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Africa Ascending, Part I: Contemporary Artists on the Continent Find a Collector Base at Home

BY ANGELA M.H. SCHUSTER, ART+AUCTION | MAY 23, 2015



Congolese collector Sindika Dokoio with paintings by Mustafa Moluka.
(Fundacao Sindika Dokoio)

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In its May 2016 issue, Art+Auction looked at the art market in Africa, where contemporary artists from the continent who have enjoyed largely European patronage in recent decades are now finding an emerging collector base at home. In the series of articles, to be released on ARTINFO this week, some of the figures who have played critical roles in furthering the cultural dialogue within Africa as well as bringing the continent's artists into the international spotlight share their thoughts on the trend. Here is part one:

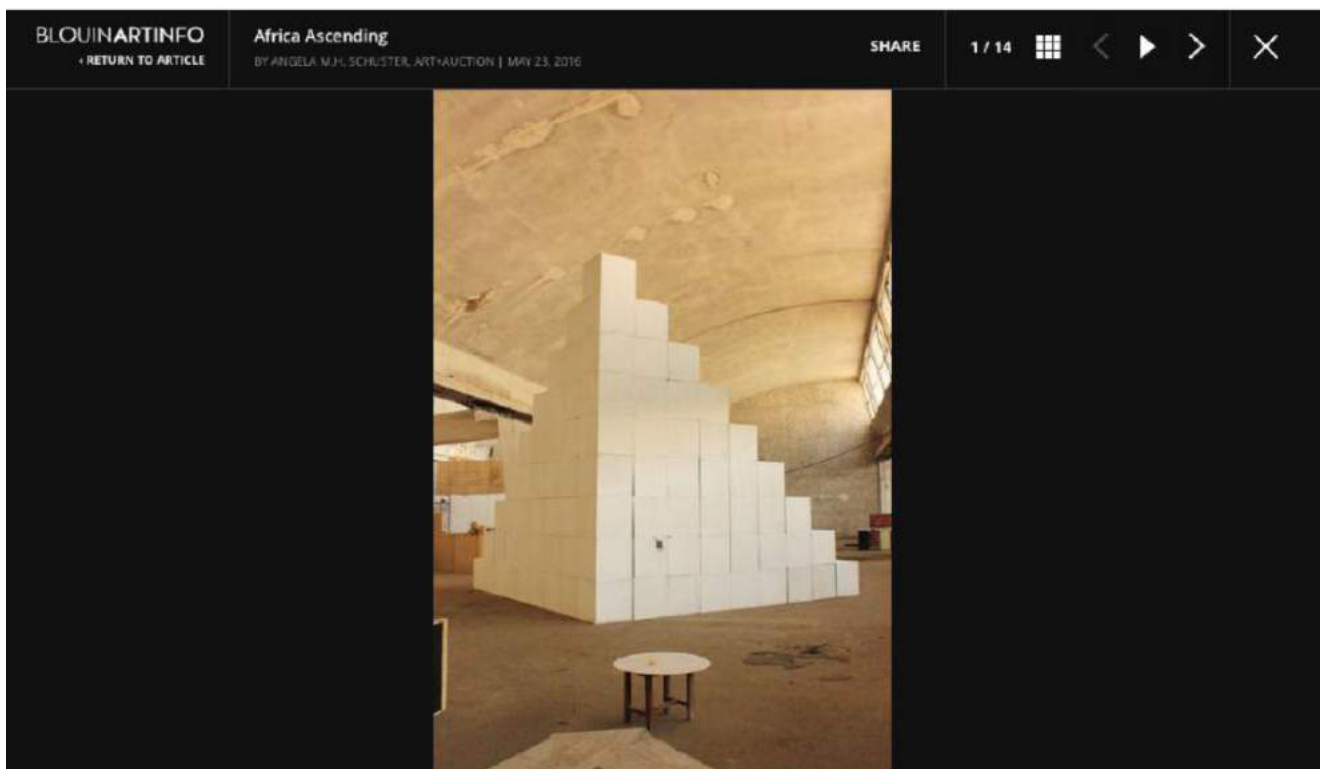
"It has been exhilarating to be part of something good for Angolan society—for the human conscience, for a future built on peace, and for the fostering of greater communication between cultures," says Lisbon- and Luanda-based artist [Francisco Vidal](#) of the postwar emergence of the art scene in the southern African nation over the past decade. Angola's artists have been attracting international attention since their debut pavilion garnered the Golden Lion award at the 2013 Venice Biennale. This was followed by a critically acclaimed encore at last year's Biennale and, more recently, the opening of the Luanda Triennial, the fourth edition of which runs at a suite of venues in the capital city through the end of this year.

Angolan artists' star turn on the international art world stage is just one part of a growing recognition of contemporary art from Africa. Angola and South Africa have led the charge, followed by Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Senegal, where a host of galleries have sprung up of late, including Echo Art in Lagos and Galerie Cécile Fakhoury in Abidjan. Senegal hosts the 12th edition of Dak'Art from May 3 through June 2. Curated by Simon Njami, the biennial presents the work of 65 artists from across the continent.

Meanwhile, American audiences looking for a chance to acquire works that remain relatively undervalued had their chance this month at the 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair. The event, which ran May 6 through 8 to coincide with Frieze New York, offered a coda to the high-profile solo presentations by galleries that participated in the Focus section of this year's Armory Show in March. Focus featured the work of more than a dozen African artists, including Vidal, whose paintings filled the stand of London-based Tiwani Contemporary.

Beyond interest generated by the fairs and exhibitions, it seems the market, too, is waking from its slumber, with prices on the auction block in a distinct climb. "When we launched our spring Africa Now sales at Bonhams London in 2008," says Giles Peppiatt, a director at the house, "the market was quite challenging. Since then we have seen a general improvement, particularly over the past three years, and in response we have doubled the frequency of our sales."

"Africa has long honored the traditional artists in her communities, and her artists have always had an empowering relationship with the art they create," says Congolese collector Sindika Dokolo. "In a sense, we are coming full circle." Here, Dokolo shares his thoughts on African contemporary art.



Francisco Vidal
"Pyramid Studio," 2016
Courtesy of the artist

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