

THE BLOG

Contemporary Art of Africa Shines at Armory Week 2016

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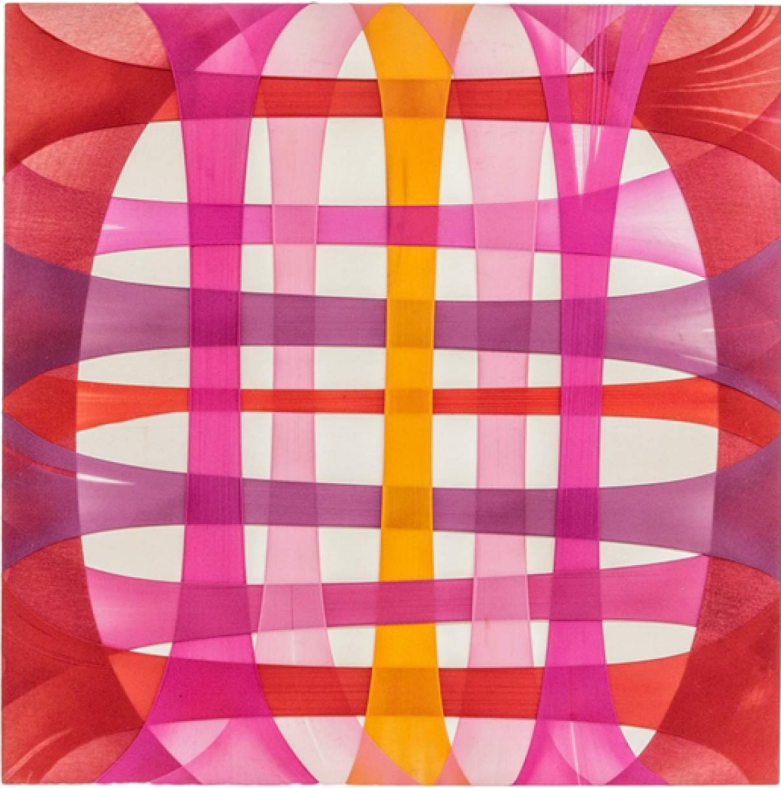
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[Namsa Leuba](#), *Untitled I*, from the series *Cocktail*, 2011, Fuji Crystal Archive Matt print reverse mounted on acrylic, 43.81 x 60cm. Courtesy of the artist and Echo Art, Lagos. At the Armory Show, Focus, Booth 560.

This spring, Africa arrives in New York. The city will be treated to an unprecedented opportunity to observe and experience a wide range of contemporary art from Africa and the Diaspora, sparked by the Armory Show's focus on the region. Satellite fairs, performances, pop-up shows, museum and gallery exhibitions featuring contemporary African artists are also coming into focus around the city--from one-time-only platforms to home-grown institutions that have consistently engaged with African and Diasporan perspectives.



Turiya Magadlela, *Zothile 4*, 2015, nylon and cotton pantyhose, thread and sealant on canvas, 100 x 100cm. Courtesy of the artist and blank, Cape Town. At the Armory Show, Focus, Booth 537.

The 2016 Armory Focus, entitled "African Perspectives - Spotighting Artistic Practices of Global Contemporaries," is curated by Julia Grosse and Yvette Mutumba, the founders of the online platform [Contemporary And \(C&\)](#), which is devoted to exploring and promoting global connections for international art from diverse African perspectives. The [Focus sector](#) brings together 14 galleries and art spaces, from around the world: London and Paris, as well as Cape Town and Addis Ababa. "We invited artists first," [says Mutumba](#), "and asked their galleries to make a solo presentation of the artist's work." The resulting picture is of interdisciplinary and varied practices, with Africa as a departure point, a node for networks, connections, and continuums that span the globe. It will be the largest showing of contemporary African and Diasporan artists at an American art fair to date.



[Ed Young](#), *NOT ME*, 2016, oil on board, 2.4 x 2.4m. Courtesy of SMAC Gallery, Cape Town. At the Armory Show, Special Projects.

Scattered throughout the fair, the Armory Show's [Special Projects](#), also curated by Grosse and Mutumba, feature a group of young artists from Africa and the Diaspora that represent what they define as "Young Global Contemporaries" who operate with geographical fluidity and whose work is in dialogue with international contemporary art practices; "artists who are really embedded in global networks that influence their practices," as Mutumba puts it. Several of these projects are stationed at prominent entry points, setting the tone for the fair: [Kapwani Kiwanga](#) (represented by Galerie Tanja Wagner, Berlin), who was commissioned to create the visual identity for this year's fair, presents an interactive installation inspired by the 1961 office of the United Nations Secretary General, situated at the entrance of Pier 92; [Emeka Ogboh](#) will infuse the aural environment of the Pier 94 entrance with the sounds of a Lagos bus station; and Ed Young's text-based works, *All So Fucking African* (SMAC Gallery, Cape Town), will line the connecting passageway between the piers with a site-specific installation of biting humor and wit.



