



Girma Berta, *Asmara IX*, 2018. Digital Archival Print, 60 x 45 cm

The Essence of Pan-African Arts at the Investec Cape Town Art Fair

Investec Cape Town Art Fair

By Chaze Matakala

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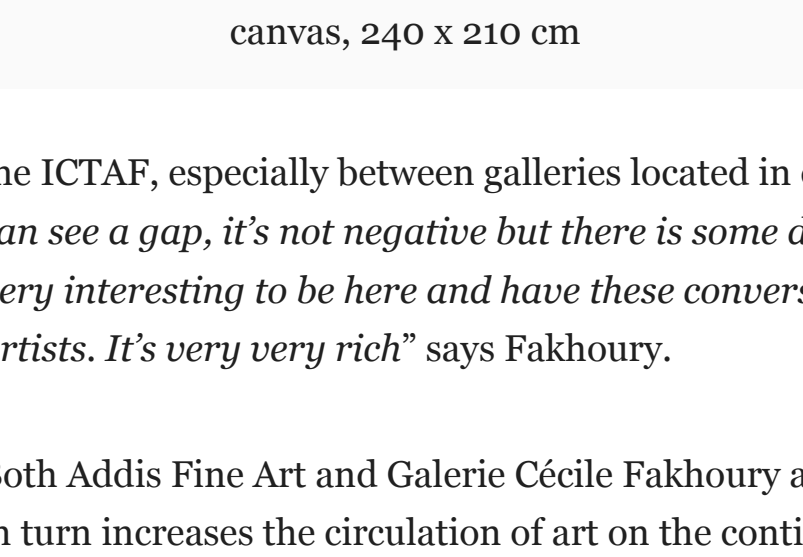
CTICC, Cape Town

15.02.2019 – 17.02.2019

The 2019 edition of the Investec Cape Town Art Fair (ICTAF) saw a number of African galleries make their way down to the southernmost tip of the continent to showcase some of the old and some of the new. Within the lived confines of the art world, we notice that the sociopolitical connections of the continent are reflected in the ways we confront the past and the future of Pan-African arts.

Through enacting the role of cultural connectors, Addis Fine Art is moving the centre towards the horn of Africa region. Showcasing award-winning photographer Girma Berta and acclaimed artist Dawit Ahebe, founders Mesai Haileleul and Rakeb Sile are motivated to build a more sustainable and engaged collector base at home in Ethiopia while introducing contemporary Ethiopian artists to the rest of the world. Sile conveyed that it essential to engage in the wider art market, of which South Africa's is much more established as compared to other regions of the continent south of the Sahara, where the infrastructure for visual arts is regarded as limited.

It comes across that the ICTAF is an important meeting point for dialogue between African galleries and artists on the continent. The premier art fair in the Western region, Art x Lagos, was a very enlightening experience for Sile and the artists whose work she took to Nigeria. There is an incentive to emulate the West African art scene, which has invested in its masters and also emerging artists, now expanding its collector taste to what the rest of the continent has to offer.



Kassou Seydou, *Red Bantamba*, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 240 x 210 cm

