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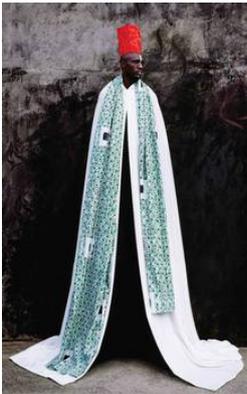
Art Sales: African riches

Rising interest in, and prices for, contemporary African art come hand in hand with an increase in fakes, says Colin Gleadell



By Colin Gleadell

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Maimouna Guerresi, Mohamed and Daughters (triptych)



Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Cemetery, 2010



Omar Victor Diop, Ikhlas Khan, Diaspora series, 2015

Anyone attending [Bonhams'](#) Bond Street reception this evening for its contemporary African art sale on Thursday might notice three paintings from the catalogue are not hanging on the walls. The works were purportedly by Congolese artists Chéri Samba, Chéri Chérin and Monsengwo Kejawamfi "Moke", and estimated to fetch between £3,000 and £10,000 each. But they have been withdrawn from the sale because they are fakes.

André Magnin – a dealer from Paris who co-curated the ground-breaking 1989 *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition that brought artists from developing nations into the western mainstream, and went on to advise Jean Pigozzi on the formation of the first large collection of contemporary African art – spotted them and managed to persuade Bonhams to look at their provenance, or ownership history. "We did that, and were not satisfied with the result, so we withdrew them from sale," says Giles Peppiatt of Bonhams.

These aren't the only fakes Magnin has spotted recently. Already this month he has removed 31 fakes from a sale in Lyon that were attributed to Congolese artists Samba, Mweke, Thambo, Moke and others, that are in his [Beauté Congo](#) exhibition which is currently wowing the public at the Fondation Cartier in Paris. Clearly there is an industry here that needs to be looked into. The making of fakes of living artists is not only frighteningly bold, but goes hand in hand with a rising market. Ten years ago, it would not have been worth faking contemporary African art.

Bonhams is the only auctioneer outside Africa that holds regular African art sales. In addition to its South African art sales, which it has been staging since 2007, it has been holding modern and contemporary African art sales since 2012. Its largest sale total for African art to date is £1.2 million. Now, with rumours spreading that Sotheby's and Christie's are contemplating following suit, it has split the modern and contemporary sections into two separate sales, and this will be its first purely contemporary sale of African art.

The Bonhams sale is just one element in an African fest that has developed within [Frieze week](#) – the non-stop merry-go-round of exhibitions, art fairs and auctions that have grown up around the Frieze Art Fair which opens today. Within the past few years, a network of nearly a dozen galleries has sprung up in London specialising in contemporary African art. In

addition to Bonhams, online auctioneer The Auction Room is staging an exhibition and sale of African art that includes successful artists from the diaspora, such as recent Turner Prize contestant Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. Ed Cross, a dealer who consults for The Auction Room, notes that buyers of African art are not just from Africa or the West, but also increasingly from China and the Far East.

And then there's [1:54](#), the art fair that focuses on art from Africa (one continent: 54 countries). Moroccan artist's daughter Touria El Glaoui launched the small fair in Somerset House two years ago with an educational talks programme that would be hard to match. Her thinking was simple: that Frieze and its satellite fairs did not properly represent African artists, so why not gate-crash the party? Six thousand visitors attended the first fair; 11,000 the next. In May, it launched in New York to coincide with the Frieze fair there.

Examples of high-profile sales and rising prices are beginning to proliferate. In 2013, Tate held an exhibition for 85-year old Sudanese artist Ibrahim El-Salahi, and acquired works for its collection. Last summer, the Vigo gallery, which will be at 1:54, sold out an exhibition of El-Salahi's work that was priced at up to £200,000.

Mariane Ibrahim, a dealer from Seattle, sold her first work by Dakar-based photographer Fabrice Monteiro to the Seattle Museum for \$2,500 two years ago. At 1:54, she will unveil Monteiro's latest, more complex work priced at \$8,000.

André Magnin is also exhibiting at 1:54 and says that prices have been rising fast for some of his artists. Photographs by Senegalese artist Omar Victor Diop, for instance, have risen by 30 or 40 per cent in one year, and will be priced between €4,000 and €9,000 depending on size and edition numbers.

In some cases, as with Ghanaian artist Ibrahim Mahama, who makes wall tapestries from rough jute coal sacks, artists are standing back from the incipient wave of speculation. When an American dealer bought a large work from him and split it up into smaller, and accumulatively much more valuable, works, the artist declared them as fakes.

All the more reason, then, for a fair like 1:54 to provide stability as well as inspiration in this rapidly expanding market place.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/luxury/art/87310/art-sales-african-riches.html>