

Africa State of Mind

At New Art Exchange

Description

Africa State of Mind, curated by Ekow Eshun with NAE, explores the work of an emergent generation of photographers from across the African continent. 16 artists from 11 different countries interrogate ideas of 'Africanness' through highly subjective renderings of life and identity on the continent, along the way revealing Africa to be a psychological space as much as a physical territory; a state of mind as much as a physical location. The exhibiting artists are: Emmanuelle Andrianjafy, Sammy Baloji, Raphaël Barontini, Neil Beloufa, Girma Berta, Eric Gyamfi, Kiluanji Kia Henda, Lebohang Kganye, Namsa Leuba, Michael MacGarry, Sabelo Mlangeni, Mimi Cheron Ng'ok, Musa N Nxumalo, Ruth Ossai, Athi Patra Ruga and Michael Tsegaye.

The exhibition orientates around three main themes - Inner Landscapes, Zones of Freedom and Hybrid Cities. In the show the modern African city is documented in all its dynamism and contradiction. The fluidity of gender and sexual identity is addressed through compelling portraiture, and the legacy of history, from slavery and colonialism to apartheid, becomes the source of resonant new myths and dreamscapes.

Africa State of Mind takes place at a time in which popular Western views of the continent still remain limited. Exhibition curator, Ekow Eshun explains: 'On one hand, there is the boosterism of an "Africa rising" narrative, that celebrates the development of an emergent middle class and the growth of a tech sector driven by a young aspirational population, while glossing over the inequalities of income and opportunity that still hinders social progress in many countries. On the other hand, the reductive stereotype of Africa as a land of would-be migrants and corrupt rulers - a vision given ugly validation by President Trump's description of its nations as "shithole countries".' By contrast, Africa State of Mind features photography that seeks to address the complexity of what it means, and how it feels, to live in Africa today.

The exhibition also draws inspiration from the work of the Senegalese economist Felwine Sarr, who has called for a fresh consideration of how to understand Africa. Sarr speculates about a new Africa conjured into being by artists, thinkers and cultural actors. By creative figures whose work is intent on articulating contemporary lived experience in Africa as a thing of nuance and imaginative reach. In so doing articulating Africa as a place where there is, as Sarr puts it, a profound 'continuity between the real and the possible'.