

54 Countries, One Continent Our Picks From 1-54 London 2018

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Remember at the start of the year, when we said that contemporary African art is the [darling of the industry](#) and that collectors are expanding their collections? Well, if this year's 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair is anything to go by then we were right!

The fair closed its sixth consecutive London edition on Sunday 7 October at Somerset House and welcomed 18,000 visitors, 43 international galleries (almost double the number from the 2013 preview of the fair), and presented works from more than 130 artists of African descent.

What drew so many visitors to 1-54, many more than at classic African art fairs? Is it the perceived affordability of contemporary works when compared with historical pieces? Is it the idea that the money spent goes to living African artists? Are collectors 'investing' early in the hope of cashing out when artists become established, or are contemporary fairs simply better at marketing?

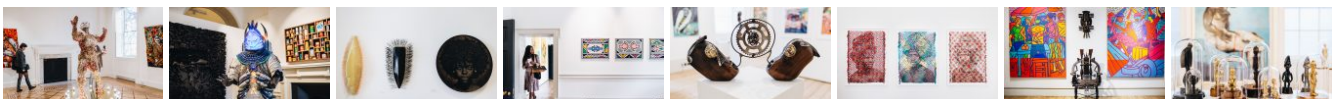
Whatever the answer, there was much talk about the [buying frenzy](#) that took place at the fair with many booths selling out on opening night. Here are some of the stand out works from this year's edition.



Dimitri Fagbohoun, Benin

'Microcosmos', 2017

Galerie Cécile Fakhoury



Athi-Patra Ruga, South Africa

'Of Gods, Rainbows and Omissions'

WHATIFTHEWORLD

"In his first solo UK exhibition, Ruga brings together three bodies of work—*'The Future White Women of Azania'* (2012-2015), *'Queens in Exile'* (2015-2017), and *'The Beatification of Feral Benga'* (2017-Present)—that combined, present a mythical utopia aimed at challenging ideas of cultural identity. The show parodies the construction of the South African nation-state in the post-apartheid era. The free exhibition runs at Somerset House until the 7 January 2019."

—

Zak Ové, United Kingdom

'Umbilical Progenitor', 2018

Vigo Gallery

"Ové works in sculpture, film, painting and photography, often collaging the various elements using found, cast and recovered materials. Interested in reinterpreting lost culture and mythology using modern and antique materials, he pays tribute to both spiritual and artistic African and Trinidadian identities, which have been given new meanings through the Trinidadian carnival and the cross-cultural dispersion of ideas."

—

Alexis Peskine, France

'Power Figures', 2018

October Gallery

"Peskine's work is thematically linked to the 'Black Experience'. His powerful portraits literally nailed into wooden planks, pay tribute to the many individuals undertaking the dangerous boat journeys from North Africa to Europe. Using several sizes of nails, he uses the nail as brushstrokes. The nail for Alexis represents transcendence. It expresses pain as well as the force of resistance."

—

Esther Mahlangu, South Africa

'Unknown', 2009

Burning in Water

"As a young girl, Esther Mahlangu learned traditional Ndebele mural painting, which features large-scale geometric patterning rendered with extreme precision. Now 82, Mahlangu paints her lines and shapes freehand using a chicken feather without stencils or preparatory drawings. She has painted buildings in Tokyo, created cars for BMW and painted British Airways airplanes."

—

Dennis Muraguri, Kenya

'Alien Dialect', 2018

Circle Art Gallery

"Born in 1980, Muraguri is a multimedia artist, working in painting, printmaking and sculpture. In his sculptures, Muraguri works with recycled wood and metal to create a representation of industrialisation in Kenya."

—

Kyle Meyer, United States

'Unknown', 2009

Yossi Milo Gallery

"For his Interwoven series, Meyer addresses Swaziland's hyper-masculine culture by photographing its LGBTQ community. He imagines a parallel world in which the queerness of his subjects may be expressed as brazenly as the bold patterns colouring the headdresses. After taking the subject's portrait, Meyer hand-cuts the large-scale print and textiles conventionally used for women's headdresses into strips, weaving them together to create a textured, three-dimensional work."

—

Ajarb Bernard Ategwa, Cameroon

'Untitled', 2018

Jack Bell Gallery

"Shaping Douala into the vibrant and colourful metropolis that it is today, its evolving landscape is a major source of inspiration for Ategwa, whose paintings form a constellation within a larger narrative based on the chaos of his hometown. Shifting between taxi stands, newsagents, roadside markets and fleeting moments of calm, Ategwa's scenes, distinctly rendered in a vibrant colour palette, act as candid snapshots of everyday life."

—

Dimitri Fagbohoun, Benin

'Microcosmos', 2017

Galerie Cécile Fakhoury

"Born in Benin, growing up in Cameroon, and now working between Paris, Brussels and Cotonou, Fagbohoun's work questions what it is to be 'African'. Fagbohoun reflects on his background and history, straddling geographical and artistic boundaries." Learn more about how Fagbohoun interprets classic works of African art by reading his [Artist Spotlight](#).

Missed the London edition this year? Fret not for 1-54 is putting on three shows in 2019:

- Marrakech at La Mamounia, 23 – 24 February 2019
- New York at Industria, 3 – 5 May 2019
- London at Somerset House, October 2019

Stay up to date on all upcoming fairs, auctions and exhibitions by checking out our [event listing page](#).

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