

The rise of Amazons – African female artists

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The month of March is all about women. It is indeed Women's month and the world just celebrated international women's day on the 8th. Why do we need a special day or month to celebrate women?

Some argue that women should be celebrated everyday and just not on a special day set aside by the world, and they are right. As a woman, I share their sentiments and strongly believe that women must be celebrated every day. However, I can see the reasoning behind dedicating a day in the year to remind women of just how truly amazing we are as humans.

The global art industry is male dominated. Male artists have always received full recognition and promotions to Master in years past. It is exciting to see more women take the center stage as artists. Representation matters and we can see how the few female veteran artists have incited a new generation of younger female artists to take full ownership of their place in the industry.

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NENGI OMUKU

Nengi describes her art as a language and a way of expressing herself, non-verbally with the hope that whoever sees her work can understand the sentiment she has translated through painting. Her practice is inspired by an understanding of the body that is beyond representation and focuses more on a state of mind. Nengi merges her knowledge of oil painting with the tradition of weaving which is popular in Nigeria.

Upon completing her Masters program, Nengi moved back to Nigeria where she soon started noticing that there were several mentally ill people on the streets. This birthed The Art of Healing (TOAH) which focuses on the interiority, emotions, and state of the mind. Understandably, art cannot make people well, but through her therapeutic art, Nengi seeks to uplift the spirit of people that are mentally or physically unwell.

TOYIN OJIH ODUTOLA

Toyin is a Nigerian-born artist born 1985 in Ile-Ife. At a young age, her family relocated to the United States where she grew up in the South. Toyin's work challenges traditional notions about social and political identity. With portraiture, she seeks to change the narrative about race, identity, and class – visually using her detailed portrait drawings in black pen ink which she is best known for.

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SOMI NWANDU (The Somi effect)

At a young age, Somi Nwandu took interest in art. She was passionate about photography and spent years exploring digital software. Her life's journey has also taken her into the worlds of branding, creative project management, marketing, and art direction, where she draws inspiration from. She pushes her creativity further through writing, painting, and illustrating fashion designs. As an award winning visual artist and photographer, she believes that art can uplift, unite and inspire people. She has fared well in group exhibitions and fairs such as the New York Art Fair, the Lagos Biennial, the LagosPhoto festival, and Xposure International Photography Festival Sharjah. Somi has also taken part in international photography festivals and fairs and she currently works at the Smithsonian Institution – Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C

ZOZA ICHA

Zoza is a visual artist who specializes in ceramics and sculptors, with the aim of making art an experience, not just something that appeals to the eyes.

Zoza is the founder of the Asah Bara brand which was born from the belief that effective economic impact is made in countries where the place of creative industries is properly understood. Instead of complaining about it, she gave birth to Asah Bara. Asah Bara is an afrocentric brand telling African stories through crafts. Every product from Asah Bara is handcrafted with love for clients in a functional contemporary style.

MARCELLINA AKPOJOTOR

Marcellina produces richly textured and layered work with compelling visual imagery exploring femininity, personal and societal identity and issues surrounding women empowerment in contemporary society. Working primarily with discarded pieces of the Ankara fabric – sourced from local fashion houses. In her work, she presents powerful images that capture the unyielding strength, complexities and seemingly effortless style of her subjects while also referencing the arduous journey to female empowerment and gender equality, especially in contemporary African societies.

[@marcellina_akpojotor](#)

SARAH SANNI

Sarah is a self-taught muralist who is undoubtedly Nigeria's most sought-after female mural/aerosol artist. Despite working as a software developer in IT, she continued to pursue her passion for art. Her inspiration came from the designs made on the hands and feet of brides in the northern part of Nigeria called 'Laali'. Sarah went on to acquire art books that helped enhance her skills as a painter. Recently, she launched her lifelong dream art center—the Cera Cerni Art Hub—which is intended as both a center for teaching art skills and a gallery where art is exhibited and sold to customers.

[@ceracerni](#)

There are several female artists who are making a mark on Africa's contemporary art scene with a brush in their hand and canvas in front of them.

There is an increasing demand for artists to portray the continent's challenges, diverse beauty and traditions, and female artists are rising up to meet this demand with their impeccable creativity and unique art style. Women in arts and culture should be celebrated more, it doesn't matter whether she makes tie and dye in a small village in Abeokuta, or is a sculptor in Benin city. It neither counts if she is a potter or a painter, a digital artist or one who draws with black ball point ink. Regardless of their different styles of art representation, every female artist is deserving of recognition, for their creativity, resilience and unrivaled ability to tell inspiring stories. Art is not gender based, let us endeavor to put an end to the unspoken stereotypes by breaking the bias in the art industry.

Happy International Women's Day.