

# This Week in African Arts and Culture (October 25 – 31, 2020)

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M A G A Z I N E

Adejoke Tugbiyele's *Hybrid Spirit* at The Melrose Gallery, Johannesburg



Currently showing at The Melrose Gallery in Johannesburg is a solo exhibition titled, *Hybrid Spirit* by Nigerian-American queer artist, Adejoke Tugbiyele. Curated by Ruzy Rusike, works in the exhibition include several sculptures created from grass brooms, two-dimensional mixed-media works, photography and performance art presented as videos.

Implicit in hybridity is the notion of queering dominant space or accepting both sides of the soul as both masculine and feminine, or neither. The works exhibited were created during Tugbiyele's stay in South Africa between 2019 and 2020. She challenged herself to confront the unknown and seek further the possibilities of form that can be achieved with her primary material, the traditional African broom. With this show, she challenges the viewers who encounter the works to be more than just curious in experiencing and engaging the themes addressed—human, female, hybridity.

Commenting on her creative process, Tugbiyele said she was able to focus her energy (in Yoruba-ese) towards greater awareness of formal and material possibilities, including scale. Furthermore, she continued to explore performance in costume to understand the visual language(s) her body speaks—hybrid, androgynous and spontaneous gestures with improvisation. And by so doing, she could free herself from historical and cultural “othering,” so she could become whole unto herself, regardless of identity.

Also featured in the exhibition are illustrations, videos and photographs of Tugbiyele performing in costumes she made and other mixed-media works. For the performance, she worked in collaboration with a South African lens-based photographic artist, Clint Strydom, to capture the presentation as videos and photos.

Born in 1977 in New York, Tugbiyele is an award-winning queer Black artist and advocate. She received a bachelor's degree in architecture from the New Jersey Institute of Technology in 2002. She graduated with a Master of Fine Arts in sculpture from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2013. She works with a diverse range of materials, including wire, natural fibers, fabric and wood to create intricate sculptures, which are sometimes integrated into her performances. Her works are charged with symbolic meanings that revolve around social, cultural and political ideas such as race, gender and sexuality, and religion. They examine the role of religion in defining the way we view our bodies, as well as the subversive role spirituality can play in reclamation towards healthy forms of self-love and acceptance.

In 2015, Tugbiyele was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship and in the same year, she was featured in the list of 100 Leading Global Thinkers by *Foreign Policy* magazine. In 2016, she received the Joan Mitchell Painters and Sculptors Grant. In 2019, she was awarded the Grand Prix Leridon of the prestigious Gervanne Leridon Matthias Collection based in Paris for her sculpture, *Ange*, produced for BISO2019!—The first International Sculpture Biennale in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, sponsored by The French Institute.

Some of her works appear in corporate, public and private collections including The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York; The Museum of Arts and Design, New York; National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, New York; The Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey; Daimler Contemporary, Berlin; Sakhile&Me Art Gallery, Frankfurt, Germany; and Credit Suisse Bank, globally.

*Hybrid Spirit* is on view until Nov. 15, 2020 at The Melrose Gallery, Johannesburg.

**Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery Presents New Works by Nengi Omuku in a Solo Show Titled *Gathering***



New works by Nigerian artist, Nengi Omuku are on view at a recently opened exhibition at Kristin Hjellegjerde gallery in London. Titled *Gathering*, the exhibition echoes the scenes of real people carrying and mourning the bodies of those they have lost, while also drawing our attention to the multiple connotations of the word itself. The works depict the different ways in which we come together as well as the potential power and danger as was experienced and felt in the recent protests in Nigeria, which are still ongoing in certain parts of the country. Although a few portraits are included in the exhibition, the majority of the artworks specifically depict the act of “gathering” or coming together as a collective; nevertheless, a strong sense of absence pervades.

Many of the paintings were created during the lockdown, a period in which the artist was largely cut off from human interaction. As with all of her compositions, she built her scenes from a digital collage of her source imagery, specifically looking for photographs of groups of people in Nigeria and exploring new ways of coming together during the pandemic.

Though the idea of a collective is suggestive of unity, strength and belonging, Omuku's moody skies and faceless figures also imbue the works with a sense of fragility and transience. In one of the most striking paintings, entitled *Technicolour Protest* for example, a man stands at the forefront, his arm raised and fist clenched in a moment of desperation, paint pouring from his limbs, while once again, the crowd stands passively watching the action unfold.

Omuku's latest body of work marks a shift in the artist's focus from the individual to the collective body and communal existence. Painted on panels of a traditional Nigerian fabric known as *sanyan*, the artworks negotiate the complexities of identity and belonging in relation to gender, race and cultural heritage. These works bring together a collection of highly atmospheric and emotive scenes filled with urgency and longing.

Gathering will be on view until Dec. 19, 2020.

**Pierre-Christophe's *Sankara – The Upright Man* Premieres at Alliance Française Lagos**



Alliance Française, Lagos, together with the French Institute Nigeria and the Embassy of France in Nigeria welcomed visitors to an exhibition by French-Cameroonian artist, Pierre-Christophe. Titled *Sankara – The Upright Man*, the exhibition features work in mixed media installations celebrating the life and legacy of Thomas Sankara, the former president of Burkina Faso. The exhibition will be accessible to the public from Oct. 31- Nov. 13, 2020, with series of talks and other public events in between.

