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Art X Lagos: More Than an Art Fair, a Platform for Pan-African Creativity

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE on Oct 30, 2018 • 11:58 pm No Comments



ARMED WITH DEGREES IN LAW AND BUSINESS, **Tokini Peterside** is an entrepreneur dedicated to art. She founded [Art X Lagos](#) in 2016. Peterside considers the international art fair a pan-African “platform” for artists rather than a mere art fair, envisioning the brand as an opportunity to work across the spectrum of the art world. The latest edition of Art X Lagos unfolds this week (Nov. 2-4) at The Civic Centre in Victoria Island, Lagos.

The fair is a destination for seeing and buying art by emerging and established artists and hearing from the artists, curators, and cultural leaders who are shaping the contemporary African art sector during the Art X Talks programming.

“We seek to show the world what we can do, tell the African story to the world,” Peterside said in an interview with CNN (video above). “But we also exist to show our local audience what is possible. To inspire our local audience and ensure that those future artists, for the next generation, remain inspired and believe that it is possible to make something of their lives with these talents they’ve been given.”

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JOY LABINJO, “Untitled,” 2018 (acrylic and oil pastel on paper). I via Tiwani Contemporary

[Eighteen galleries](#) are exhibiting at the fair—nearly half are Nigerian, all but three are based in Africa. They are presenting work by [more than 50 artists](#), including ruby onyinyechi amanze, Armand Boua, Sokari Douglas Camp, Victor Ekpuk, Cyrus Kabiru, Dada Khanyisa, Zanele Muholi, and Nnenna Okore.

Galleries are showing multiple artists. New paintings from Ethiopian-born Tadesse Mesfin’s Pillars of Life series are being exhibited by Addis Fine Art (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia). The works celebrate women who are vendors in Ethiopian markets. Bloom Art gallery (Lagos) is featuring Nigerian artist Omosuyi Fred-Omojole, whose abstract

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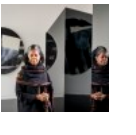
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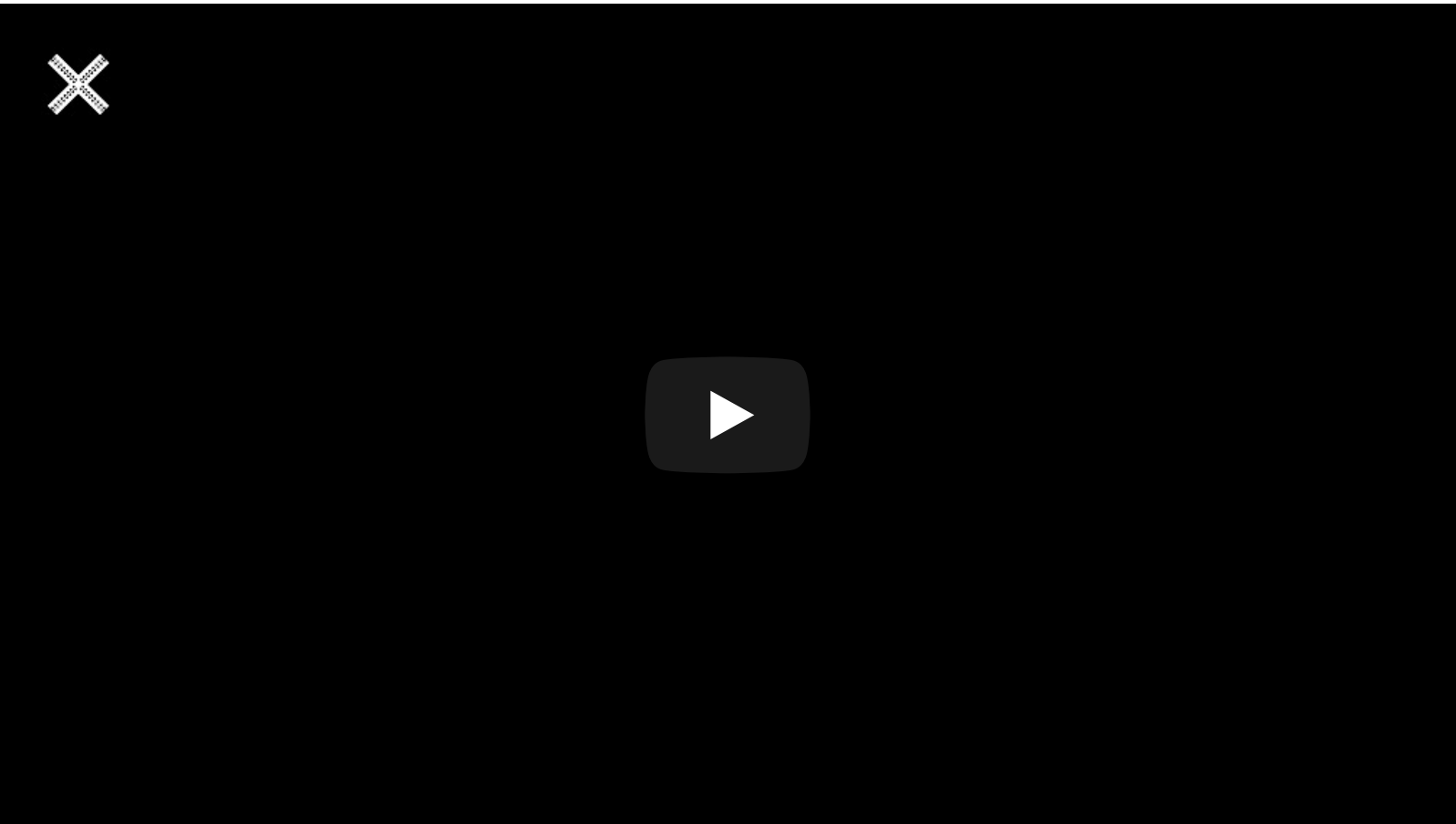


