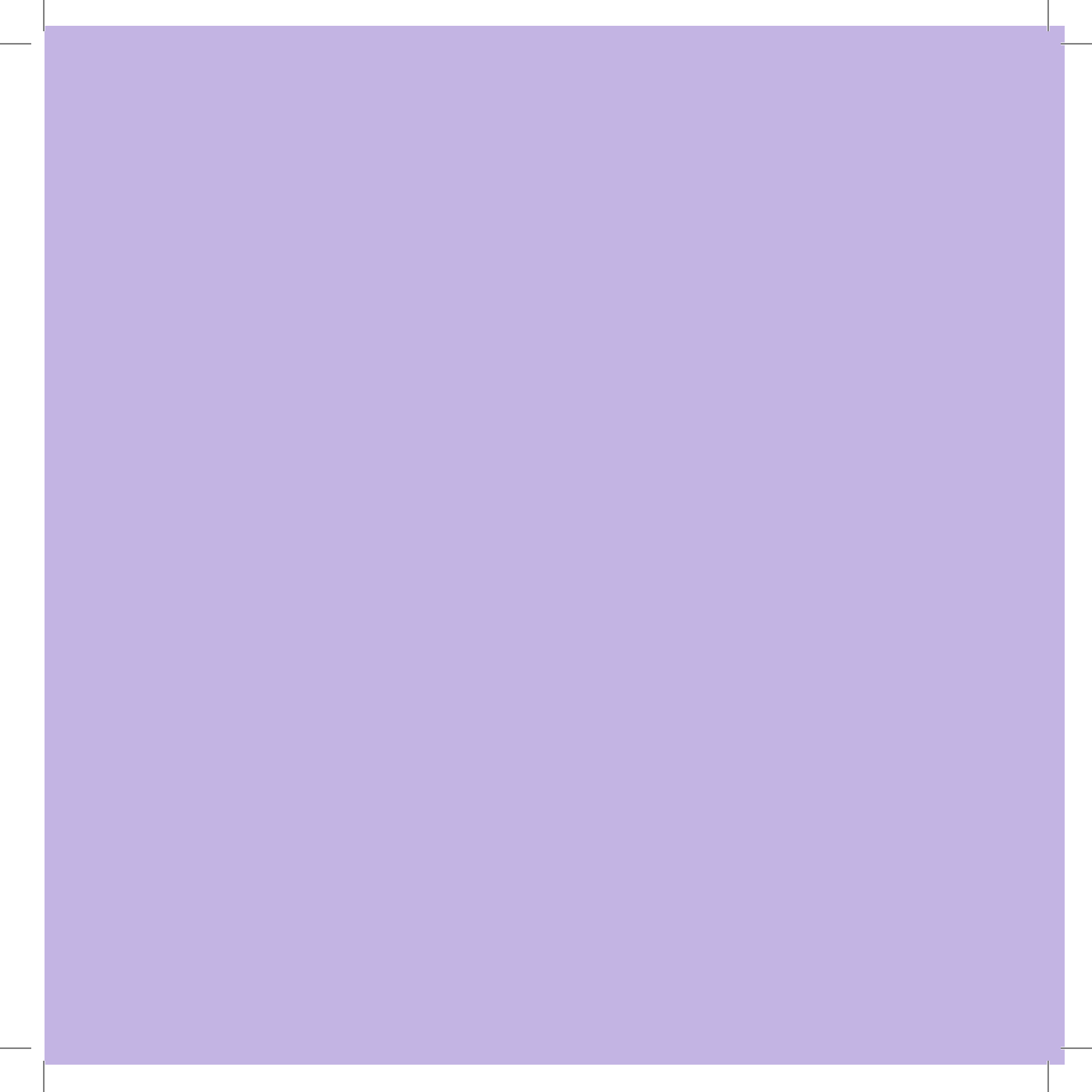
This is vitally important. It is always about the exchange. Art is always participatory. One of the reasons I have curated a diasporic aspect to this exhibition is because I believe in cross-pollination of ideas. So-called Western civilisation is only Western in name. It is civilisation that was initiated by the Arab world and nurtured by the Africans, Asians and the rest, but housed in Europe or the so-called West.

The African's true asset is that whether you are African, African American, Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Caribbean, we have the most relatable violent histories, and overcoming this must make us stronger. When we find occasion for solidarity, we gain a unique sense of self. It cannot really be explained.