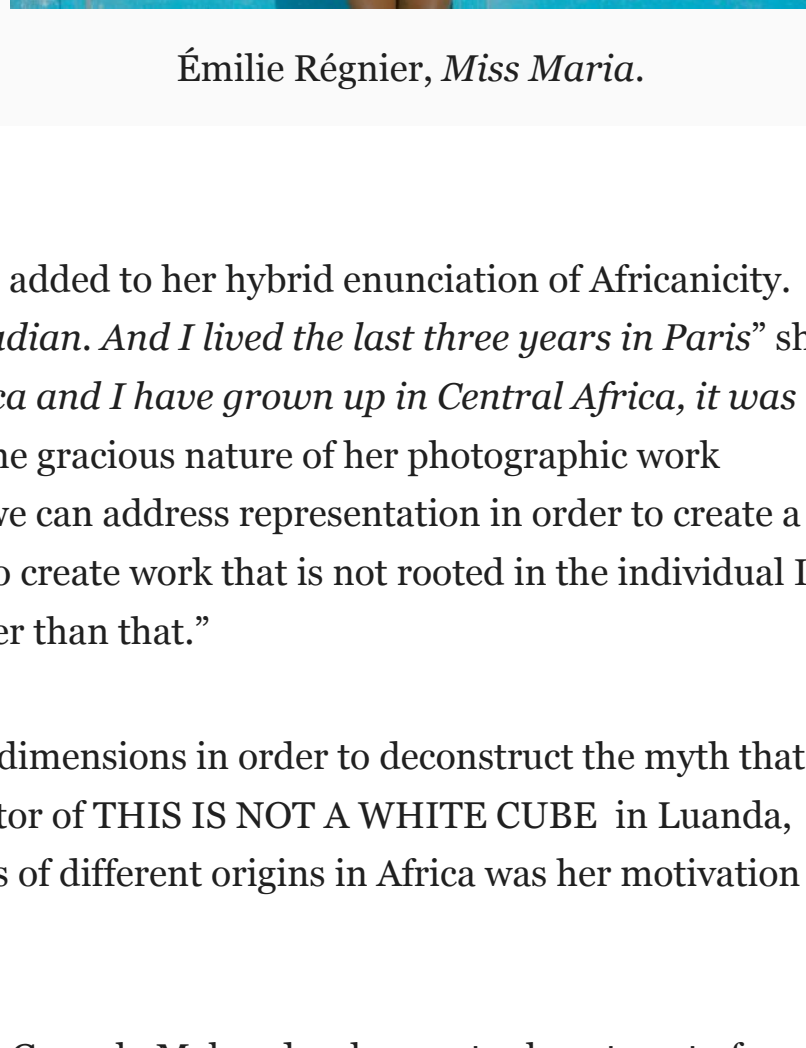
Take for instance Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, a gallery based in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, with a newly opened space in Dakar, Senegal. Galerie Cécile Fakhoury is contemporary gallery working with artists who are concerned with past history in order to navigate the present. The first exhibition in Abidjan showcased young artists work alongside Frederic Bruly Bouabre, one of the masters of visual art in Ivory Coast. Fakhoury conveyed that Bouabre's vision was all about transmission, and she seeks to carry this vision forward in echoing Bouabre's belief that "the role of an artist is to be a messenger".

The messages being transmitted are existing in what Fakhoury describes as an echo chamber at the ICTAF, especially between galleries located in different geo-political regions of the continent. "We can see a gap, it's not negative but there is some distance between Anglophone and Francophone. It's very interesting to be here and have these conversations about geography, about cultural spirit and artists. It's very very rich" says Fakhoury.

Both Addis Fine Art and Galerie Cécile Fakhoury are determined to build their local art markets, which in turn increases the circulation of art on the continent, a factor that is essential to cultural preservation. Dominick Maia Tanner of ELA - Espaço Luanda Arte in Luanda, Angola, recognizes the important role that galleries have to play in nudging artists towards creating for the right reasons and to steer the impetus away from commercial interests, which is a challenge in itself. "It's good that artists have a dialogue and don't do things by themselves. And galleries also shouldn't do things by themselves, and on a higher level we should be more united in Africa amongst us so that again we don't commit certain mistakes."

In the cultural sphere of the ICTAF, we notice two bubbles, namely African art and a European collector base. Whether these two bubbles merge in a synergetic way is up for contestation, as it has been since we transitioned into the postcolonial/neocolonial era. Tanner, who is the director of ELA - Espaço Luanda Arte, asserted that "I don't see Pan-Africanism at this fair, I see an African representation. But what I see, to be very blunt, is an organization which I like a lot, called Fiera Milano, which brings the European galleries and European collectors, but I don't see them buying outside of their comfort zone. And a lot of the works that we sell here from Angola are to Africans. And its not a racial thing, it's very much a spiritual thing."

