



## 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair – Build it and they will come!

By P. Andrews-Keenan

Congrats to **Touria El Glaoui** on the triumphant return of the **1-54** Contemporary African Art Show to New York for its 6<sup>th</sup> edition, and her continuing vision to spotlight art of the African Diaspora! The show was held at Harlem Parish, a former church on St. Nicholas Ave.

When 1-54 started in 2011 -12 says Glaoui the landscape was very different. There was no visibility for artists from the African continent and African Diaspora and African artists were not included in the global art fairs as they are now. There were big names like **Julie Mehretu** from Addis Ababa, but the majority did not have access to the art fairs that could further their careers. Others, she said, were famous in their countries but unknown outside their geographical borders.

Glaoui's art education was intrinsic. Her father, **Hassan El Glaoui**, was revered as one of Morocco's greatest artists. He studied at La Beaux-Arts and exhibited internationally. The family traveled with him, and she experienced first-hand how exposure and access can impact an artist's career. Her father later moved back to Morocco where there was no infrastructure supporting the arts. She says his first show was held under a tent with neither lighting nor air-conditioning. Yet was a milestone for the country. Glaoui held the first edition of 1-54 in Morocco in 2018 and it will return in February 2023.

"When I founded 1-54 the ecosystem of the art world was not paying attention to African artists", said Glaoui. "It was a problem of access, a problem of knowledge, a problem of the media not covering them (artists)." What she knew intuitively was that collectors are curious and want to know about the next big thing, so she brought the beauty of the continent to them. And understandably, the response was, they did not know this wealth of talent existed.

Today the shows cover art from across the Diaspora. Included in the show were galleries from Morocco, Paris, Harlem, Cote d'Ivoire, Brooklyn and London. It felt like spring; light and bright and refreshing. Just what a winter weary Chicagoan needed. There were a lot of new artists to ooh and ahh over like **Thandiwe Muri**, **taylor barnes** and **Didier Viodé**. But it was just as cool to see the masters like fiber artist **Dindga McCannon**, **Preston Sampson**, and **Renee Cox** and the work they are creating now. Cox is creating NFTs, while McCannon, mentor to **Lavett Ballard** who came up for the show, creates these amazing amorphous shaped books of fabric, cooper, cowrie shells, and other objects. They may be headed to the Smithsonian soon according to her gallery.



## pigment

While the success of art fairs are measured by sales and Glaoui can claim those, she says exposing the world to this indisputable talent remains her goal. We salute her passion, her perseverance and most of all for her love for this art that means so much to all of us. Next up is 10th edition of 1-54, London this Fall. Visit their website for highlights from Monique Long and Pauline Willis @paulineawillis.

### Highlights

#### Medium Tings/taylor barnes

**Stephanie Baptist** is gallery director of Brooklyn's Medium Tings, a roving gallery concept. She curated a dramatic booth, painted black, featuring the work of Austin based barnes. **barnes** received an MFA in Fibers from the University of North Texas, where she earned two BFAs in 2015 for both ceramics and fibers and served as a teaching assistant and fellow. Her work is done in fiber and charcoal with 'free motion' sewing that creates her female subject's hair. barnes describes why she creates in this excerpt from her poem.

I create knowing fact holds the key to truth  
I create a presence in female forms, vessels, lines, and voids  
I create with hard dust, cloth, string, and erasers  
I create with agency...

#### Thandiwe Muri,

Muriu is a photographer born and raised in Nairobi, Kenya. She is passionate about celebrating and empowering women. Her CAMO series showcases Africa's unique mix of vibrant cultures, textiles, and beauty norms.

#### Didier Viodé

The Benin native was born in the Ivory Coast. He studied at the National Institute of Art in Abidjan, leaving for France to pursue his studies when the Ivory Coast was in political turmoil. He discovered the FLUXUS movement which advocates that everything is art. The human figure – Gbèto – is at the center of his work be it painting, photography or cartoons. He explores contemporary life impacted by immigration, social inequity, global anxiety and Black Lives Matter. His George Floyd image is particularly arresting.

#### Rene Cox

The Jamaican born photographer's work tackles racism and sexism. The fact that she pissed off Rudy Giuliani with her work, *Yo Mama's Last Supper* just makes you smile. A master of reinvention her work *On Cloud Nine* is available as an NFT. Cox is her own model as shown in her work Yomammamadonna and Chile.

#### Dindga McCannon



## **pigment**

The Harlem born, Philadelphia based painter, quilter, costume designer, muralist and printmaker together with Faith Ringgold was a co-founder of Where We At, the first women's artist collective in Harlem. Her work was included in "We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1966-1986."

### **Preston Sampson**

Preston Sampson is a painter and printmaker whose work focuses primarily on the dignity, strength and power of Black men. He feels a need to show Black men in a positive and proud manner, highlighting their accomplishments and breaking stereotypes depicted in the media. "I think every piece I've ever done is protest art."