

# Artists bend rules of contemporary African art

Katy Scott, CNN

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**Photos: Behind the scenes at Lagos art fair**

**ART X Lagos – The exhibition will pay tribute to legendary photographer Johnson Donatus Aihumekeokhai Ojeikere, who is known for his work with unique hairstyles found in Nigeria.**

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(CNN)ART X Lagos is not your traditional contemporary art fair in any shape or form. In fact it takes great pleasure in bending the rules. The audience is invited to observe the artists performing their crafts and are even encouraged to add their own mark by scribbling on a gigantic coloring wall.



Tokini Peterside - the woman providing a platform for Nigerian art  
ART X Lagos founder, Tokini Peterside, is bursting with excitement at the prospect of bringing this immersive experience to Nigeria for the very first time.

"I wanted to create a platform that would really allow the artists in Nigeria and in neighboring countries around Africa to be seen and to shine," she tells CNN.

While exhibiting some of the finest artwork Africa has to offer, the three-day affair is punctuated with live art performances where musicians compose music off the cuff and artists paint, sketch and sculpt in harmony.



A visitor examines Nigerian fashion designer Maki Oh and artist Lakin Ogunbanwo's exhibition of the Nigerian expression "ehn". The term can mean many things, here they explore it's use as a question - "ehn?"

"As is probably taboo in the art fair world, these young artists are going to be performing live on stage alongside four musicians, who will also be building a piece of music live, to show that there is an intersection between art and other creative expressions," says Peterside. The idea behind ART X Lagos is to try bridge the gap that exists in Nigeria and West Africa between contemporary art and popular culture.

They draw, they paint they take photographs, and they're all under the age of 26."

While Lagos is overflowing with culture and personality, Peterside believes that the art world is inaccessible and trailing behind.

"There is a bit of a disconnect between the great activity in music, fashion and film with what happens in the art world," she says.

Through ART X Lagos she is hoping introduce both local and international visitors to the talent Lagos and the rest of Africa has to offer.

"We have a significant number of international visitors who, just by virtue of the fact that they heard about this project, decided that they would come to visit," she explains. "They've been longing to see what Lagos has to offer."

## Coloring outside the lines

One of the highlights of the fair is a seven meter long coloring wall designed by Nigerian born artist [Karo Akpokiere](#).

The wall portrays a fictitious scenario in Lagos whereby the city is divided in two to represent the widening gap between the rich and poor. Visitors are invited to treat the wall like a giant coloring book, if they dare.



Photos: Best of African artists in Inktober 2016

During the month of October Instagram is all about art.

Inktober, a trend started by American illustrator Jake Parker, sees artists make an ink based drawing for the 31 days of the month. What started out as a small idea has taken the world by storm with artists across the globe taking part, and African artists are getting in on the action.

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"You're coming into a space where you don't have to follow all the rules," Akpokiere tells CNN. "You're just faced with this almost-blank wall and are free to express yourself whichever way you want."

Growing up in Lagos, Akpokiere paid great attention to the images, patterns and influences around him. "All those things in popular culture played a huge role in my visual identity," he says. "So my interest in creating art in the public space stems from that experience I had growing up."

For Akpokiere, the importance of his art is its accessibility, visibility and interactivity. It is for this reason he believes ART X Lagos is a necessary project.

## Changing perceptions



Ade Adekola's "Colourfield Expressions"

Similarly, Nigerian photographer and conceptual artist Ade Adekola believes in art's ability and responsibility to drive dialogue.

"The job of the artist is to observe culture, to distill it into an essence and find a way of telling that story behind an object," he tells CNN.



### [7 artists you must see at Lagos Photo Festival](#)

Adekola, who is exhibiting four artworks at the fair, often uses Lagos as inspiration to carve out stories and inject them into his work.

The largest of his four works on display, "Colourfield Expressions", consists of hybrid abstract photographs that explore different aspects of Nigerian culture.

As these are massive light box pieces, Adekola makes use of programmed lights to bring different parts of the piece to life.

"I create pieces that make people reflect and re-perceive what a photograph is," he says.

"Changing people's perceptions is a big part of my work."

## Bringing art to life



Being A Corleone Date, 2012 - Nigerian artist Uche Okpa-Iroha inserts himself into scenes from Francis Ford Coppola's infamous film *The Godfather* in a series titled *The Plantation Boy*.

Live art installations at ART X Lagos performed by artists Yadichinma, Stacey Okparavero and Tunde Alara show the breadth of creativity in the region.

"Their energy and dynamism has just blown me away, as well as the fact that they're not limited by medium," explains Peterside. "They draw, they paint they take photographs, and they're all under the age of 26."

Of all the established artists showcasing their work at ART X Lagos, these young artists are Peterside's favorites.

"They are incredibly inspiring, because if they are the future of contemporary art in Nigeria, then the future is really exciting."

[ART X Lagos](#) runs from 4 Nov until 6 Nov, 2016 at The Civic Center in Lagos, Nigeria

<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/11/04/arts/art-x-lagos-international-art-fair/>