ELA - Espaço Luanda Arte seeks to stimulate diversity in Angolan creative production through a residency programme called *Angola AIR* which also encourages the participation of non-Angolan artists. An artist showing work produced during *Angola AIR* at ICTAF is Émilie Régnier. For the Canadian-Haitian photographer, diversity can be understood in its temporal dimensions through referencing a spiritual saying of the Middle Ages "that if you cover our head, your soul will be closer to God," she says. Rooting this notion in a contemporary and conceptual way, Régnier captures the balancing act that African women enact on a daily basis. In her body of work, *La Bella de Luanda*, Régnier shares portraits taken on 35mm and medium format of *Zungaras*, women who walk around the city carrying goods for trade on their heads, and in Régnier's opinion, "carry the entire universe on their heads, physically but also metaphorically."



Émilie Régnier, *Miss Maria*.

Régnier's time spent in Luanda was a new layer to be added to her hybrid enunciation of Africanicity. "I am not only African, because I am also half-Canadian. And I lived the last three years in Paris" she says. "Angola was for me, even if I live in West Africa and I have grown up in Central Africa, it was super exotic." Régnier's presence at the ICTAF and the gracious nature of her photographic work kindles interesting reflections on the ways in which we can address representation in order to create a visual universe that is inclusive. Régnier is pushing to create work that is not rooted in the individual I, rather she would like to "go below that, to think bigger than that."

Diversity may also be understood in its socio-spatial dimensions in order to deconstruct the myth that Africa has a single story. For Sonia Ribeiro, the director of THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE in Luanda, Angola, the need to facilitate dialogue between artists of different origins in Africa was her motivation at this year's ICTAF.

THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE showcased work from Gonçalo Mabunda who creates beauty out of deactivated weapons from Mozambique's civil war period. Mabunda is interested in the collective memory of his country, which is also where Ribeiro was born. Mabunda des Ribeiro's starting point for the booth at ICTAF, where the evolution of Mabunda's style of creating masks an thrones has transformed into forms that are more structural and architectural as he negotiates how to heal from history. This makes for stimulating conversation when Mabunda's work is curated adjacent to the work of Angolan artist Nelo Teixeira. A self-taught artist like Mabunda, Teixeira's background in carpentry and theatre questions the urban space of Luanda through the use of raw material and found objects.



Gonçalo Mabunda, *The Man of the New Orbit*, 2019. Welding on metal and weapons, 96 x 62 x 24cm

This dialogue between artists from Lusophone countries in Africa is significant in the context of a city as Eurocentric as Cape Town. Contrasting the urban dialogue in the booth of THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE CUBE was work by Cameroonian artist Hako Hanson, whose magical realist paintings attempt to bring tradition and spirituality into a contemporary space. Pushing against the false truths concerning African spirituality brings up questions of identity and perception, as well as the role that education plays in the development of the artist. For Angolan-born Christiano Mangovo, the only artist in the booth who underwent formal training in the Faculty of Fine Arts at Ecole des Beaux Arts in Kinshasa (DRC), what is conveyed is critical thinking through the perception of the body. Mangovo's surrealist and textured paintings are playing with the imaginability in order to make sense of the chaos of daily urban life. Putting all of these artists from Mozambique, Angola and Cameroon in conversation in the booth at the ICTAF cultivates Pan-African dialogue in the arts, which will hopefully be transmuted into collective conversations. "We need to put Africa in focus in creating those bridges" says Ribeiro.

One could argue that the programme talks at ICTAF were not as inclusive of the perspective of African galleries. A talk on Friday at the ICTAF about Curating in the 21st Century solely included panelists from South Africa and the UAE. It would have been more valuable to gain perspectives from the pool of "70% of the galleries existing in Africa which are very recent" according to Ribeiro. In doing so, the ICTAF could be facilitating Pan-African dialogue that takes into account the challenges facing emerging galleries on the continent outside of South Africa. Ribeiro articulates this sentiment clearly in saying that "it is not about a saloon of artists, it's about artists in dialogue."

