

# Pulane Kingston, a patron of Africa's art

[Nkgopoleng Moloji](#) 07 Sep 2018 00:00



[Pulane Kingston](#) was for the second time part of the judging panel for this year's FNB art prize. She says that professionals like her can help artists in a number of ways, including with their finances and gallery contracts. (Photo: [Delwyn Verasamy](#)).

Despite its emphasis on progressiveness, the art world can be a closed bubble. It isn't often that individuals come out of the art space fully empowered, and it's rarer when they are embraced for their contributions. Pulane Kingston is one such person.

The lawyer-turned-art collector and adviser is blazing her own trail. She completed her LLB at the University of Wales and her Master's in international law at the University of Nottingham. She works at Webber Wentzel law firm and is a co-founder and chairperson of Sphere Holdings. Her love of art is evident through the many ways in which she shows up in the art world.

Nkgopoleng Moloji spoke to Kingston ahead of a dinner she hosted for

Nigerian British artist Yinka Shonibare, who is exhibiting at the FNB Joburg Art Fair.

## **What does your involvement in the art space look like?**

Whenever I am asked about the genesis of my interest and involvement in art, I am reminded of a document that first sparked my deep interest in culture at an intellectual level and later contributed to my passion for visual arts.

This paper, titled *Preparing Ourselves for Freedom*, was prepared and delivered by Albie Sachs for an ANC in-house seminar of exiled cultural workers in 1989. The debates and discussions that this paper generated, especially for a young woman like me, who was born of South African parents outside the country and who was still shaping her identity and finding her voice and place in the world, had an indelible impact on me.

This foregrounding heavily informed my passion for preserving, revitalising and documenting our culture and heritage in a way that is accessible. Art — contemporary visual art specifically — is the one aspect of our culture that I was most drawn to.

When I returned to South Africa, I was already a young art enthusiast who had spent a significant portion of my free time at university visiting galleries, museums and art institutions, as well as attending diverse cultural events, as a matter of course. This has continued.

## **Can you tell us about some of the earlier works you were interested in, and maybe even bought?**

My first ever purchase of art was a reproduction print of *Blue Nude II* (1952) by modernist and impressionist artist Henri Matisse. Alongside the Freedom Charter and struggle art posters, it adorned the walls of the various rooms that I occupied for the entire time that I pursued my tertiary education. I remember how it reminded me of the majestic beauty of a Makonde carving — regal, smooth, with elegant features.

Over the years, I have acquired a few other pieces of art that I have been instinctively drawn to — aesthetically or from a composition perspective — or, indeed, because of their symbolism or what they represent.

## **How do you decide on what art to buy?**

With the passage of time, and as I have come to understand the art ecosystem better, I have begun to actively focus on supporting modern and contemporary art that is produced by African female artists and those from the diaspora —what I casually term “gender mainstreaming” in art.

I remain perplexed by the statistics which demonstrate how, as in all other areas of human endeavour, women remain underrepresented, marginalised and excluded,irrespective of their talent and efforts.

It is only through intentionally supporting their work, supporting the publication of scholarly writing about their work, and more, that we can play a part in raising their profiles.

**Can you tell us about some organisations within the art space that you are involved with?**

I am a member of the advisory board of the Zeitz MOCAA in Cape Town and serve as a member of the Africa acquisitions committee of the Tate Modern museum in the United Kingdom. I am also excited to be serve on the board of Lalela, which is an NGO that provides arts education to at-risk youth to spark creative thinking and awaken the entrepreneurial spirit.

**How do you see the role of professionals — lawyers, accountants, doctors, etcetera — in relation to the greater global art discourse?**

It is absolutely clear to me that professionals remain an important stakeholder in the global art discourse and have a number of roles to play. The obvious place to start is at the intellectual level, as people who visit art establishments (which includes artists’ studios) to view and buy artworks and to participate in talks and debates that are held.

Through the interactions and exchanges of ideas, these professionals have the opportunity to educate artists. An engagement with artists may lead to a sharing of advice about how to spend, how to save and how to invest money effectively, as well as in relation to the legalities around their contractual arrangements with galleries or with respect to their wills.

**Alongside Johannesburg Art Gallery chief curator Khwezi Gule, you were part of the judging panel for this year’s FNB Art Prize.**

## **What were some of the tenets you followed and how did you decide who should receive the award?**

This is the second year that I have had the opportunity to be part of the judging panel. Last year, we put in place criteria for selection, which made the shortlisting and final selection process defensible. The lawyer in me needs to work within the confines of set criteria to ensure fairness and objectivity.

We were most impressed by the overall quality of the submissions, and so the criteria once again came in handy in focusing our minds on the task at hand. In a sense, the submissions speak to the fact that contemporary African art really has found a voice that resonates. We were looking for youth — under 35 — as well as innovation, relevance and aesthetic appeal, along with compelling composition and coherence in presentation.

Because of the high quality of the submissions, we had many debates and discussions. Ultimately, Haroon Gunn-Salie's reflective artwork *Senzeni na*, which captures the ghosts of those slain in the Marikana massacre, won the prize.

## **It is art week in Jo'burg and the FNB Joburg Art Fair is around the corner. Who are some of the artists you have your eyes on?**

As a pan-Africanist, I am extremely proud of the fact that the fair is supporting and helping many African galleries to attend the fair, staying true to its mandate of solidifying its presence as the oldest and biggest art fair on the continent. It is also very heartening to see so much work that is being produced and showcased by female artists. Some of my favourites are:

Addis Fine Art in Ethiopia: Painter Addis Gezehagn will be one of three Ethiopian artists represented. Since Addis Fine Art opened in 2016, they have firmly cemented their presence in the local and international art scenes. The young artist attracts me because of the way in which he depicts urban landscapes, with compositions that blend the boundaries of fantasy and the reality of urban life. His portrayal of the multifaceted characteristics of the external facades of homes in Addis is very striking.

Afriart Gallery in Kampala: Stacey Gillian Abe will have her thought-provoking and daring performance work shown in the form of photography. She won the Bag Factory Female Residency award last year.

Arte de Gema in Maputo: Mauro Pinto is a well-recognised contemporary photographer who sheds new light on Mozambican culture and is definitely one to watch.

Espaco Luanda Arte in Luanda: The wealth of new exciting work coming out of Angola is electric. Afro-futurist Jone Ferreira is an excellent example of new perspectives and futures in Angola.

First Floor Gallery Harare: Every year First Floor Gallery unearths some really exceptional Zimbabwean contemporary artists, while continuing to promote the likes of Wycliffe Mundopa.

Gallery 1957 in Accra: Florine Demosthene has a collage on wood panels. Her work should most certainly be in my collection. Her art practice examines the ways in which black culture is commodified and fetishised.

Red Door Gallery in Lagos: Mixed media by Fatai Adewale, whose work focuses on themes and subjects ranging from global politics, history, identity and culture.

**How do you manage your energies, given the different things that you are involved in?**

Art is my passion. I am invested in it. It keeps me engaged and feeds my soul. The energy just flows seamlessly and enables me to focus on the business of living fully, meaningfully and intentionally.

***Some of Kingston's answers were edited for length and clarity***