Pierre-Christophe was born in Paris in 1983. He was part of the advisory board of the acclaimed touring exhibition, *Making Africa: A Continent of Contemporary Design*. His work has been shown at the Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao, at the Vitra Design Museum and at the Lagos Photo Festival among others. He also works as an art director for various fashion, luxury and lifestyle organizations. His clients have included Margiela, Publicis, Kenzo, and Universal Music, among others. These roles have seen him travel the world curating experiences across multiple continents.

### **ART X Collective Postpones ART X Lagos 2020**

ART Collective, the organizers of ART X Lagos, have announced the postponement of this year's edition of the art fair. Initially scheduled to commence Nov. 6, 2020 for three days, the postponement was decided in response to the #EndSARS movement that has shaken the country in the last two weeks.

Among the reasons cited in their press statement: “As an organization led and run by young people, we have been inspired by the #EndSARS movement. We are honored to have played a small part in supporting some of the photographers and filmmakers who captured this historic moment. In just two days, we received close to 1,000 applications for the opportunity that we had earmarked for 100 artists across the country. We will work to amplify their voices in the coming weeks, and champion the art and creativity that can contribute tangibly to the movement for a New Nigeria.”

The organizers have promised to share new dates for the fifth edition of the art fair soon.

### **Lady Skollie Wins 2020 FNB Art Prize**

This week, Lady Skollie (born Laura Windvogel) was announced the winner of this year's FNB Art Prize, one of Africa's most coveted art awards, from the FNB Art Joburg fair. She is the 10th recipient of the prize since it was launched in 2011. Filled with bold color, god-like figures and suggestive fruits, Lady Skollie's work revolves around themes of gender, sex and the politics of lust, as well as her musings on identity.

“As someone who never fit in, someone who dropped out of art school, someone who only got South African representation at the age of 31, winning a local art prize makes me feel like my existence in it is validated,” said Lady Skollie about her win.

The 2020 FNB Art Prize recipient jury was comprised of Khwezi Gule (chief curator, Johannesburg Art Gallery), Aspasia Karras (publisher, *Sunday Times Lifestyle*, *The Edit*, *Edit Man*, *Business Day Wanted* and *Sowetan* magazine) and Nicole Siegenthaler (fair manager, FNB Art Joburg).

The prize comes with a dedicated page for the artist on the online fair, a cash prize and an international residency scheduled for 2021-2022.

### **Congolese Art Collector, Sindika Dokolo, Passes Away at 48**



Sindika Dokolo, one of Africa's major art collectors and activists, passed away on Oct. 29, 2020 in a diving accident in Dubai. He was 48 years old.

Sindika Dokolo was born in Kinshasa, in former Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo, to a Congolese father and a Danish mother. He spent his childhood between Belgium and France. Dokolo earned his reputation as a great supporter of African art, with a collection of more than 3,000 works by the likes of William Kentridge and Zanele Muholi (both from South Africa), Barthélemy Toguo (Cameroon), Kudzanai Chiurai (Zimbabwe) and Edson Chagas (Angola).

As an activist, Dokolo also was involved in the restitution of African art. He worked to bring objects taken from Africa back to their owners using a combination of intensive research and legal pressure. He would identify artifacts that appeared in Western museums and auction houses and offer to pay them the price for which they acquired

the objects, so that he could return them. If the museums and auction houses didn't comply, he threatened with a lawsuit. With his foundation, he had generously supported artists from Africa at Documenta 14 in Kassel and Athens in 2017.

In memory and tribute to Dokolo, renowned art curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, who was part of the artistic management team at Documenta 14, wrote these words on Instagram: "Thanks to your deep love for the arts and culture of Africa, your stubbornness towards the dominant narrative, your support as a collector and financier of art projects, many of us could even dare do what we are doing! It was your fierce and provocative utterances on issues of restitution of African arts in Western museums that actually instigated the recent restitution turn. And when no African state, and very few cultural institutions were ready to support the 20+ African artists invited to Documenta 14, you were the ONE who mobilized an incredible amount of money to make that happen."

Koyo Kouoh, curator and executive director of Zeitz MOCAA also wrote, "You enabled so much for so many of us. You carved the way for such important conversations long before they became trendy. Rest in Peace Rock Star Sindika Dokolo (1972-2020)."

**Blackbird Books Publishes *Exhale: Queer African Erotic Fiction***





South African publishing house Blackbird Books, in collaboration with HOLAAfrica!, recently published an anthology titled *Exhale: Queer African Erotic Fiction*. The work is a compilation of stories from queer African writers across the continent, featuring fresh and established literary voices, including the notable South African singer, actor and writer, Nakhane.

The book fills the need gap in the LGBT community whose sexual experiences are continually seen as less important or void of their need to exist and as such, silenced. The stories are diverse, compelling and most importantly, earnest. Other writers

featured in the anthology are Mercy Thokozane Minah, Mubanga Kalimamukwento, Fiske Nyirongo, Lawrence Mashiyane, Tshogofatso Senne, Akou Midadje, Nakhane Toure, Cisi Eze, OluTimehin Adegbeye, Kabelo Motsoeneng, Lady Nwadike, Yvonne Ethagene and Von ZiGo.

### **Wizkid Releases His New Album: *Made in Lagos***

Wizkid released his much-anticipated album, *Made in Lagos*, which he dedicated to Nigerian youth fighting against police brutality in the ongoing #EndSARS protests around the country. Originally meant to have launched two weeks ago, the album was delayed to honor the protests. It features 14 tracks, including some notable artists such as Burna Boy, Skepta, Damian Marley, H.E.R., Ella Mai and Terri.

*Compiled by Roli O'tsemaye*