For the young Zimbabwean artist Troy Makaza, it is all about contribution. "If someone can take away that feeling of colour, or the possibilities of many mediums, I think I would have done my part," he says. Makaza's work was showcased by First Floor Gallery in Harare, Zimbabwe. Director Marcus Gora has worked over the past 10 years to develop a sustainable gallery model that would be able to support emerging artists and provide them with opportunities.

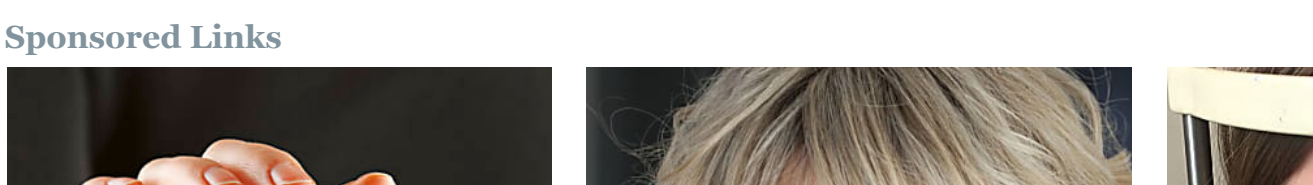
Troy Makaza, *The Pleasure of the precipice, Part 1*, 2018. Silicone infused with paint, 255cm x 125cm

Having won the TOMORROWS/TODAY prize for emerging artists at this year at the ICTAF, Makaza is looking forward to dispelling myths about his home country while conveying his make-believe world, "a Neverland" as he puts it. Makaza has created his own medium which fuses silicone with ink to project his vision of maps, characters, tastes and relatable objects. One of them being playing cards, which represent for Makaza "a game of chances... we don't even know if we are going to win or lose in this Neverland, in this same land... it's a beautiful game of chances, which is almost similar to life." Beyond ideologies of Pan-Africanism, there is meaning to be found in everyday experiences of young Africans. The inspiration behind his series of works at the ICTAF came from a friend's WhatsApp status which was questioning Peter Pan and other media we consumed in our youth. What makes western conceptions of fairies, goblins and magic so palatable, "Cinderella concepts" as Makaza puts it, while "African things are demonized?" he interrogates.

Makaza is reimagining his own Neverland, projecting into the future of art on the continent mediums only just conceived, referencing the not so distant past, and distilling the essence of colours so fresh you can taste them.