5. What would be the ideal image of Africa?

I think the ideal image of Africa is the image we are all searching for: artists, curators, cultural practitioners, politicians, scientists. Artists allow us to imagine a future, and others work to realise this future. For me, though, it is an Africa that is self-assured, is more concerned about our common history and more interested in trusting each other. A curious people, eager to share and engage, and willing to host the world on our terms. A continent that trades amongst itself and has reason to be confident in our abilities and future.

Azu Nwagbogu is the founder and director of the annual LagosPhoto festival and of the African Artists' Foundation (AAF), both based in Lagos, Nigeria. He is also an independent curator and the chief editor of Art Base Museum an online repository and journal on contemporary art.





Tabi Bonney, *Le Bon Voyage*, 2018. Photography, 98 x 123 cm.

TABI BONNEY

Togo-born, Washington, D.C.-raised musician, director and photographer Tabi Bonney (1977, Togo, based in U.S.A.), is the son of Itadi Bonney, an afro-funk musician popular during the 1970s in Togo and West Africa. Bonney achieved recognition in the Washington metro area with his radio singles 'The Pocket' and 'Doin It' which featured Raheem DeVaughn. He has directed and produced commercials and music videos for several brands and artists, including friend and fellow D.C. associate Wale. Now Los Angeles-based, Bonney's visual content has won awards at Toronto Film Festival and has aided campaigns for Adidas, DC Tourism, Alaffia, Tidal and more.

Early 2018, rapper Tabi Bonney travelled to Ethiopia with a friend to study its coffee culture. In the valley of the Omo River in southwest Ethiopia Bonney encountered the Surma people: semi-nomadic cattle herders whose lifestyle is under threat due to severe drought. The Surma are known for their elaborate body paint, scarification, and majestic lip discs, which denote beauty and status, particularly for women. This encounter made Bonney take up the camera to document their disappearing culture.

In these photographic series, Bonney celebrates the Surma style from a contemporary and universal sense of appreciation: 'I shot these portraits from a beauty and fashion aspect. I saw richness and ingenuity, where others may have seen something else. I saw that our people—no matter what circumstances, social status, or where we are in the world—have the ability to make the most out of even a little.'



Bobbin Case and Jan Hoek, Ghost Rider, from the series Boda Boda Madness, 2018. Photography, 150 x 100 cm.

BOBBIN CASE & JAN HOEK

Avant-garde fashion designer Bobbin Case (1991, Uganda, based in Kenya), creates imaginative costumes and dreams of designing clothes for major film and music productions. Bobbin won the Upcoming Kenya Fashion Designer of the year 2016-2017 award and was selected for the same award in Uganda and at the Swahili Fashion Week. Several of his collections appeared in ELLE magazine and on the BBC TV channel.

Amsterdam-based artist, photographer and writer Jan Hoek (1984, The Netherlands) is attracted to the beauty of outsiders worldwide and is always keen to collaborate intensively with people that normally are overlooked, with the aim of creating a new image together. In Hoek's universe the 'normal' people are the strangers and the outsiders are the rulers of the planet. Hoek's work has been shown at Foam (Amsterdam), Unseen Festival (Amsterdam), Photoville (New York), Fomu (Antwerp), and Lagos Photo (Lagos).

Fashion designer Bobbin Case and photographer Jan Hoek jointly created the project 'Boda Boda Madness' for the motor taxi drivers of Nairobi. The drivers customarily add striking features to their vehicles in order to distinguish themselves from the competition, and strengthen their appeal to customers. In this way, they frequently transform the motors into true artworks on wheels. Their colourful appearance caught the attention of Case and Hoek, who soon realised the drivers had forgotten to include their own outfits in the creative process, and told them: 'There is still something missing, your clothing!'

Case and Hoek singled out seven motor taxi drivers and together with them designed special outfits to match their motors. Case took the lead in the outfit redesign, while Hoek photographed the drivers in the Kenyan landscape. Adhering to his usual method of involving his models in the process, Hoek closely followed the drivers' wishes for their portrayal. Now, these taxi drivers proudly whizz around in Nairobi in their spectacular custom-made outfits.



Justin Dingwall, RUBY II, from the series A seat at the table, 2018.
Photography, 119 x 79.3 cm. Courtesy ARTCO Gallery.

