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## JANUÁRIO JANO: TELLING OUR STORIES THE AFRICAN WAY



BY LADUN OGIDAN

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in **ART, INTERVIEW**

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Angolan multidisciplinary artist, Jandino Júnior's investigation revolves around notions about his conflicted and prescribed identities concerning his cultural heritage and wider questions around colonial subjectivities. This investigation drives an in-depth process of research in which the artist refers to multiple archives, including his photographs and an archive that documents photographs taken by a missionary group from the US who came to Luanda (where he grew up) and built churches around the city. In this interview with *Omenka*, he talks about his ongoing solo exhibition at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery *Imbambas: Unsettled Feelings of Object and Self* as well as the importance of controlling and changing the narrative of Africa.

**Your ongoing exhibition with Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery titled *Imbambas: Unsettled Feelings of Object & Self* takes its departing point from the term imbambas (from the Kimbundu language) which refers to things such as furniture and luggage that have an intrinsic and uncanny relationship to the body and self. Please tell us more about the show, what you hope to convey to the public through its theme, and the reception it has received so far.**

With this exhibition, the goal was to continue the research around the themes that are dearest to me. By engaging with objects, questioning our relationship with them, as well as how we interact with the body and space. This exercise permits thoughts of materiality, its function within Western culture and in relation to African culture. These elements work as catalysts for my project and my research as well as enriches my vocabulary and practice.

Furthermore, the project has this seductive element to it, which allows the viewers to play a vital role in activating the space and completing the negative spaces. This makes it appealing to a group.



*Axiluanda IV (M0011)*, 2021, mixed textile, transfer onto unprimed canvas, acrylic, wool, calico, hand sewing, 195 x 91cm

*Ambakista (M009)*, 2021, transfer onto unprimed canvas, acrylic, wool, calico, hand sewing, 204 x 113cm

Please explain the thinking behind *Axiluanda IV (M0011)* and *Ambakista (M009)*.

*Axiluanda IV (M0011)* and *Ambakista (M009)* for instance, are textile-based works in which silkscreen-printed photographs, collage, hand sewing, acrylic paint and rope converge and deftly extend into the room. The titles are in Kimbundu language, which refers to a specific group within the Ambundu ethnic group.

Colourful textiles, photography, objects, are juxtaposed to create a sense of hybridity while addressing historical and personal unsolved issues—such as colonial legacy, the question of personal and cultural identity and belonging—to convey a sense of

meaning in the construction of the narrative.

These works resonate around the cultural motif, in particular within the “Ambundu” culture and its philosophy. The “Mponda” (a cotton bag-like belt used by Ambundu women to keep personal belongings) is the starting point. With Mponda becoming a container to keep the body, it is no longer bag-like, it becomes a house, a planet on its own.



*Ambakista (M009)*, 2021, transfer onto unprimed canvas, acrylic, wool, calico, hand sewing, 204 x 113cm

**Part of your photographic work depicts various aspects of colonial oppression and violence. In your opinion, how influential is African art today in a political context?**

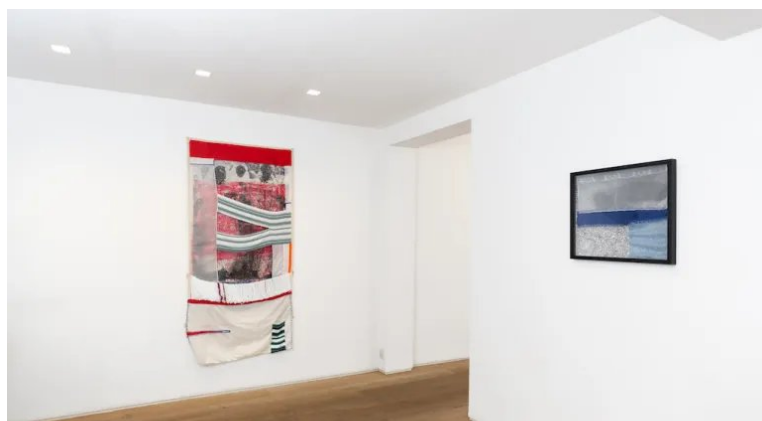
Based on the past (not entirely) throughout the 19th century, the Western powers invaded and took advantage of the technological development at their disposal to dominate and oppress almost the entire continent. In the process, most of the African cultural production was infected and corrupted by these external forces from looting, stealing and forceful appropriation imposed on the continent, resulting in

