

A black and white photograph of a woman sitting in a chair. She is wearing a light-colored headwrap and a dark, sleeveless top. Her hands are resting on her lap. The background is dark and textured. The text is overlaid on the image.

2019 CONTEMPORARY
AFRICAN ART ECOLOGY

THE TOP 50 ARTISTS &
THE TOP 20 CURATORS
WHO VALIDATED THEM

COVER: ZANELE MUHOLI, *MAID IN DELAWARE*
(2017)

image courtesy Stevenson Gallery

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THE TOP 50 ARTISTS & THE TOP CURATORS WHO VALIDATED THEM**

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INTRODUCTION

The expansion and development of the contemporary African art ecosystem has been exponential since the mid-noughties. In this time it has grown and diversified via the establishment of new museums, art galleries, art fairs, auction houses, and an increase in the number of exhibitions dedicated to this geographically-defined category of art.



MALICK SIDIBE, NUIT DE NOEL (HAPPY CLUB) (1963)
Image courtesy Wedge Collection

The combination of these factors has compelled a need to reflect on how, why, where, and through whom these changes have occurred.

Corrigall & Co are committed to mapping, quantifying and analysing this shifting territory so that complex, dense information, opinions and insights from the top end to the bottom can be considered and distilled for those interested in the patterns which shape it.

This report is an abridged version of our inaugural 2018 report, Contemporary African Art Ecology: A Decade of Curating, which presents a comprehensive map of the socio-political conditions of the last decade that have contributed towards the development of the category. Identifying the main 'centres', types of art platforms that have best facilitated validation and indeed the structure of the African art ecosystem, both before 2007 and how it appears now were covered in this essential document.

The focus of this abbreviated edition, as its title implies, is on presenting the names, interests and curatorial patterns of the Top 20 African curators. We have extended the list of artists who have been validated through their practices, listing 51 of them, as well as charting their particulars and registering and analysing patterns pertaining to them.

This offers insight into the tastemakers and 'the voices', if you will, that have come to exemplify contemporary African art, and the interests, dialogues and aesthetics they have been driving in the years between 2007 and 2017 – the timeline of this study.

Lists of 'important artists to watch' have regrettably become a ubiquitous feature of listicle art journalism, particularly in the wake of heightened interest in African artists. Art reports tend to present lists or make studies of those artists whose work fetches the highest sums of money. However, in this category of art we are cognisant of the fact that the full value has largely (albeit with a few exceptions) not yet been fully realised in the secondary market, and therefore data relating to it does not, at this point, provide a solid foundation in isolation of other information, opinions and research from which to explore those 'leading' names.

The cachet surrounding artists, be it social, cultural or political, is largely established prior to their work entering

AS THIS IS OUR FIRST FORAY INTO MAPPING THIS ECOSYSTEM, IT SEEMED FITTING TO BEGIN WITH A DECADE-LONG OVERVIEW THAT:

Analyses exhibitions staged from 2007 to 2017



Identifies and focuses on high-profile curators active during this period



Asks experts in the field to reflect on changes they have observed over this period



Gathers retrospective views from our on-the-ground writers in different art capitals



Researches and collates this information in the context of and **in relation to larger shifts in the broader international contemporary art world.**

the secondary market. It is in the realm of museum exhibitions and biennales that this quality is secured. Due to their own cachet and status, the influential group of curators identified in this report have offered (some) artists a path towards accruing validation. As such, the patterns pertaining to their selection of artists in the exhibitions they have staged offer insight into which artists, as well as what kind of art, they consider to be important. The pioneering curators listed in this report are, to a large degree, responsible for making African art visible on the continent and elsewhere in the world during the time period of the study – 2007 to 2017.

This is precisely why our inaugural report plotting the contemporary African art ecology began with identifying the role curators have played in its expansion and how this may have evolved as conditions have changed.

Curators are rarely the prism through which insights into the art market are derived. However, in this category, the limitations – namely, an absence of platforms on the continent where this work is presented, and sustained institutional resistance to it in most western art centres – have driven this pioneering group of individuals to generate platforms, adapt them, and take the first bold steps towards advancing this category, mediating and asserting conversations about its relevance to both local and international audiences.

All the statistics and information contained in this report are derived from a study of the exhibitions produced by this elite group of 20 curators between 2007 and 2017.

The year 2007 proved to be a watershed marker in the development of contemporary African art. It was in this year that a pavilion dedicated to art from Africa was staged at the Venice Biennale, an event which would become the subject of much contentious debate.