JUSTIN DINGWALL

With 'Albus', Justin Dingwall seeks to inspire a public debate on the taboo subject of albinism in Africa. Throughout the continent, people with albinism frequently face discrimination, superstition and violence. In some regions, they are associated with magical powers and sometimes even killed for their sought-after body parts. Dingwall states that his highly stylized portraits are 'not about race or fashion, but about perception and what we subjectively perceive as beautiful.' To Dingwall, 'diversity is what makes humanity interesting and beautiful.'

Johannesburg-based photographer Justin Dingwall (1983, South Africa) has an eye for the unusual, a passion to explore avenues less travelled, and the desire to create images that resonate with emotion. Dingwall has exhibited extensively both locally in South Africa and internationally. He has been selected for various awards, including: SA Taxi Foundation Art Award 2015, Sasol New Signatures 2014, and International Photography Awards (IPA) 2013.

In 'A Seat at the Table', Dingwall features model Moostapha Saidi who lives with the condition of vitiligo, which makes the skin lose its pigment. Because of his appearance, Dingwall explains, Moostapha had a difficult time growing up, but things have changed: 'Through these challenges he has gained strength and confidence from looking so different. He no longer sees his vitiligo as a hindrance, but as something precious and unique.'



Omar Victor Diop,
Don Miguel De Castro,
from the series Diaspora,
2014-2016. Photography,
120 x 80 cm. Courtesy
Galerie Magnin-A, Paris.

Don Miguel De Castro,
Emissary of Congo,
c. 1643-50. Original
painting attributed to
Jaspar Beck or Albert
Eckout.



OMAR VICTOR DIOP

With his 'Diaspora' series, Omar Victor Diop pays homage to notable Africans who once played important roles in 16th to 19th century Europe, Asia, the Americas, or the Middle East, but by now have largely been forgotten.

Referencing the style of their original portraits, in paintings, engravings, and photographs, Diop brings these historical figures back to life in elaborately staged images. Using himself as model, Diop becomes a painter, a diplomat, a saint, an abolitionist, a courtier, a scientist, etc. With this project, Diop intends to construct 'a reinvented narrative of the history of black people, and consequently, of the history of humanity and of the concept of freedom.'

Each historical African character is accompanied by a contemporary football accessory: a foot rests on a ball, a boot dangles over a shoulder. With these incongruous additions, Diop wants to highlight the paradoxes they share with present-day European football heroes, who are still targets for outright racism: 'Football often reveals where society is in terms of race.'

Multimedia artist Omar Victor Diop (1980, Senegal) developed an interest for photography and design at an early age, essentially as a means to capture the diversity of modern African societies and lifestyles. The success of his first conceptual project 'Fashion 2112, le Futur du Beau,' featured at the biennial photography exhibition Rencontres de Bamako in 2011, encouraged him to dedicate his career to photography. Working as a visual artist as well as a fashion and advertising photographer, Diop enjoys mixing his photography with other art forms such as costume design, styling and creative writing.



Samuel Fosso, Black Pope, 2017. Photography, 239 x 180 cm. Courtesy Jean Marc Patras, Paris.

SAMUEL FOSSO

Photographer Samuel Fosso (1962, Cameroon, lives and works in Paris, France, Central African Republic and Nigeria) has worked for most of his career in the Central African Republic. Born in Kumba, Cameroon, as the son of Nigerian parents, Fosso grew up in Afikpo, his ancestral home, until 1972, when he was forced to flee to Bangui in the Central African Republic in the wake of the Nigerian Civil War. In 1994, Fosso became known abroad when he won the first edition of African Photography Encounters in Bamako, Mali, the most important photography festival in Africa. He won the Prince Claus Award from The Netherlands in 2001. His work is significantly represented in the largest museums worldwide, such as Centre Pompidou (Paris), MoMA (New York), Tate (London), prestigious private collections as the Artur Walther Foundation, and corporate collections which both Samuel Fosso and Jean Marc Patras are contractually not allowed to mention.

For the past forty years, Samuel Fosso has created imaginatively staged portraits of himself in various guises. The iconic figures he recreates often denote a comment on Africa's present or past, such as 'Liberated American Black Woman', 'Self-Portrait as Mao Zedong', and 'Black Pope'. His self-portrait as Mao comments on China's growing influence on the African continent, while his 'Black Pope' asks the legitimate question 'Why can't the next Pope be black?' By transforming himself into different personas, Fosso challenges perceptions of identity, history and representation.