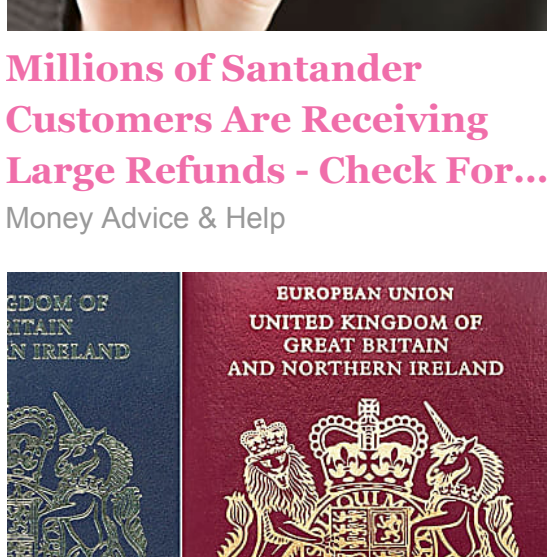


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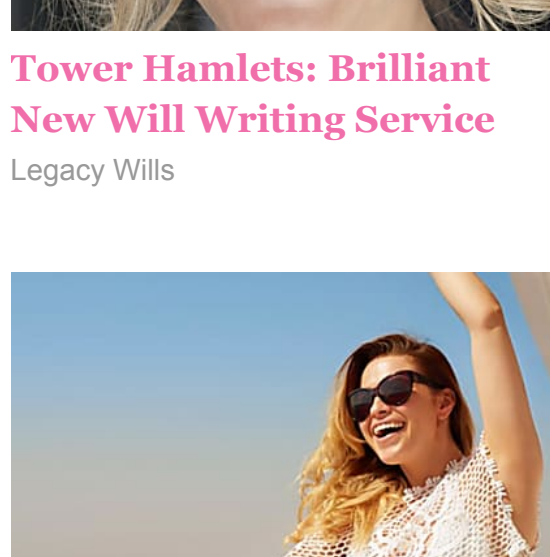
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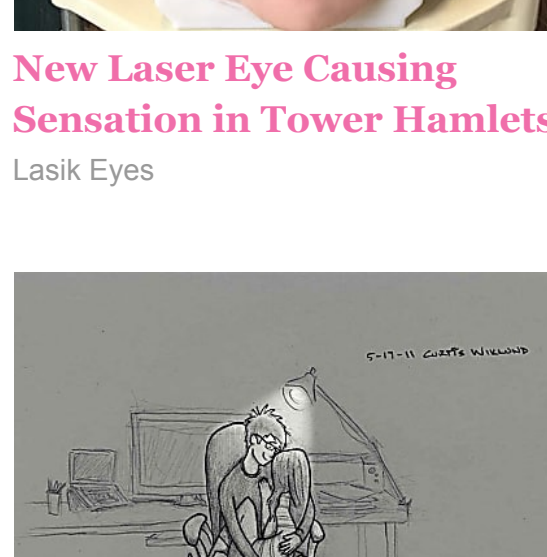
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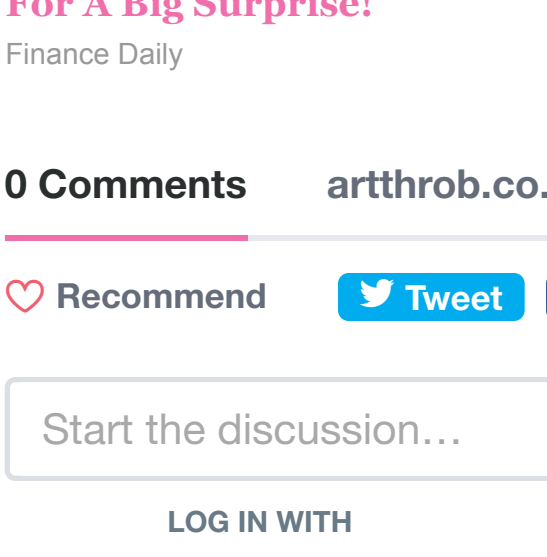
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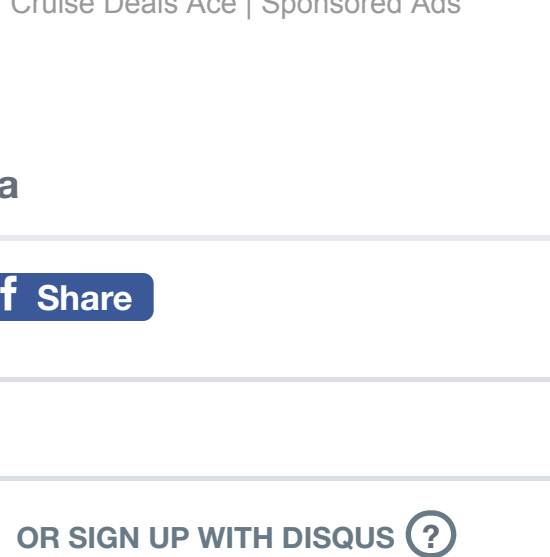
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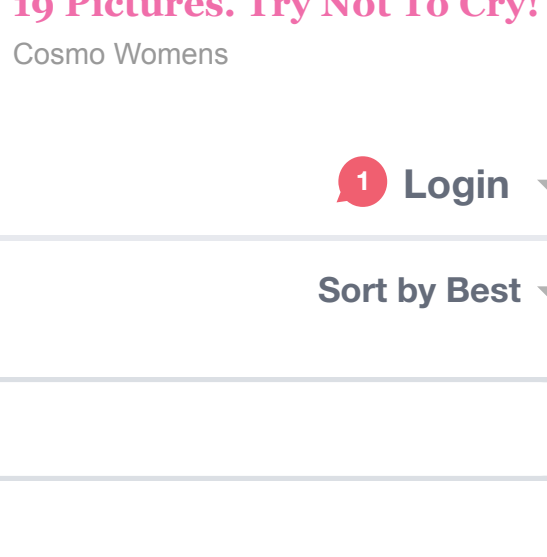