However, as it coincided with the recognition of Malick Sidibe's art – he was awarded a Golden Lion Lifetime achievement award in that same year – it appeared that the world was ready to celebrate contemporary art from Africa. In the continent's major art capitals, the ecosystem was evolving to meet growing interest; based on our data, 16 new significant art platforms (from commercial galleries to foundations, festivals and museums) opened in this year.

'African art' remains a geographically-defined category. This report doesn't undo this naming trend. In order to derive insight into the rise of contemporary African art, it is necessary, if not expedient, to group activities which relate to it in order to grasp the attitudes, conditions and contexts that have perpetuated or bear down on this geographical (and still racially defined) art category.

METHODOLOGY

BRIDGING FACT AND OPINION TO ARRIVE AT 'SOMETHING ELSE'

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“Normally we think a person should have only one standpoint, but when you build a bridge, you must have two – one which is balanced and another which is less stable”. This bridge is always dangerous, but ... the notion of the bridge creates the possibility of opening up something new.’

(**HUANG YONG PING** QUOTED IN
HANS-ULRICH OBRIST, *FLASHART*, OCT, 2009)

We are keen to ‘open up’ and explore what we think we know about contemporary African art and test this against factual data. This report is the product of constructing a ‘bridge’ between researched facts, opinion and insight. This has depended on the bridging of traditional (academic and journalistic), visual (graphs and infographics) and new technological epistemological tools to gather and digest large amounts of complex information.

The hard irrefutable data surrounding exhibitions – dates, biographical and geographical data – form the fixed balanced quantities that ground the report and our insights, while providing the veritable bridge to the less stable factors, such as the opinions of the experts we’ve interviewed and our on-the-ground reporters.

THIS REPORT IS THE RESULT
OF THE FOLLOWING:

INTENSIVE DATA GATHERING

ON THE

'TOP 20'

AFRICAN ART CURATORS

DATA AND ANALYSIS

OF **'TOP 50'**

ARTISTS THEY VALIDATED

COMPREHENSIVE INTERVIEWS

WITH

30 INDUSTRY LEADERS

INTERPRETATION

OF DATA VIA MULTIPLE
SOFTWARE PROGRAMMES

VISUALISATION

OF DATA **IN-DEPTH ACADEMIC
RESEARCH**

DIRECT INPUT AND REPORTS

FROM

6 ON-THE-GROUND
REPORTERS AND
RESEARCH ANALYSTS
AROUND THE CONTINENT.



YINKA SHONIBARE, *CHAMPAGNE KID (FALLEN)* (2013)

image courtesy Goodman Gallery

DESPITE ALL OUR EFFORTS TO PRODUCE A BALANCED REPORT THAT JUXTAPOSES
FLATTENED DATA WITH NUANCED INSIGHTS AND DIFFERING OPINIONS,
THERE ARE IN-BUILT LIMITATIONS:

- As our main source data is derived from a study of the exhibitions produced by the 'Top 20' curators, the insights tend to reflect what is occurring in the most visible and prominent art hubs on the continent and in the world.
- Limited time and resources have meant that we did not interview everyone we would have liked to, nor study every significant exhibition.
- Some curators and individuals in the industry refused interviews and/or were unwilling to share information and/or opinions.
- Factual information on the exhibitions in this study was not always reliable or available.
- NOT ALL exhibitions are curated – this is particularly the case on the continent.
- As visibility for curators inevitably entails staging exhibitions in Western art centres, there was an over-emphasis on what occurred in these destinations/platforms.
- Data gathering forces the researcher to flatten complexities and as such carries a level of subjectivity that the term 'data' denies.
- We have yet to establish on-the-ground reporters in each art capital – writing on, observing, reporting on art is a difficult pursuit, and in some cities we have been unable, as yet, to find, engage or establish a relationship with a suitable reporter.

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TO MITIGATE SOME OF THESE LIMITATIONS WE HAVE:

- Supplemented our data analysis with opinions from experts around the continent and the world so as to introduce nuances that cannot be contained in it.
- Relied on our on-the-ground reporters who intimately know the developments in their respective cities.
- Committed to updating this report and study annually to keep covering new ground and overcoming the absences, gaps and limitations in this inaugural study.