At the same time, his play with role models and cultural codes of style and pose functions as a form of healing: 'Taking pictures is a way of liberating myself from the sufferings of childhood, from illness, war, everything. I used to believe that my life would be pushed aside by other people's lives, but photography has given me a second life. It has made all lives possible for me.'



Raquel van Haver, A Shrine of a Deity, Purple Haze, 2018. Dissected mounted print of photo collage, 190 x 150 cm.

RAQUEL VAN HAVER

Raquel van Haver (1989, Colombia, lives and works in the Netherlands) refers to her work as loud and spiritual paintings. She explores themes such as identity, meditation, presentation, spirituality, urbanism and the diaspora and draws inspiration from African, Western, Caribbean and Latin American cultures within her community in the South-East of Amsterdam, Netherlands. More recently, she has spent long periods abroad gathering source material in both West Africa and South America. Her works are often monumental in scale, at times dark and ominous, colorful and energetic and continue to negotiate boundaries between alienation and recognition. Her works have been exhibited in a solo exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, at the Dordrechts Museum, Netherlands, Lagos photo festival Nigeria and BOZAR Centre For Fine Art Brussels. She recently won the prestigious Dutch Royal Prize for Painting, and was awarded with the Amsterdam award.

Fashion as performance in NOW LOOK HERE is not meant to impress but rather designed as an act of personal resistance to society's relentless oppression. This is the central achievement of this exhibition. The youths all over Africa feel a sense of disenfranchisement and neglect. There is a palpable sense of persecution and a feeling of being misunderstood. They are impatient and want to do things their way. Style offers an outlet for individuality which they crave. The impulse to create oftentimes has deep roots. For Raquel van Haver these roots reside in her quest to understand her origins as a separate entirety from her home in the diaspora. Having lived in the Netherlands since the age of three, Van Haver has sought—through travels in Africa and her native Colombia, Curaçao, and Surinam—the essence of her blackness. Her collages mix in narratives that tell the story of those who have a voice but are not being heard. Her subjects reflect the gaze. Growing up accustomed to being gawked at as darker than most around her, Van Haver's subjects in her paintings and collages interrogate this gaze and reflect them to make the viewer uncomfortable. The unease you feel from the reflection of the gaze is tangible. It says NOW LOOK HERE but we are looking at you too. It says: we won't be exoticized as specimens in a lab or animals in a zoo.



Lola Keyezua, Fortia, 2017. Photography, 120 x 90 cm.



LOLA KEYEZUA

Lola Keyezua's 'Fortia' series seduces the viewer with the image of a strong beautiful woman in a red dress, but the actual story lies in the masks. These were designed and made by men who have lost one or more limbs, just like Keyezua's father, who lost both his legs from diabetes and died when she was still a young girl.

Keyezua initially created 'Fortia' as a way to honour her father, but it grew into a tribute to 'each person that battles with an emotional reaction to physical disability, and to empower them.' In Angola, a man without legs is no longer considered a man. Keyezua wants to counteract this negative perception with an empowering narrative: 'In each mask, I want to express the force I found in this group of physically disabled men.' Each mask represents a different emotion in a ritual of mourning and acceptance.

With 'Fortia'—Latin for force—Keyezua wanted to create a poetic weapon. The masks came to represent not only her own stories of loss, but also those of others, and their strength to survive.

Photographer Lola Keyezua (1988, Angola) studied at the Royal Academy of Arts in the Hague, The Netherlands, and has now returned to live and work in Luanda, Angola. She calls herself a storyteller who uses art as a communication tool. Keyezua's work addresses individual stories, expressed in films, paintings, poems and sculptures. She is driven by a desire to change the often-prejudiced narrative about Africa, and to contribute to change through her art.



Osborne Macharia, Magadi, 2017. Photography 203 x 150 cm.

OSBORNE MACHARIA

Self-taught photographer and digital artist Osborne Macharia (1986, Kenya) was born and raised in Nairobi. His work focuses primarily on themes of Afrofuturism in culture, identity, and fictional narratives. His photographic style creates a powerful platform to convey important messages on topics like gender abuse, ivory poaching and victims of war-torn regions in Africa. He places his work within the genre of Afrofuturism, which he defines as 'an artistic repurpose of the post-colonial African narrative through integrating historical elements, present culture and future aspirations of people of colour by using narrative, fantasy and fiction to highlight African identity.'

