



Touria El Glaoui – 1:54 from Pop-up to Global Fair in Two Years

By Daria Zlobina
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I met Touria El Glaoui during the opening of 1:54 art fair this October. Already familiar with Touria's tremendous success in not only establishing the fair four years ago, but also expanding to New York only two years after the inauguration, I was intrigued to meet her.

Elegant in her long silky dress with a stylish, and warm for English weather, cardigan, Touria made you feel 1:54 was not simply an art fair, but a home. The amiable, pleasant atmosphere of the Somerset House, which you don't typically find in a large-scale art fair, made me feel like a guest to a home party, rather than a stranger in a museum. There was no sense of pretentiousness.

While we were sipping hot morning coffee and treating ourselves with a warm butter croissant, Touria shared how she built the brand, or better say the platform for contemporary African artists, and what it took to get 1:54 to the level of today.

You earned your MBA in Strategic Management and have an impressive background working both in banking and IT industries. What made you decide to turn to the art one?

I grew up in Morocco in the house of an artist – my father, Hassan El Galoui – and he was the person who gave me my artistic education. For this reason, art – particularly African art – has always been a part of my life. Much later on – in fact, during my career in the IT industry – I was travelling extensively around Africa and the Middle East, and this is when I fully realised how absent African and African diaspora artists were from the international markets in Europe and the US. Having seen the incredible work being made on the continent, I decided it was time to bridge the gap and create a platform.

How did your personal background (your father is a famous artist) influence you throughout your career?

Many of my earliest memories are of my father's studio with its incredible smell of oil paint. I would spend hours watching him transform his canvases, and the life of an artist became my daily norm. Because of this, my approach to running 1:54 has always been centred on the artist and on maintaining the integrity of the work. I have also organised and co-curated a number of my father's exhibitions, and have also been working on the catalogue raisonné of his life's work, and these experiences have certainly shown me much about the realities of being an artist working on the continent versus in Europe and America.

How did the idea for 1:54 come about? What challenges did you face/still facing?

When I established 1:54 back in 2013, the biggest challenge was finding both the interest and the support. This underpinned much of my decision to launch in London. In 2011 I could already see evidence of a growing interest in African and African diaspora art – for example with the Tate launching its two-year African art programme. I will never forget the incredible backing that I received in that first year, yet every year we continue to face the financial challenge of making the fair happen. We are incredibly grateful this year to our main sponsor, Floreat, as well as to Christie's education and the Arts Council England who have both sponsored this year's FORUM.

Are you planning on expanding the fair to other locations? What's the importance of having the fair now in both London and NY?

As I said, London was the most obvious 'home' for 1:54 for a few reasons, its internationality being one. Once London was up and running, we began to toy with the idea of New York, and began to see that our galleries and collectors were keen to make the move. We first launched as a pop-up edition, in May 2014, but returned again this year to enjoy our second edition. The two fairs are actually quite different due both to the buildings they are housed in as well as the different audiences they attract, and so the importance of having both editions is to widen the diversity and outreach of the fair. It's very exciting for us when collectors are able to visit both.

Who's your favourite artist?

This is always such a difficult question! I can never choose and it would be unfair for me to do so. All the artists and galleries that we welcome to each new edition brings something unique to 1:54 and my greatest hope is always that our visitors will explore and appreciate this diversity, and appreciate each artist in their own right.

6. Tell us what is new in this year's edition of 1:54 art fair.

I am particularly excited about our incredible line up of Special Projects joining us this year. We have 10 in total, and each one is incredibly unique and will add a whole new element to the fair. Zac Ové's installation, for example, will extend the fair into the Edmond J. Safra Fountain Court for the first time ever; Ifeanyi Oganwu's lounge design – created in collaboration with Phoebe Boswell – and Barthélémy Togo's Mobile Cafeteria will introduce vibrant, interactive spaces; and we will also be extending out over the airwaves with a live three-day broadcast by a new music-radio platform, Worldwide FM. **Of course the Malick Sidibé exhibition – created in collaboration with Somerset House and MAGNIN-A – is also incredible exciting. We are thrilled to have the opportunity to showcase such an influential African photographer, and to be able to extend the exhibition past the four days of the fair, throughout Somerset House's winter season.**



1:54 Contemporary Art Fair, Somerset House Courtyard View. Zak Ove installation. Courtesy of Artsy.

Who are the artists to watch at 1:54 this year in London?

I want to draw attention to the fact that this year we are delighted to be welcoming 16 Africa-based galleries, of which 6 are from North Africa. Many of these are joining us in London for the first time, including Village Unhu from Harare, Zimbabwe; Mashrabia Gallery of Contemporary Art from Cairo, Egypt; and L'Atelier 21 from Casablanca, Morocco.

What are your future plans for the fair and beyond?

1:54 is constantly evolving, this year we welcome an incredible 40 exhibitors with over 130 artists exhibiting with us this year. Despite this, we want our ethos to stay the same: to create a platform for African and African diaspora artists in the international art market while putting the artist first. In terms of expanding further afield, we first want to ensure that our London and New York editions are as good as they can be.

<http://www.artversed.com/touria-el-glaoui-154-from-pop-up-to-global-fair-in-two-years/>