[Robin Rhode](#), *Fountain*, 2014, C-print 15 parts, 19.69 x 19.69 in. each. Courtesy of STEVENSON, Cape Town, Johannesburg. At the Armory Show, Booth 700.

An [accompanying symposium](#) at the Armory Show, kicking off with a panel discussion with influential African [artists El Anatsui](#) and Sam Ntshengwa, critically explores topics related to the Focus. It includes a lecture-performance by Armory Commissioned [Artist Kiwanga](#), panel discussions between artists of different generations, and concludes with *Section Cinéma*, a screening of a series of videos curated by South African [artist Robin Rhode](#).



Abdoulaye Konaté, *Composition en rouge (orange, vert et jaune citron)*, dyed and woven cloth, 2.5 x 2m. Courtesy Blain Southern Gallery, London. At the Armory Show, Booth 908.

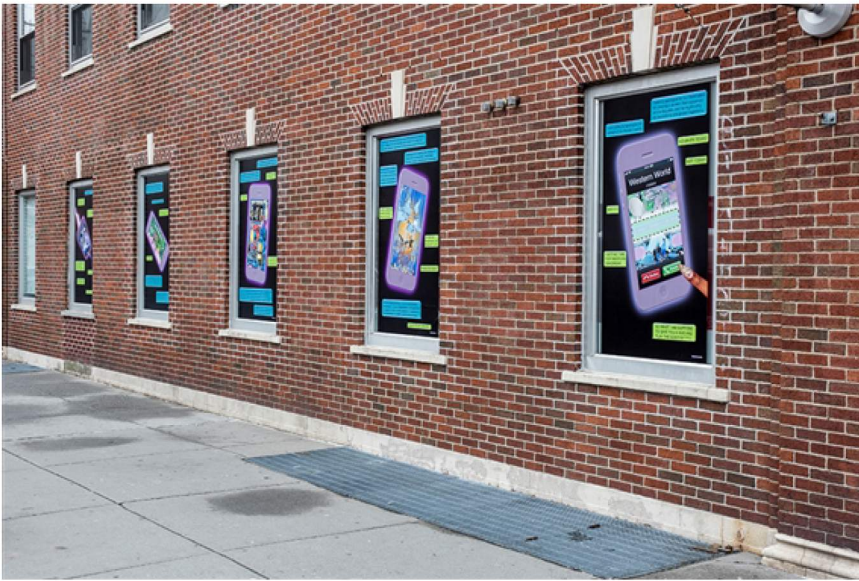
The special curated sectors are not the only place collectors will find artists with African backgrounds at the fair, as several international blue-chip galleries embrace the Focus as well. Hong Kong and London-based enterprise Ben Brown Fine Arts will be showing work by African-American artist [Awol Erizku](#); Los Angeles gallery Honor Fraser will present works by Botswana-born, New York-based [Meleko Mokgosi](#); London-based Blain | Southern will show woven cloth works by Malian artist Abdoulaye Konaté; and, of course, major South African galleries Stevenson, Goodman, and Gallery MOMO will be showing a selection of artists originating from or based in African countries.



[Dawit Abebe](#), *No. 2 Background 40*, 2016, acrylic and collage on canvas, 240 x 200 cm. Courtesy of Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London. At

VOLTA NY.

The programming for the Armory Show's affiliate (and adjacent) fair, VOLTA NY, has also been invigorated by the Armory's Focus this year. VOLTA's curated section, "[Something I Can Feel](#)," curated by New York-based [artist Derrick Adams](#), explores works related to the body, and includes several artists with work that addresses their African backgrounds, among them [Doreen Garner](#), [Leonardo Benzant](#), and Shaun Leonardo. Grappling with urgent issues facing the African-American community, Leonardo's performance/workshop *I Can't Breathe* will be staged on Friday March 4 at 5pm. Also present at VOLTA are two artist-run and experimental galleries from Africa: First Floor Gallery, from Harare, Zimbabwe, showing [Wycliffe Mundopa](#); and ARTLabAfrican, out of Nairobi, Kenya, showing [Paul Onditi](#). Brooklyn's Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts (MoCADA) will show [works by Tschabalala Self](#) in their booth, as well as presenting Kameelah Janan [Rasheed's project](#) confronting respectability politics, *HOW TO SUFFER POLITELY (and Other Etiquette)*, along the elevated walkway connecting VOLTA with the Armory Show, forming a visual link with Ed Young's text-based project next door.



[Tabita Rezaire](#), *Sorry For Real*, 2016. Courtesy of MoCADA. Photo: Roy Rochlin.

