

This Art Fair Is Basically The Frieze of West Africa



Courtesy of Lagos Art Fair

Going down this weekend, we spoke to founder and Director of ART X Lagos about her mission to make Nigeria an art hotspot

“Lagos is a very energetic, very lively place; it’s teeming with people — close to 27 million!” laughs Founder and Director of ART X Lagos Tokini on the phone from Nigeria. This isn’t far off from what one is often told of [Africa](#)’s second largest economy, known for its oil, chaos, corruption and now, its thriving fashion and art scene. “Nothing prepares you for getting off the plane in Lagos!” laughs Peterside, comparing the experience to Mumbai and Cairo.

And it’s exactly the city’s cacophony of people, sprawling cityscape, traffic and energetic pulse that Peterside has banked on to develop one of Africa’s most talked about contemporary art fairs, often dubbed the “Frieze of West Africa.” The Nigerians, she says, “are very bold and daring people. We are not passive people — especially Lagosians. Lagos is a city that makes its own rules.”



Portrait of the Children of Abobo Gard II by Armand Buoa, 100 x 100cm, Acrylic and newspaper on canvas, 2017

Peterside has made her own rules too when it comes to staging an art fair on Nigerian soil. “I decided that I didn’t want to just copy and paste the art fair model as it exists around the world but to look at the unique features of the city of Lagos and create something that could really speak to the city’s personality and that is why the fair is now the way it is,” she says. Peterside was spurred by the need to mend the disconnect she witnessed between [Nigerian artists](#) and the international art community. “I would have conversations with artists and collectors [in West African] and they would talk about their frustrations and how they felt disconnected from the global art world; a number were taking matters into their own hands and choosing to emigrate — moving to places like Berlin or to the US,” she says. “The general consensus was that if they felt they could have more prosperous careers staying in Nigeria they would have stayed — this was their homeland and the place of their ideas.” Peterside set out to change this. After visiting the Venice Biennale in 2015 she felt the need to create an event in Nigeria that would bring people to Africa.

[The fair](#), which takes place from 2-4 November at The Civic Centre in Victoria Island, Lagos, is staged to reflect the unique character of Lagos

and its people. “When we looked at Lagos with this very energetic population we realised that we actually needed to have projects that the audience could interact with.” The audience in Lagos craves more. “Nigeria has a very young population where the youth makes up the majority of the population,” explains Peterside. “Whereas other fairs in Africa might focus on established collectors we are focusing on the next generation, the young people in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties.”



Collin Sekajugo, The closet 2, 2018, Mixed medium, 124cm x 190cm

ART X Lagos features a select number of 18 exhibitors. “The galleries make up the core of our art fair and we are consistently looking to have half of the represented galleries be Nigeria-based and the other half be international,” says Peterside. “This year we have eight local galleries and 10 international galleries.” These include [galleries](#) from outside Nigeria, including Ghanaian galleries Gallery 1957 and Nubuke Foundation, South African galleries SMAC Gallery and Stevenson Gallery as well as London-based British galleries Tiwani Contemporary and Tafeta. East African artists and galleries will also be exhibited for the first time, including Afriart Gallery from Uganda, Addis Fine Art from Ethiopia and Circle Art Gallery from Kenya. Additional galleries include eight Nigerian galleries, including Arthouse - The Space, Artyrama, Nike Art Gallery, Retro Africa, Signature Beyond, SMO Contemporary, Thought Pyramid and Bloom Art Nigeria. Peterside works closely with the selection committee led by N'Goné Fall, the renowned Senegalese curator, art critic and cultural consultant, and Femi Lijadu, one of Nigeria's most respected art collectors.

“We are looking for galleries that have the kind of artwork that we feel could do well with the Nigerian [collector](#) base and audience,” says Peterside. What kind of art is that? Clearly, it’s a difficult question. “There is no one answer but what we have noticed is that Nigerian collectors, overwhelmingly so, come to art collecting with an aesthetic eye. They look at an artwork as an object of beauty, one that must incite their imagination.



Fete by Ranti Bam, 2018. Vulcan black clay, 31 x 16cm

Among the highlights are the Curated Projects, curated by Missla Libsekal, focusing on the Keynote [Artist](#), internationally acclaimed Yinka Shonibare MBE, who will be visiting Lagos from London. There's the ART X Talks, also curated by Missla Libsekal and the Interactive Projects, curated by A Whitespace Creative Agency, featuring experiential platforms, Another

feature is the ART X Prize with Access featuring the work of the 2018 prize winner, Bolatito Aderemi-Ibitola, who will have a solo presentation of her project, Scraps from Mama's Floor.

“We are not the biggest fair in the world but what we try and present is an art fair that intrigues and excites and what people can look forward to as a fair that celebrates contemporary art from across the continent.”

ART x Lagos is happening on November 3 & 4.