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works are influenced by color field painting.

Works by Joy Labinjo, Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum, and ruby onyinyechi amanze will be on view at Tiwani Contemporary of London. Labinjo, the British-Nigerian artist who won the Woon Art Prize in 2017, uses vibrant colors to depict scenes of contemporary life.

Selected from a shortlist of three artists, Bolatito Aderemi-Ibitola won the 2018 ART X Prize with Access (the sponsor). The Lagos-born artist was raised in the United States and currently lives and works in Lagos. Aderemi-Ibitola’s multidisciplinary practice explores issues of race, gender, and identity. As a part of the prize, she is presenting a solo project at the fair titled “Scraps from Mama’s Floor.”



Winner of the 2018 Art X Prize, Bolatito Aderemi-Ibitola, discusses her practice and special project for the art fair. | Video by Art X Media

One of the highlights of the fair is a special survey exhibition celebrating Yinka Shonibare’s work over the years. The British Nigerian artist known for his use of Dutch wax fabrics, is the Keynote Artist at Art X Lagos 2018. In addition to the exhibition, the designation includes participation in Art X Talks. Shonibare will be in conversation with art historian Chika Okeke-Agulu on Nov. 4. (He also served on the jury for the Art X Prize.)

Last year, Njideka Akunyili Crosby was featured in the Art X Talks. The conversation with the Los Angeles-based, Nigerian-born artist whose international recognition has skyrocketed over the past few years, was billed as her first public talk in Nigeria.

IN ADVANCE OF ART X LAGOS 2017, Peterside spoke to CNN about her background and the genesis for the fair. She said her upbringing gave her the confidence to think big.

“In an African family to have a daughter be first, as I am, my parents really stressed the fact that I should see myself as equal to or in fact better than male counterparts,” she said. “I grew up in an art-loving household. I grew up in an art-appreciating household that exposed me from early on for an appreciation for the arts.”


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YINKA SHONIBARE, “Material II,” 2018 (bronze sculpture, hand-painted with Dutch wax pattern, 100 x 63 x 77 cm). | Image courtesy of the artist and Blain Southern, London. Photo by Stephen White


Peterside studied abroad in the UK, where she encountered misperceptions about Africans and Nigerians, in particular. The experience reinforced her sense of her self, made her “more fiercely proud” of being Nigerian, and more patriotic.


She returned to Nigeria in 2008. “I ...fell in love 100 percent with the way of being here. You have to get with the program when you are here. People are so vibrant. They are so dynamic. It was infectious,” Peterside said. “A lot of young people were moving back. There was a huge community of us ...I made so many friends. In between the partying and the fun, I was also making great connections for my career. So I stayed.”

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Eight years after coming home, Peterside launched Art X Lagos. The fair has spurred Art X Week, a series of activities and events scheduled around the fair. “Ngozi Omeje: Connecting” is on view at the Centre for Contemporary Art Lagos. The expansive installation is Nigerian artist Ngozi Omeje’s first solo show. Stevenson Gallery of South Africa is staging a pop-up group exhibition at ALÁRA Lagos, the concept store designed by architect David Adjaye. The most prominent event, Lagos Photo, predates Art X Lagos. The ninth edition of the annual photography festival is currently underway (Oct. 27-Nov. 15).

Fall in Lagos is rich with visual art programming, providing a dynamic environment for artists to showcase their creativity to fellow Nigerians, visitors from across the continent, and beyond. Peterson’s ambitious omni-vision may be on the horizon.