Osborne Macharia's 'Magadi' photo series shows a group of erstwhile female circumcisers living on the vast salty plains of Lake Magadi, Kenya, carefully staged in glamorous outfits and poses. After abandoning their former practice, these women took up ethnic fashion as an alternative livelihood. Macharia explains: 'They now shelter young girls escaping early marriage, teaching them fashion skills such as styling, design, print work, and modelling for both local and international runways.'

In 'No Touch Am' Macharia presents herbalists and animal charmers of the Hausa tribe from the Northern State of Katsina, Nigeria, as stylish protectors of the forest: rangers in fancy suits, with a monkey or hyena at their side. 'The wild animals they once domesticated and used as pets, a tradition passed down from their ancestors, are now expert trackers. Now both man and beast roam the forests at night, seeking illegal firewood harvesters while protecting indigenous flora.'



Emo de Medeiros, Kaleta/Kaleta, since
2013. Video installation in three channels,
1920x1080, 16:9, colour, stereo.

Multidisciplinary artist Emo de Medeiros (1979, Benin) lives and works in Cotonou, Benin, and Paris, France. Emo de Medeiros works with a wide range of media, including sculpture, video, photography, performance, electronic music, drawing, interactive devices, performative installations, painting and connected objects. His work hinges on a single concept he calls contexture, a fusion of the digital and the material, of the tangible and the intangible, exploring hybridizations, interconnections and circulations of forms, technologies, traditions, myths and merchandises. It also rests on the new perspectives and conversations happening in a novel space: the current context of the post-colonial, globalized and digitalized world of the early 21st century. The focus of his research encompasses transcultural spaces and the questioning of traditional notions of origin, locus or identity and their mutations through non-linear narratives.

EMO DE MEDEIROS

The video installation 'Kaleta/Kaleta' incorporates hundreds of audio and video fragments that can be infinitely recombined. Its music mixes traditional percussions of Benin, Brazil, or Cuba, Jamaican dub, Chicago house music and Nigerian afrobeat. The work pays tribute to the Beninese tradition of Kaleta, invented by Afro-Brazilians returned to Benin after the famous Muslim slave revolt of Salvador de Bahia in 1835.

Kaleta is a unique mix of Brazilian carnival, American Halloween, and local mask traditions. De Medeiros: 'Born from the slave trade, Kaleta is anything but a lament: it is a tribute to human resilience and resistance, but also to cultural resilience, since the tradition is passed on by children.' Kaleta is performed around Christmas and New Year by groups of young boys who go from house to house, dancing and playing makeshift instruments in exchange for small tips.

De Medeiros belongs to a generation of Africans who are more interested in the future of the continent than its past, while using memory, history and tradition as fundamental elements of their outlook on the future.



Sethembile Msezane, Chapungu—the Day Rhodes Fell, 2015. Photography, 84.1 x 118.9 cm.

SETHEMBILE MSZANE

For 'Solitude', Msezane embodied the spirit of Solitude, a slave rebellion leader in 19th century Guadeloupe. For several hours, she stood as a living sculpture in Dakar, on a strip overlooking Gorée Island, the largest slave trading centre on the African coast between the 15th and 19th centuries. The powerful image of 'Chapungu', Sethembile Msezane's masked performance during the 2015 student protests at the University of Cape Town, quickly went global: after standing on a pedestal for four hours, she raised her winged arms at the exact moment Cecil Rhodes' statue was lifted away.

In Shona beliefs, the Chapungu bird is thought to be a good omen, bringing good fortune to a community. Msezane embodied its spirit, and in doing so, located her body—as a black female—within a public memorialized space, as a mechanism of reclaiming and re-remembering the narratives of black women in South African and African histories. After moving from Soweto to Cape Town, Msezane did not feel she belonged in her new hometown: its public monuments and statues, supposed to represent her national identity, only depicted white male colonial figures.

Multidisciplinary artist Sethembile Msezane (1991, South Africa) lives and works in Cape Town. Using an interdisciplinary practice encompassing performance, photography, film, sculpture and drawing, Msezane creates commanding works heavy with spiritual and political symbolism. The artist explores issues around spirituality, commemoration and African knowledge systems. She processes her dreams as a medium and poses questions about the remembrance of ancestry. Part of her work has examined the processes of mythmaking which are used to construct history, calling attention to the absence of the black female body in both the narratives and physical spaces of historical commemoration.



