

## 1-54 CONTEMPORARY ART SHOW AS VIBRANT AND COLORFUL AS THE ANCIENT CITY OF MARRAKECH

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What better way to celebrate **Black History Month** than to visit The Continent and surround yourself with Black art. [Pigment International's](#) trip to Marrakech for the **1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair** was without compare.

Marrakech is a balm for the soul, especially for ones weighed down by a Chicago winter. It is all terra cotta walls, and colors as vivid as the spices and resins they sell - saffron, curry, amber and sandalwood - and you can hear the call to prayer five times a day. [1-54](#) was equally a feast for the eyes where color and pattern draw enthral and entice. The gallery walls were yellow and terra cotta; green and blue, and of course are perennial favorite black. And the color palette of the art on the walls was just as bold. The **La Mamounia Palace Hotel** was a palatial backdrop for the show, with its lush cactus and palm filled gardens, Bedouin inspired artwork, and two Jean-George restaurant. The hotel is celebrating its centennial this year.

[Maya-Ines Touam's](#) work set a tone for this view of the show, while also putting a new spin on what we know of the traditional still life. Lush and colorful, - the African totems, statues, fruits, foliage, elevated household items, even a [Juju Hats](#) – appeared to jump off the canvas. Such boldness!! And the works on paper are available under \$4K.

Tousam's work was shown by [This Is Not A White Cube](#) (Angola and Lisbon) which certainly lived up to that moniker, as just one of the 20 gallery spaces represented that chose saturated wall colors. Their artist Angolan, **Francisco Vidal**, who lives and works in Lisbon, was certainly a show highlight with his live portrait performance 'Still Free.' The global polyglot was raised and lives in Portugal, but his family extends to Angola, Cape Verde, and Buenos Aires; and he studied with Kara Walker at Columbia. His works are on paper and canvas, but the performances pieces on paper in [India ink](#) were a steal at \$300 each.

**193 Gallery** afforded us the third time within a year to see the work of [Thandiwe Muriu](#), who again knocked it out to the park and sold four of her nine works on display. She was also at 1-54 in New York and at Art Miami this past December, and her work starts at \$7K. [Hyacinthe Ouattara's](#) bold and brash textile sculptures literally jumped off the gallery's yellow wall and both sold.

When we spied artist [Hako Hankson](#) across the room, it wasn't his artwork that first caught our eye, it was his regal and reserved bearing and immaculate dress. The self-taught artist hails from a chiefdom in Western Cameroon and his father, a sculptor was also a dignitary, who was the keeper of all the ceremonial objects for the initiation rites of the chiefdom. Then his work though, certainly, the graffiti look puts you in a Basquiat frame of mind. But the symbols, and totems in his work, exploring his country's history, and tribal and ancestral heritage, give his work a gravitas that comes from an unbroken bond to an ancestral home.

Something Basquiat and nearly all African American artists have sought in their art. One of his works from the show is available from [L'Atelier 21](#).

There were several mentions of this iteration of the show being smaller than pre-Covid, as most things have been, but the intimacy allowed for engagement as well. Paris based **Carole Kvasnevski Gallery** became a gathering place, certainly because of the work of **Ibrahim Ballo**, but also because of its welcoming vibe. Ballo's works were as interesting from the back as they were from the front. His colorful 'weaved paintings' are inspired by the women of his community in Mali who weave cotton for clothing. The U.S. Ambassador to Morocco **Puneet Talwar** visited with the namesake owner, as did Pigment International, our favorite author **Halima Taha**, who is doing research for a book about global Black run art fairs, and **Aeon Cummings**, the founder of [Art Hedge](#). Both Taha and Cummings left Marrakech headed to the **Investec Cape Town** Art Fair in Cape Town which ends today.

Angolan **Anna Silva** repurposes the detritus of everyday life into a tabloid story using woven plastic bags and embroidery. Prices upon request from **Magnin-A Gallery**.

Just as with every great fashion show there is a showstopper, and at 1-54 there was no doubt it was **Reggie Khumalo's** mammoth piece. Set against a black wall, the work literally overflowed the canvas onto the floor, giving us both Kerry James Marshall and **Sam Gilliam** vibes. But the 6' x 9' acrylic and fabric on canvas piece titled, *When The Filly Joins The Party*, was hedonistic in its lushness, color pallet and arresting female subjects. The women in his work, done in shades of the blackest black, exist in a languid and indulgent state, as if in a very black, very floral, Alice in Wonderland Tea Party, and rather than a rabbit in a top hat there is a black horse!! Black woman self-care anyone? Underneath the piece was #idealismisnotdead. Should you not have wall space, his single portrait pieces are available from **mmARTHouse**.

See interviews and more of the art and artists from 1-54 on our [IG](#).