She said: “I want to make my life’s work about building the structures and the platforms for these talented individuals so that these cultural ambassadors can literally continue to go all over the world and shine.” **CT**

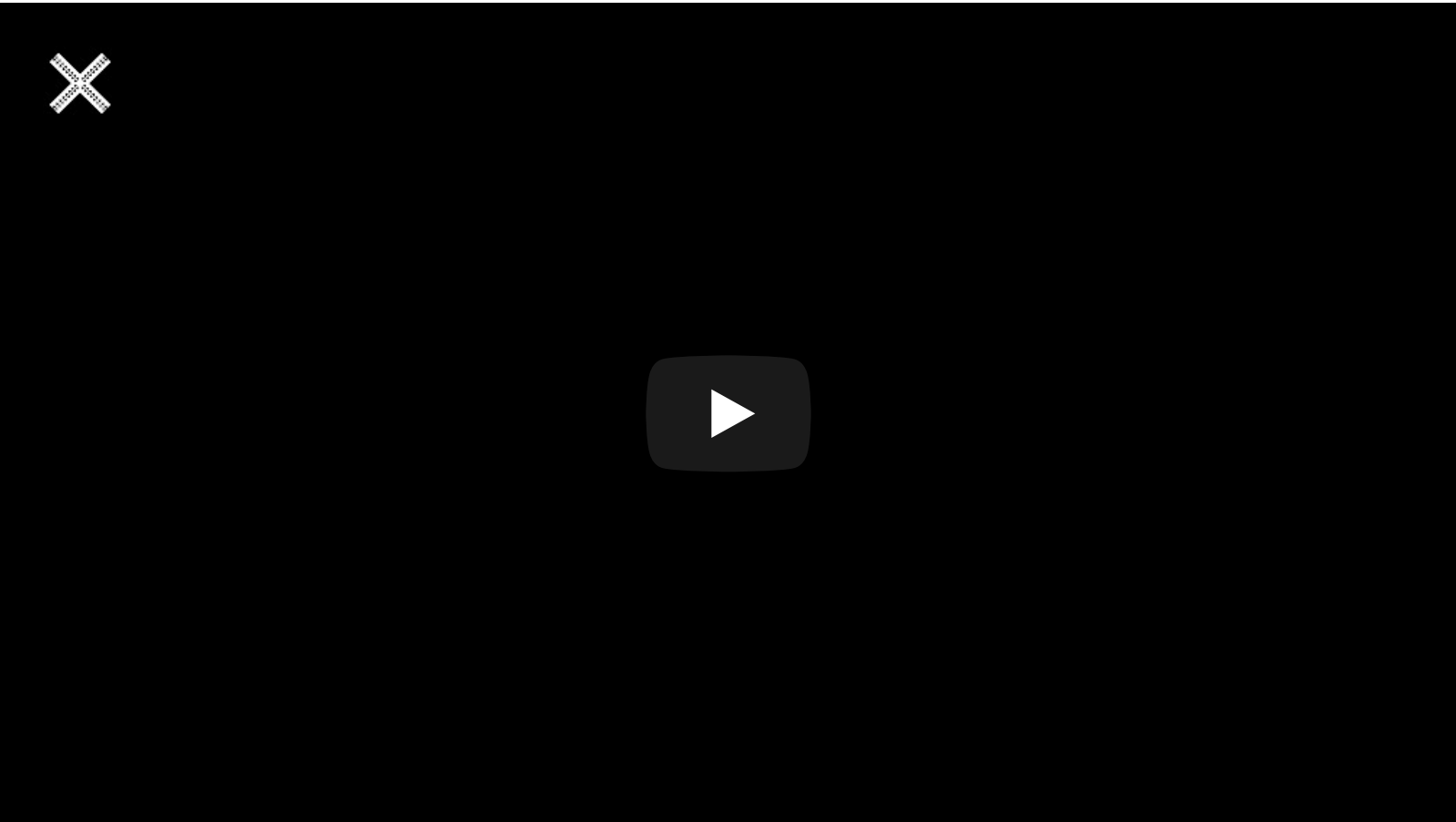
TOP OF PAGE: Tokini Peterside, founder of Art X Lagos, talks about establishing the international art fair and her vision for the future of creativity in West Africa. | Video by CNN

READ MORE about Art X Lagos [on the fair’s website](#)

BOOKSHELF

“Contemporary African Art Since 1980” is a seminal volume by Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu. “Making Africa: A Continent of Contemporary Design” accompanied a recent international traveling exhibition. Many volumes have been published about Yinka Shonibare’s work. “Yinka Shonibare MBE: Magic Ladders,” was published to coincide with an exhibition organized by the Barnes Foundation. “Yinka Shonibare: Criminal Ornamentation,” a volume forthcoming in November 2018, accompanies the show the artist is curating for the Arts Council Collection.

TADESSE MESFIN, “Pillars of Life: Strength,” 2018 (oil on canvas, 115 x 144 cm). | via Addis Fine Art



Gallery 1957 is showing work by Gerald Chukwuma at Art X Lagos 2018. The Nigerian artist talks what inspires his work. | Video by Art X Media

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