Yves Sambu, Traditional, from the series Vanitas, 2010-2017. Photography, 80 x 120 cm.

YVES SAMBU

Educated as a painter, Yves Sambu (1980, DR Congo) decided to devote himself to photography and video soon after graduating in 2007. Together with fellow students, he formed the SADI collective, a group characterised by social consciousness and action. Sambu's work is based on the dynamic evolution of man and the social integration of men and women in the city. He addresses cohabitation issues which demand respect for each other's differences in point of view, conviction, and way of being. For him, not only the artistic result is important, but also the process and the approach.

In 'Vanitas', Yves Sambu combines a fascination for the elegant Sapeurs of Kinshasa with fearful childhood memories of traversing cemeteries with his grandmother. The project was inspired by the Sapeurs' yearly gathering at Gombe cemetery, to commemorate the death, on 10 February 1995, of Stervos Niarcos, the king of SAPE, or 'Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes'. The Sapeurs dress up like dandies, wearing famous brands or their own designs, self-made or dearly purchased, in outfits meticulously put together according to a clear set of rules. These rules extend to behaviour: a Sapeur chooses a way of life full of beauty, compassion, goodwill, and dignity.

Yves Sambu considers La Sape a form of religion, kitende, revolving around respect for oneself, respect for the body, around purity, beauty and harmony; a form of non-violent resistance amidst harsh conditions. Cemeteries as locations of choice emphasise the movement's religious aspect, but also as provocative protest against an urban environment in decline. Yves Sambu sees the Sapeurs as artists, who through their 'vanity' create a very contemporary vanitas.



Mary Sibande, *Silent Symphony*, 2010. Photography, 150 x 225 cm. Courtesy SMAC Gallery, Cape Town.

MARY SIBANDE

Mary Sibande (1982, South Africa) is based in Johannesburg, and uses painting and sculpture depicting the human form to explore the construction of identity in a postcolonial South African context. Her art aims to critique stereotypical depictions of women, particularly black women. For many years her work has exclusively revolved around a servant character named Sophie. Sophie's life is collected and presented through a series of human scale sculptures, moulded on Sibande herself.

With Sophie, Mary Sibande presents an iconic image of a strong, powerful and combative woman in a blue housekeeper costume. The figure is moulded after Sibande and can be seen as her alter ego. In this series, Sibande celebrates the hard work, strength, love, hope, and imagination that carried so many black South African, women working as maids for white families—her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother included—through apartheid in South Africa. Sibande's High Priestess, dressed in an exuberant purple dress, presents a new, powerful persona. She will determine her own future, thereby rewriting history, and creating alternative paths and perspectives.

With her photographs and sculptures Mary Sibande explores the construction of identity in a postcolonial South African context and beyond. 'We witness Sophie as the High Priestess becoming the space between two realms', Sibande explains, 'between the past and future, between what has been and what could be. She is fleeting, a personification of mystery and spirit that is unknown to the rational world.'



Buhlebezwe Siwani, *iSana libuyele kunina*, 2015. Photography, 112 x 72 cm.

BUHLEBEZWE SIWANI

Buhlebezwe Siwani (1987, South Africa, based in the Netherlands and South Africa) was raised in Johannesburg. Due to the nomadic nature of her upbringing she has also lived in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal. Siwani works predominantly in the medium of performance and installations, she includes photographic stills and videos of some performances. She uses the videos and the stills as a stand in for her body which is physically absent from the space. Siwani completed her BAFA (Hons) at the Wits School of Arts in Johannesburg in 2011 and her MFA at the Michealis School of Fine Arts in 2015. She has exhibited at the Michaelis Galleries in Cape Town, a site-specific exhibition in collaboration with APEX Art, New York City, in 13th Avenue, Alexandra township, Commune 1, and Stevenson in Cape Town. She is represented in the in multiple private collection and institutional collections around the world.