Beyond Armory Week events, New York City offers further opportunities to explore art of Africa and the Diaspora at institutions that are dedicated full-time to showcasing artists of African descent. MoCADA is currently showing *Be Alarmed: The Black Americana Epic, Movement I - The Visions* by visual artist and [filmmaker Tiona McClodden](#), paintings and [collages by Adrienne Gaither](#), and a window installation by new media [artist Tabita Rezaire](#) that imagines an apology from the Western World, as delivered by text message, entitled *Sorry For Real*. This week is also a great time to make a visit to the Studio Museum in Harlem, now in the final week of its current exhibitions, including "Black: Color, Material, Concept," featuring [work by Sam Gilliam](#), [Kerry James Marshall](#), [Noah Davis](#), and others, closing March 6.



[Ibrahim El Salahi](#), *Flamenco Dancers*, 2012, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York.

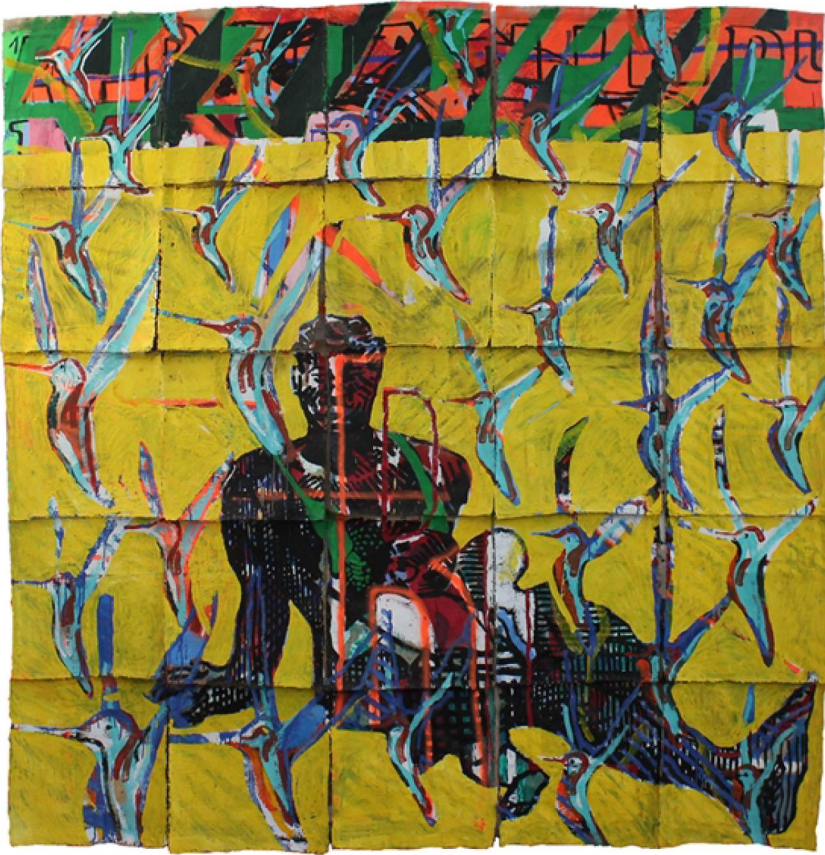
From Chelsea to Bushwick, several current exhibitions found in New York galleries and project spaces relate to Africa, the Diaspora, and black identity. Right now one will find new photography from Africa at the Walther Collection Project Space

in Chelsea, and a major [exhibition of Ibrahim el Salahi](#), "father of African and Arab Modernism", at Salon 94 on the Bowery. Luhring Augustine is showing a two-venue exposition of [Glenn Ligon](#)'s new work, and staying open late (9pm) at its Bushwick location on Saturday March 5 for Armory Week's Late Night Bushwick. Chicago gallery moniquemeloche is popping up in New York for Armory Week at 2 Rivington St on the Lower East Side, with an exhibition of patchwork quilts by [Sanford Biggers](#) and tapestries and mixed media [works by Ebony G. Patterson](#).



François-Xavier Gbré, *Palais du Gouverneur II, Lomé, Togo*, 2012 - Archival pigment ink on fine art paper, Edition of 5. Courtesy of the Artist and the Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Abidjan. At the Armory Show, Focus, Booth 542.

While inroads have been made in the international art market for contemporary artists from Africa, there is definitely room for improvement, in New York and beyond. As curator Mutumba says, "African perspectives being included in international exhibitions should actually be a normal event." This week may hopefully facilitate greater exposure and awareness of these perspectives, and foster new connections and networks between galleries, curators, and artists from London to Lagos, New York to Nairobi.



[Francisco Vidal](#), *R*, 2015, oil and acrylic on handmade recycled paper, 255 x 255cm. Courtesy of the artist and Tiwani Contemporary. At the Armory Show, Focus, Booth 548.

--Natalie Hegert