the displacement of several important, and yet culturally significant objects to Europe and beyond.

These objects have become a source of inspiration for numerous (so-called well-known) artists, excluding artists of African origin from the main discussion table. Though labelled as primitive for several years. In recent times, however, many artists and art practitioners from the continent and beyond have come to terms that indeed the art world is incomplete without the inclusion of all the players.

Although there is still a long way to go, the game has changed. More artists are pushing for new paradigms as well as shifting the cannons that promote the rise of African art as a consequential part of the art world. I recommend the need to continue these discussions at all levels. Reportedly, 80 per cent of African art is currently housed in museums and private collections outside the continent. As Africans, we have a core responsibility to be the safe-keepers of our heritage, otherwise, history will repeat itself if 95 per cent of our artistic creations are collected and kept on foreign soil.

I also believe it is timely and relevant to continue the debate on historical occurrences, like colonialism, and how they have shaped coexistence in the modern world as well as what they portend for the future.





*Axiluanda IV (M0011)*, 2021, mixed textile, transfer onto unprimed canvas, acrylic, wool, calico, hand sewing, 195 x 91 cm

Having a community to reach out to during this pandemic period which sometimes demands prolonged isolation and stress is critical. In 2012, you established Pés Descalços, a cultural and philanthropic collective for the development and promotion of projects focused on the arts. In what way has the collective served as a support system for its artists and the community at large?

As I mentioned earlier, Pes Descalços is a platform that lends a voice as well as drives the narrative to provide a place for absent players in the cultural production field along with artists. We think GLOCAL, as we partner with a wide network of institutions to support local and regional initiatives with an intrinsic relevance ranging from artists to cultural practitioners at all levels, by facilitating and paving the way to a global stage.

We run artistic residencies, workshops, training, conferences, research and project founding. That way we create an ecosystem that catalyses for future generations to benefit on.

Trends in contemporary African art are still largely dictated by Western patrons and by scholars, many of whom are Africans residing in diaspora and thus may not be directly influenced by stimuli from the continent. Is this an anomaly, and how can a balance be achieved on the African continent?

To shift these trends, as Africans, we have to create



the stimulus that the Westerns have created, only then can balance will be achieved. It is not rocket science, we know the formula, let us use it wisely.



African art has become more visible in the global market today than ever before. Do you think that this influences the way that art is made on the continent?

Yes, I believe this is the case especially with easy access to new technologies and economic disadvantages.

Our culture is so rich and diverse and art offers an important platform to showcase this diversity. However, the African narrative in art has not been embraced as it should. We need a conversation about what happens when outsiders bring their ideas and then dictate what they want to see from

us, leaving the rest of us without the power to showcase what is truly ours. We have to tell our stories in our African way, by keeping true to ourselves and our heritage.

*Imbambas: Unsettled Feelings of Object and Self runs at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery until 5 February 2022.*