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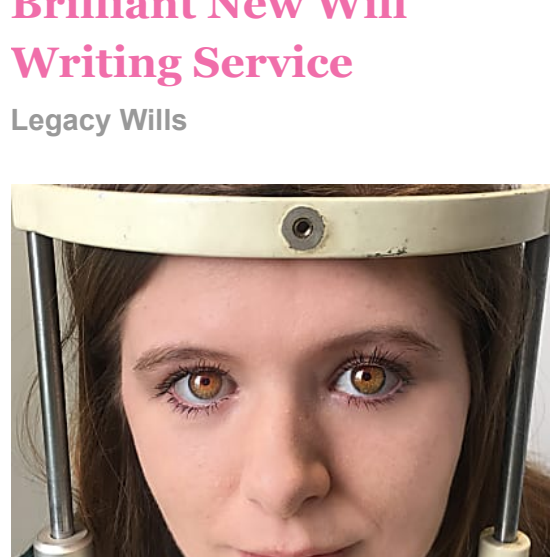
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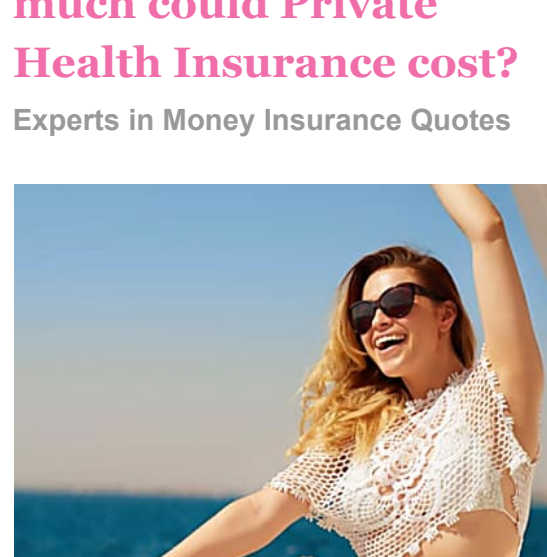
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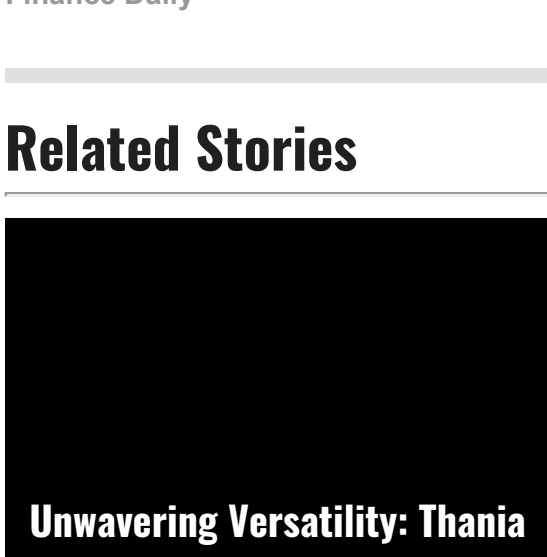
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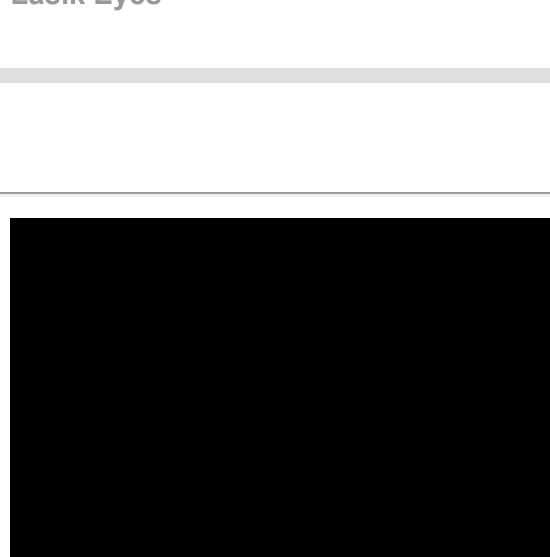
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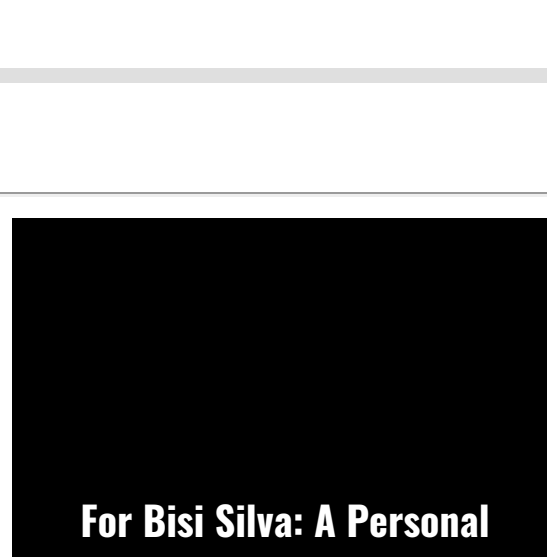
