

Event - 1:54 FORUM: Focus North Africa

DISCUSSION / CONFERENCE

1:54 FORUM: Focus North AfricaSomerset House, London, United Kingdom
15 Oct 2015 - 18 Oct 2015

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how ideas circulate and proliferate across this perceived border. North Africa's subjectivity and positionality will provide an entry point into topics such as migration, globalisation and artistic historiography.

Firsthand insight will be provided by artist talks including: Algerian artist Messinissa Selmani, honoured with a Special Mention at the 56th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale; Tunisian artist Nidhal Chamekh, also selected for the 56th Venice Biennale; and French-Algerian artist Kader Attia, whose installation *Continuum of Repair: The Light of Jacob's Ladder* was on display at the Whitechapel Gallery for a year.

Alongside Selmani and Chamekh, this edition of 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair will feature work by more North African artists than ever before. First-time exhibitors include Ibrahim El-Salahi, Zahira Kahlo, Amina Benbouchta and Hassan Musa.

Dubbed 'A Visionary Modernist' by the Tate, Sudanese-born El-Salahi is one of the most significant figures in African and Arab Modernism. Employing an unprecedented Sudanese visual vocabulary, born out of his own pioneering integration of Islamic, African, Arab and Western artistic traditions, El-Salahi's work is deeply spiritual and reflective, while vigorously attending to social and political injustice.

Kahlo's identity straddles a triad of cultures; born in Morocco she uses a pseudonym created through several anecdotes and influences. Casting herself as the protagonist against simple backgrounds, Kahlo's photographic works navigate the heterogeneity of female identity.

Also born in Morocco, Benbouchta has devoted her practice to anthropological reflection on the interdependence of the environment, objects of everyday life and humanity. Working with painting, photography, sculpture, installation and video, Benbouchta's work responds to her experience of living as a contemporary woman in both public and private spheres.

Sudanese-born Musa enjoys intellectual and creative mobility as he transits between the histories of multiple world cultures – often imbuing traditional painting techniques with new meanings and appropriated aesthetics. His critically engaging assembled images contain complex references to European painting, Arabic calligraphy and Chinese watercolour.

Another first time exhibitor is GVOC: founded in 1946 it is the oldest gallery in Morocco. Now located in the new center of Casablanca, and built in Art Deco style, it is a key institution within Morocco's art scene. In recent years, the gallery has successfully showcased the work of many renowned Moroccan and international artists. GVOC is firmly committed to presenting the work of emerging artists in the early stages of their artistic trajectories.

As well as 33 galleries, 1:54 will present Special Projects, artists and art centres based in Africa. The upcoming edition of 1:54 will feature a unique Lounge area designed by Hassan Hajaj's Moroccan based *Lamache Studio*. With an eclectic practice that encompasses photography, painting, up-cycling, furniture design, album covers and restaurant interiors, Hassan Hajaj draws on juxtapositions and hyperbolic imagery to celebrate North African street iconography in radiant fashion.

Please note that 1:54 FORUM will take place in the Main Portico Room in Somerset House's South Wing. Admission to FORUM is included within 1:54 tickets and VIP passes, but seat reservations must be made in advance.

1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair announced the programme for its upcoming edition of FORUM, 1:54's critical conversation series. This October, curators Koyo Kouoh and Orner Bernada will lead an inquisition into the discourse surrounding the Sahara. Click here to discover the full FORUM Programme.

Considered an invisible border, the Sahara edges the distinct regions between the so-called 'Maghreb', North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa; it is often imagined as a boundary and cultural divide between two artistic and intellectual cartographies rather than as a space of exchange.

Over the course of four days, keynote lectures, artist talks, panel discussions, book launches and film screenings will be used to generate conversation around what, if anything, distinguishes cultural practice in North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa.

By interrogating the Sahara as a conjectural boundary, FORUM will explore