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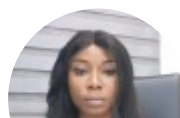
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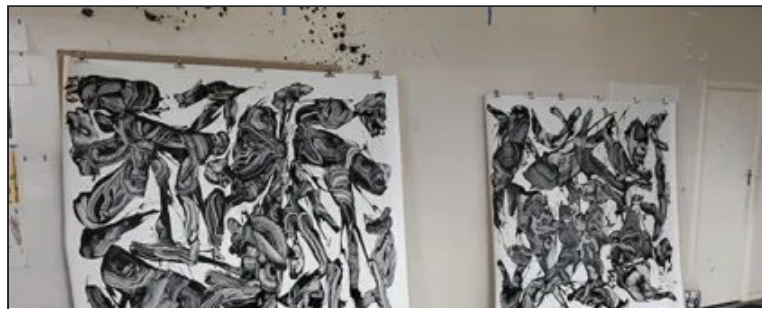
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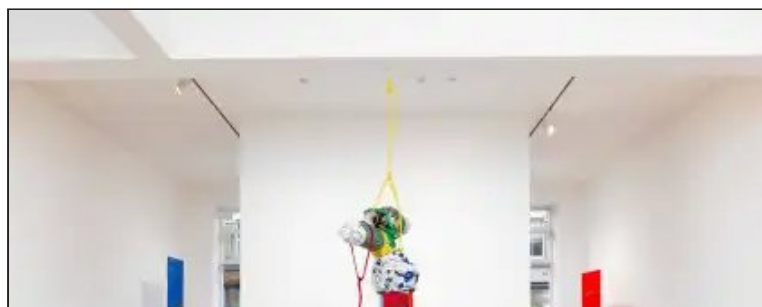
of Omenka Africa's first art, business and luxury- lifestyle magazine. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Mass Communication from Covenant University, Nigeria. Ogidan is also Operations Manager at the Omenka Gallery, and Chief Operating Officer at Revilo Company Limited, a leading art publishing company in Lagos. She has co-ordinated several exhibitions at home and abroad.

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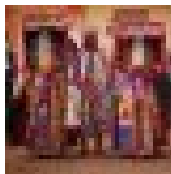
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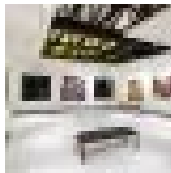
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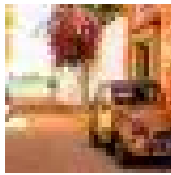
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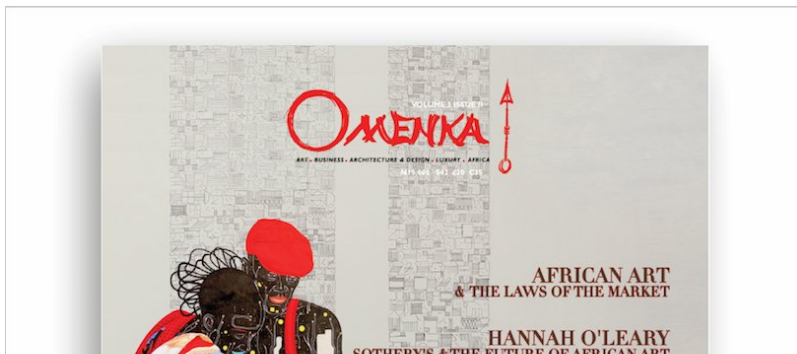


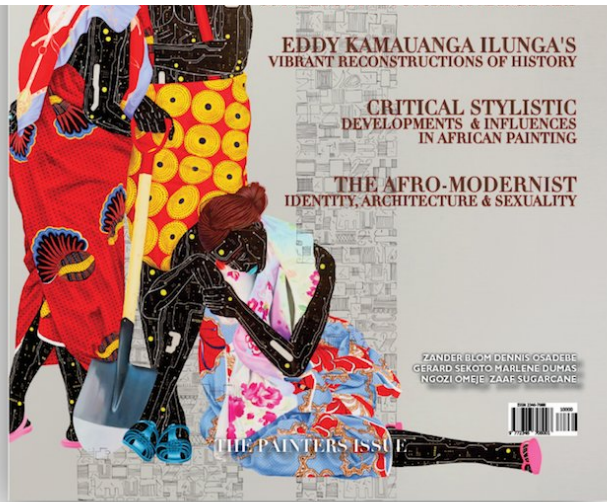
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