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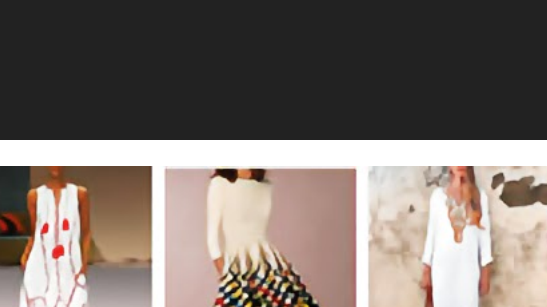
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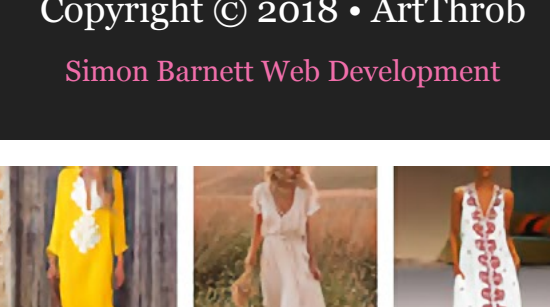
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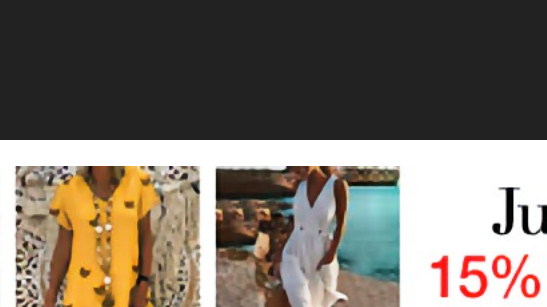
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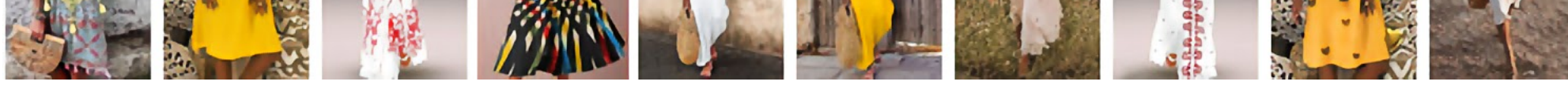


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