RICHARD MUDARIKI, *THE TRICK* (2016)

image courtesy Sanlam Art Museum/Barnard Gallery

CURATORS: ●

N'GONE FALL
SENEGAL/PARIS/NIGERIA
Curator, Academic, Editor (Revue Noir)

BISI SILVA
NIGERIA
Founder CCA Lagos

PAULA NASCIMENTO
LUANDA/PORTUGAL
Curator, Winner Golden Lion Award at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013)

RAPHAEL CHIKUKWA
ZIMBABWE
Curator, Director, National Gallery, Zimbabwe

JEANNE MERCIER
FRANCE/MALI/ PORTUGAL
Curator, MACAAL, Marrakesh, opening exhibition 'Africa is no Island'

KAREN MILBOURNE
USA
Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington DC

VIOLET NANTUME
KAMPALA/BERLIN

ALICIA KNOCK
FRANCE
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

JOSEPH GERGEL
LAGOS
ArtHouse auction house and residency

CHRISTA CLARKE
USA
Newark Museum, New York
Co-author: Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Century of Collecting and Display (2010)

ART SPECIALISTS WE CONSULTED

ON-THE-GROUND-REPORTERS ●

These are individuals we identified in different art capitals who have been consistently reporting on the visual arts in those capitals, or have been embedded in them.

DOMINIC MUWANGUZI
KAMPALA, UGANDA

AYODEJI ROTINWA
LAGOS, NIGERIA

TRACY MURINIK
JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

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Artist, Cape Town

KUDZANAI CHIURAI

ZIMBABWE

Artist

ADENRELE SONARIWO

NIGERIA

*Curator, gallerist,
Rele Gallery, Lagos*

ROCCO ORLACCHIO

MOROCCO

*Gallery director,
Voice Gallery, Marrakesh*

ASHLEIGH MCCLEAN

SOUTH AFRICA

*Gallery director,
Whatiftheworld, Cape Town*

EMMA MENNELL

UNITED KINGDOM

*Founder, director,
Tyburn Gallery, London*

AIME NYATIKA

BELGIUM

Artist

KENNETH MONTAGUE

CANADA

*Art collector, curator,
Wedge Curatorial Projects, Toronto, and
board member, Tate Modern African Art
Acquisitions*

NYAMBURA M. WARUINGI

KENYA

Curator, filmmaker

MOUNIR FATMI

PARIS/MARRAKESH

Artist

DEFINITIONS

[ecosystem]

As awareness around the creative economy has grown, and its impact on society, employment opportunities, growth of cities and economies is being quantified, it has become important to understand how the art 'system' is structured and the way in which it operates.

On the African continent, where ecosystems are in their nascence, the term pertains to the network that has evolved to support and professionalise the visual arts industry. In art market analyses focused on European and US art markets, the term has been employed in a process to better 'understand how economic value originates for contemporary art' (Petterson 2014: 67).

Mapping an art ecosystem involves an understanding not only of each part, its structure, community of players, or the different tiers of institutions, but also how these relate to each other and the power dynamics underpinning their interactions. While curators play a pivotal role in the system, and a unique one in the African art context, their role, like that of curators operating anywhere in the world, lies in securing institutional validation through staging exhibitions in museums and other settings.

As a result, they are placed in close proximity to validating centres and sectors and are counted, along with gallerists and art dealers, as intermediaries between artists and art platforms.

To some degree the entire art system depends on artists. They are the source of art and the quality and quantity of its production can impact on the 'system'. However, as artists require platforms, galleries and an interest in art to remain motivated, growth in other sectors compels more people to become artists and/or convince them to make this their full-time occupation.

2018 Contemporary African Art Ecology: A Decade of Curating, includes a detailed analysis of the ecosystem's structure. Developments in each of Africa's art capitals, and indeed in the reception of art in Western ones, have manifested differently and/or are inflected by nuanced differences. As such, a comprehensive ecosystem naturally flattens this reality, though it provides a bird's eye view of the relationships/influences of different segments within the system.

[curating]

Curating was once an activity limited to professionals working in museums who were concerned with the preservation of collections and staging exhibitions.

The term is no longer limited to museums or exhibitions, but instead includes all forms of programming at any kind of venue (Smith 2012: 17). It is indeed the rise, fixation with and slippery nature of contemporary art that has compelled redefinitions of the term. In an attempt to settle on an all-encompassing definition for the curator of contemporary art, Australian art historian Terry Smith (2012: 20) advances the following:

Curating is caring for the culture, above all by enabling its artistic or creative transformers to pursue their work. This facilitation is done, preferably with empathy, insight, effectively with some style.

On the African continent there are few post-graduate university courses dedicated to the practice of curating. Many of its 'star' curators have pursued studies elsewhere, or have cut their teeth assisting or learning under more experienced curators. This being the case, the act of curating, for many on the continent, has been a largely administrative one that entails selecting artists based on proposals, rather than framing a conversation or driving a narrative or idea.