The image of the artist represented in Buhlebezwe Siwani's photographic series 'iSana libuyele kunina' is not merely aesthetic. Siwani collides metaphors and imageries to speak about the convergence of colonial histories through religion, and its divergence and disconnect with African ancestral worship and attributes. The metaphorical juxtaposition of the chicken that is to be sacrificed and the road in the background tell a story: the sacrifice of the chicken represents death, while the road becomes an important metaphor for continuity. Conversely, the church represents discontinuity and an interruption of the journey.

Buhlebezwe Siwani's performance Umkhosi WoMhlanga places the black female body, which is often exoticized and fetishized, at its centre. It draws a comparison between its existence in two separate worlds, both of which are places where it belongs—the diaspora and its continuous association with 'home' in Africa. In both spaces the female body exists but must perform to exist. It is a struggle. Thus, the body negotiates and travels between these two worlds by exercising that which it has internalized. The black female body in this case questions the notion of history and its manifestation as a colonial construct when adorned with various accessories and accoutrements. It changes, but the person remains the same; affected but not destroyed.



Stephen Tayo and Jan Hoek, *What I Want to Look Like in the Future*, 2019.

STEPHEN TAYO & JAN HOEK

Stylist and street style photographer Stephen Tayo (1994, Nigeria) lives, works and draws inspiration from Lagos. He developed an early eye for fashion, while growing up in the quiet neighbourhood of Ikorodu, in Lagos State. Tayo regards fashion as more than just as a way to dress, but as a way to live. His sitters are usually active participants in the process; they perform along with Tayo and often set the tone of the picture. ‘The clothing you wear says a lot about unity and love’, Tayo says. With his photography, he captures people and their surroundings; Nigeria’s community and family traditions, such as coordinating outfits for special occasions and celebrations.

Amsterdam-based artist, photographer and writer Jan Hoek (1984, The Netherlands) is attracted to the beauty of outsiders worldwide and always keen to collaborate intensively with people that normally are overlooked, with the aim of creating a new image together. In Hoek’s universe the ‘normal’ people are the strangers and the outsiders are the rulers of the planet. Hoek’s work has been shown at Foam (Amsterdam), Unseen Platform (Amsterdam), Photoville (New York), Fomu (Antwerp), and Lagos Photo (Lagos).

Early 2019, the N’GOLÁ biennial commissioned Nigerian stylist and photographer Stephen Tayo and Dutch photographer Jan Hoek to create its campaign image. They started to roam the streets of Lagos, asking children: ‘What do you want to look like in the future?’ and inviting them to choose a corresponding outfit from an assortment of local designers’ clothes. The result is a vibrant series in which children visualize their future selves, in their future professions and future appearances.

The essence of the project is connecting avant-garde, future-oriented fashion designers from Lagos to children, and allowing these children to choose and show their dreams, illustrating them with pieces from the designers’ collection. The photographs offered the children a powerful means of portraying themselves as true individuals. They underline the strength of a child’s imagination: the basis for the greatest art and fashion out there.

Tayo and Hoek first worked together in 2018 on a project in Lagos for the New York Times, documenting young Nigerian gothics at Rocktoberfest: the only Nigerian rock festival and the only opportunity to freely wear gothic dress.





Sarah Waiswa, *Stranger in a Familiar Land*, 2016. Photography, 80 x 80 cm.

Documentary and portrait photographer Sarah Waiswa (1980, Uganda, based in Kenya) has a strong interest in exploring identity on the African continent, particularly the New African Identity. After receiving both her sociology and psychology degrees and working in a corporate position for a number of years, she decided to pursue photography full time.

SARAH WAISWA

In ‘Stranger in Familiar Land’, Sarah Waiswa depicts an woman with albinism as an outcast in society by deliberately placing her against the backdrop of Nairobi’s Kibera slum: a metaphor for the artist’s turbulent vision of the outside world. In this way, Waiswa aims to express how a sense of not-belonging caused the subject of these photos to wander around in a dreamlike state.

The artist wants to highlight the challenges facing people with albinism in Sub-Saharan Africa, from the sun as well as from society: in Tanzania, they are hunted for their body parts, which are believed to possess magical powers. Waiswa: ‘People fear what they do not understand, so people with albinism continue to be exposed to ridicule and persecution.’

Sarah Waiswa: ‘I want to illustrate the plight of various social issues on the continent, in a contemporary and non-traditional way. I aim to help change the narrative on Africa by generating dialogue on developing issues as they happen. I am passionate about creating visual poetry and telling stories in the most organic and creative way possible.’

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