

## ✓ African art conquers London – Il Sole 24 ORE

BUSINESS Carla ✓ Sports ⌚ 2 days ago 🚫 REPORT



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African art has conquered London. Among the events of the Frieze week, the 1-54 fair has now established itself, dedicated to contemporary art from the African continent and the diaspora, which in its 11th edition has attracted an increasingly large and diversified audience with a quality offer at still accessible prices (12-15 October).

But contemporary African art is increasingly found also in the City's museums, in galleries and among the stands of Frieze London itself. Think of Stephen Friedman, who dedicated his entire stand at Frieze to masks made of ceramics and recycled objects of **Leilah Babiryere** representing the discriminated queer community in Uganda, and opened its new headquarters on Cork Street with **Yinka Shonibare** an artist the gallery has represented for 26 years and who will have a solo show at the Serpentine in the spring (£65,000-550,000). For the occasion Shonibare has brought with him a group of nine young artists, including the Nigerian **Universal Gospel** with its fabrics made of ceramic buttons, **Gareth Nyandoro** e **Bunmi Augusto** (paintings) and **A model of Ugu**al (sculptures), who have studied with him or have been guests of his residency program in Nigeria and therefore represent new proposals to follow (prices from \$8,500 to \$100,000).

Nengi Omuku, «Quorum», 2022, olio su seta sanyan, 132 x 212,5 cm, Courtesy Stephen Friedmann

## Beyond the figure

“African art is increasingly integrated into the programmes of international galleries, which often come to fish for their proposals from us and bring them to Frieze” commented the director of the fair, **Touria El Glaoui**. Among the stands of the African fair, which this year has grown considerably in size, welcoming 62 exhibitors, including 14 for the first time, “we can see an evolution in research,” explains the director. “There continues to be a lot of portraiture, since the theme of identity remains important, but there is also an in-depth analysis of what surrounds the figure: the background of the painting and the social context.” This emerges, for example, from the work of the Ethiopian **Wendimagegn Belete** born in 1986, who analyses the history of his country and underlines its stratification by superimposing photographs, prints and paintings (exhibited by Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery in London, prices 10-25,000 pounds).

The same evolution can be seen in the works of **Joy Labinjo** born in 1994, from London, who inaugurated the new branch of the Tiwani gallery on Cork Street with new intimate family portraits that investigate the intergenerational relationship and the environment in which it is set in greater detail.

El Anatsui, «Hyundai Commission: Behind the Red Moon», Installation at the Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, Photograph ©Tate (Joe Humphrys)

## The poor materials

“Contemporary African artists are moving in an increasingly conceptual direction,” explains Touria El Glaoui, “but at the same time the use of traditional materials such as fabric and ceramics remains very strong.” At the fair, at the stand of the Cairo gallery Ubuntu, there was a conversation between two artists through the juxtaposition of Khayameya fabrics, an ancient medieval Egyptian technique now at risk of extinction: on one side, the French designer **Louis Barthelemy** with its more pop language (3,500-12,500 £) and on the other the Egyptian **Omar Gabr** with his observation of today's Egyptian youth (£3,800-6,000). Also the intricate installation of **Theresah Ankomah** in the stairwell of one of the staircases of Somerset House, the historic venue of the fair, showed the complicated relationship between consumerism, geopolitical relations, gender dynamics, identity and capitalism.

Louis Barthelemy, «Ramses Relocation», arazzo, 70 x 112 cm, 4.800 £, Courtesy Ubuntu Art Gallery

In this, the Ghanaian master based in Nigeria has certainly set an example **The Anatsui**, who is this year's commissioned artist for the monumental Hyundai Commission in the spaces of the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern. “Behind the Red Moon” is a large installation, divided into three parts, which re-proposes in gigantic fabrics his already well-

known way of working with pieces of bottle caps and cans to draw attention to the history of globalization, the routes of slavery, but also the history of abstraction.

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