

THE CONTINENT COMES TO NEW YORK FOR 1-54 CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN ART FAIR



Saïdou Dicko, *Bubble in the Yacht TMS R Soleil*, 2022. Painted photography, 90 x 120 cm. COURTESY OF AFIKARIS.

The dominant trend in global contemporary art over the past five to ten years has been a foregrounding of artists from Africa and the African diaspora. Leading institutions and collectors worldwide finally realized how their historic neglect of the continent rendered collections deficient and shamelessly out of touch with the 21st century.

Those few trendsetters with an eye for and an interest in African contemporary art prior to its current “moment” find themselves the envy of the industry. Today, everyone’s looking for the next Julie Mehretu (Ethiopia), Wangechi Mutu (Kenya), Yinka Shonibare (British-Nigerian), El Anatsui (Ghana) or Amoako Boafo (Ghana).

Perhaps she, they or he can be found at the 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair being held Thursday, May 18 through Sunday, May 21, 2023, at the Malt House in the Manhattanville Factory District in West Harlem (439 W 127th Street).

Since its first fair in London in 2013, 1-54 has presided over a massive shift in art world awareness and market interest in contemporary African and diasporic art practices. With editions now held annually in

London, Marrakech and New York, 1-54 is the leading, first and only global event series dedicated to contemporary art from Africa and its diaspora.

“It’s been wonderful to watch artists of African descent increasingly receive the recognition they deserve,” Founding Director of 1-54 Touria El Glaoui told Forbes.com. “A growing number of African and diasporic artists are now represented by international blue-chip galleries, exhibit at major international art fairs like Art Basel and Frieze, are included in the collections of internationally renowned museums, and featured in important large-scale exhibitions and events like the Venice Biennale. Good examples include Gideon Appah, who first exhibited at 1-54 back in 2018 and recently presented a large solo exhibition at Pace Gallery in London, or Kapwani Kiwanga who showed at 1-54 in 2015, and will represent Canada at 2024 Venice Biennale.”



Adébayo Bolají, Alagbara, 2021. Mixed media on linen, 200 x 160 cm. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND KÓ.

Debuting in New York in 2015, 1-54 has dedicated itself to broadening global awareness about the art-historical significance of African modern and contemporary art. This year’s New York edition features a total of 26 leading international galleries hailing from across Africa, Europe and the U.S., all specializing in contemporary African art.

The fair’s title refers the 54 countries on the African continent. That moniker alludes to the event’s educational mission.

“A common misconception is that African art is invariable or uniform. In fact, contemporary African artists are dealing with numerous interesting and layered themes from identity and the human condition, to history and politics, and the environment,” El Glaoui explains. “At this year’s New York fair, for example, we have artists exploring ideas of ritual and rites of passage, perceptions of beauty, fashion and so much more. A goal of 1-54 has long been to highlight the diversity of art practices in Africa and the diaspora. From installation-based artists, painters and sculptors to conceptual, performance, and digital artists, there is not one style, medium, or genre that is predominant.”

Africa, many need reminding, is a vast continent, not a singular country. 7,000 miles separate Tangier, Morocco in the north along the Mediterranean from Cape Town, South Africa in the south along the Atlantic. That’s more than twice the distance from Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada to Miami.

In between, a fascinating diversity and abundance of peoples, cultures, landscapes and histories are found. And contemporary art.

“A hotspot that immediately comes to mind is Nigeria, where kó, Retro Africa and Wunika Mukan Gallery, who are all showing with us at 1-54 New York, have gallery spaces. Morocco is another country from which many of our galleries and artists come,” El Glaoui responded when asked to name prominent centers of contemporary art across the continent. “Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire and Dakar, Senegal both have extremely vibrant art scenes, with the latter the home of Black Rock Senegal, artist Kehinde Wiley’s multi-disciplinary artist residency, and internationally known artists like Amoako Bofofo, Gideon Appah and Serge Attukwei Clottey have definitely put Accra, Ghana on the map.”

1-54 will be open to the public May 19 and 20 from 11 AM to 7 PM and May 21 from 11 AM to 5 PM. Anyone unable to be in New York for the on-site presentation can browse the artworks and connect with the galleries on line via artsy.net.

So, which artists among the dozens represented at the fair should visitors be particularly keen to identify? El Glaoui mentioned two, Emma Odumade (b. 2000, Lagos, Nigeria) and Delali Ayivi (b. 1998, Baltimore), both young, emerging artists with work she’s excited to see at this month’s event.

“Emma Odumade, who is represented by AFIKARIS, creates hyperrealistic drawings that explore notions of identity and the social constructs of beauty and power, with the artist viewing her pencil as a weapon for activism and a means for reconnecting with personal stories and experiences,” she explained. “Delali Ayivi is a Togolese-German photographer represented by Galerie Number 8 whose practice focuses on diversifying representations of black communities, with a focus on fashion. Finding the work of her great-great grandfather, Alex A.—one of the first Togolese photographers—inspired the artist to document people and in 2019 Ayivi founded Togo Yéyé, a project which scouts innovative Togolese talent, documenting and empowering the Togolese creative community.”

1-54 will also be taking it to the streets for this year’s fair presenting a pop-up exhibition, “Sparkling Islands, Another Postcard of the Caribbean,” a group exhibition of contemporary Caribbean artists on view from May 11-20 at High Line Nine gallery in Chelsea. The exhibition will showcase works by a younger generation of contemporary artists from the Caribbean and its diaspora, pushing beyond reductive portrayals of the region as a sunny tourist destination to reflect the diversity of cultures informing contemporary Caribbean art.



Emma Odumade, Déjà Vu; Girl in Space, 2021. Charcoal, graphite, acrylic, old photos and black tea on ... [+] COURTESY OF AFIKARIS.

New York Art Week

New York launched its first coordinated, city-wide art week a year ago and already New York Art Week has become New York art month with 1-54 battling cleanup. Across town, a stupendous assortment of gallery shows, museum exhibitions and fairs demonstrate why no one does art like New York does art.

Other May 2023 fairs in New York include:

Future Fair

May 10 through May 13 at Chelsea Industrial, 535 W. 28th St

Independent Art Fair

May 12 through May 14 at Spring Studios, 50 Varick St.

TEFAF New York (The European Fine Art Foundation)

May 12 through May 16 at the Park Avenue Armory, 643 Park Avenue

Volta New York

May 17 through May 21 at the Metropolitan Pavilion, 125 W. 18th St

Frieze New York

May 17 through May 21 at The Shed, 545 West 30th St

NADA New York (New Art Dealers Alliance)

May 18 through May 21 at 548 West, 548 West 22nd St

Art lovers visiting New York for the fairs will surely enjoy staying at the Bauhaus inspired ModernHaus SoHo featuring first rate original contemporary art throughout the property including pieces by KAWS and George Condo.

Read the article online: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/chaddscott/2023/05/07/the-continent-comes-to-new-york-for-1-54-contemporary-african-art-fair/?sh=17b2fb8b214f>