The absence of platforms and museums, or the reality of institutional bias has meant that many African curators tend to be less driven to make statements, or expose or come to grips with contemporary practice, than they are to establish available platforms for art. As Abdellah Karroum (2016) observes, curating intrinsically involves creating spaces for art.

validation

Due to the fact that the value of art, fiscal and cultural, relies on uncertain qualities such as individual taste, perception, fashion and insider or specialist knowledge, it is often determined by consensus.

It follows the principle therefore that the greater the number of (influential) people who value the work of certain artists, the greater the chance their art will be considered valuable.

This is the case even if an artist's work might not be hard to come by (rarity in contemporary art is not a sure route to value), is not well-made or conceptually compelling in any way, or that these qualities are not consistent across their entire oeuvre (which is likely given that artists do not consistently make 'good' art throughout their career).

With the contemporary African art ecosystem still in its nascence, greater levels of uncertainty surround its perceived value. It also remains an almost impenetrable category of art, given there are 54 countries on the continent and specialist knowledge cannot extend to each destination, society or culture. As such, assessing cultural, artistic and fiscal value, and relying on external validation and consensus has been vital.

In the context of this report and art category, 'validation' could be defined as a form of public acknowledgement by an influential segment - high profile African curators - operating in the ecosystem. This form of indirect recognition naturally relies not only on the artists' work(s) being included in an important exhibition, but on the curator's influence, the destination (major Western art capitals continue to carry more cachet) and type of venue (a museum is viewed as more important than a commercial gallery setting) where it is set.

Validation requires consensus to hold more sway and is a self-fulfilling prophecy in that the more frequently artists are selected by influential curators, the more often they will be

selected by curators and the more cachet their art and profile is likely to attract.

Anders Petterson (2014: 74) distinguishes between market validation, which relies on fiscal consensus - the price of an art work at an auction - and institutional validation, which he suggests relies on curators, historians, academics and museums endorsing an artist.

According to Petterson, market validation tends to follow institutional validation. In other words, an artist's work only accrues fiscal value after it has accumulated continued acknowledgement from those who are seemingly detached from 'the market' and are only interested in the cultural or discursive value of art.

The most direct relationship between these two validating cultures can be traced in the importance of the provenance of an artwork in terms of setting value in the secondary market. This refers not only to the date of the artwork and the identity of the artist who made it but its 'life' on the exhibition circuit - the more exhibitions and the more high-profile and important these prove to be, the more likely it is that the artwork will fetch a high price.

As such, in employing exhibition data relating to the activities of the Top 20 curators, this report inevitably tracks the cultural cachet, and the institutional validation extended to an elite group of artists.

[african]

Another loaded label with no easy definition, and certainly one that many curators from the continent continue to challenge, is of what constitutes 'African'.

As the public intellectual Achille Mbembe outlines in the 2007 catalogue for Simon Njami's touring exhibition, *Africa Remix*, claiming African citizenship is not solely geographically or racially defined, given that population movements over centuries from colonisation, slavery and forced migration saw Europeans settle on the African continent, and saw millions of people of African origin deposited across various countries across the world.

Two of the star 'Top 20' 'African' curators included in this report were born outside of the continent; and many of the artists, gallerists, and other experts we interviewed were born in one place, studied in another, and now operate between multiple cities within and across continents.

2018 CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN ART ECOLOGY

A DECADE OF CURATING



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OUR INAUGURAL REPORT

CORE FOCUS:

Identifying the ecosystem sectors and conditions driving the expansion of contemporary art from Africa.

Where is the centre of African art?

Thematic trends marking Top 20 Curator exhibitions

Lists the most evolved African art capitals

Status of Curating in the major African Art Capitals

Structure and shifts in the African Art Ecosystem

CORRIGALL & CO'S NEXT ART REPORTS

THE SOUTH AFRICAN ART CAPITALS PRICING & VALUE PATTERNS

CORE FOCUS:

Analysis of prices in the first quarter of 2018 exhibitions in South Africa

OTHER FEATURES:

- Identifying artists who demand the highest prices
- Identifying average prices of works by emerging artists/mid-career artists' work
- Tracing influences on value of art in these capitals
- Presenting the thematic trends of 2018
- Idiosyncratic features of the Cape Town and Joburg art ecosystems

CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN ART FAIRS THE AFRICAN ART COLLECTOR: WHO ARE THEY?

CORE FOCUS:

Analysis of art fairs dedicated to African Contemporary Art.

OTHER FEATURES:

- Identifying the most popular art fairs for Contemporary African Art
- Comparison of the fairs catering for this category
- Identifying the criteria each fair applies
- Identifying the types of collectors and patterns in each fair
- Identifying other international fairs finding favour with African focused galleries

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