

Sexuality and the Sahara: 17 artists showcasing Africa's divergent stars

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17 photos: 17 contemporary African art stars

Sexuality and the body: Myriam Mbhindou – Pythia, 2015

"Her work often deals with the female body and its representation, engaging with ways in which bodies are threatened or made vulnerable. She also examines the confrontation with the Other and the search for identity in this encounter."

Story highlights

1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair features the work of the continent's best artists and galleries



Founder Touria El Glaoui highlights 17 who shone at this year's fair in London

The artists explore youth, photography, sexuality, migration, and the Sahara

London (CNN)—While Frieze art fair was making London's loudest noises, last week, a younger creative event was calmly claiming plaudits.

1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair, "Europe's leading art fair dedicated to Contemporary African Art," opened for its third edition at the Strand's grand Somerset House.

It was 1:54's biggest year so far with 38 galleries representing more than 150 artists from Africa and

African diaspora. The 2015 event follows the fair's first excursion overseas, a parallel show in New York held earlier this year.

"I am absolutely delighted with the response to the latest edition of 1:54," says founder Touria El Glaoui. "As the only international contemporary African art fair, it is a great joy to showcase the world's best African and African diasporan artists here in London."

Glaoui reports 15,000 attendees, around a quarter of the more established Frieze. But visitors said its smaller scale offered an exciting museum-like experience, with a lot to take in at Somerset House's west wing. African art is big business, now, but -- unlike the main Frieze event, a take-it-or-leave-it experience for many who weren't there to buy -- the 1:54 fair packed "rich diversity."

This year's fair takes inspiration from the Sahara -- a physical and psychological borderland between the continent's northern rim and southern expanses -- but has won praise for the wide-range of offerings on show.

Before the show, Glaoui highlighted FORUM, the series of talks that provide the backbone to the fair, which focuses on the artistic production in North Africa and "the perceived border between the so-called Maghreb and the countries south of the Sahara," said the founder.

"FORUM will move to consider experiences of migration and movement across the conceptual border of the Sahara which remains in the consciousness of many, an artistic, cultural and social divide," she said.

1:54 -- the name a reference to the 54 countries that make up the African continent -- hosted artists from South Africa, Morocco, Angola, Tunisia, Benin, Kenya, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, and Zimbabwe, as well as artists from across Europe and the USA.

For the organizers, the desert theme provided fertile ground from which many different discussions have grown. Drawing on salient themes from this year's fair, Glaoui names some of the continent's best young artists and photographers exploring emerging topics from the show: sexuality, migration, and the Sahara.

Swipe through the gallery above to see the 17 artist organized by theme: youth, photography; sexuality, migration, and the Sahara.

