

Under African eyes

Jackie Wullschlager on an exhibition that showcases the continent's leading artists on non-western terms

Lurking behind an office door at London's October Gallery is a thin, rough, pale wooden figure, nearly two metres high, topped with a cheap doll's head that has been charred black, its hair scorched into an Afro fright-wig. A smaller figure, equally stark, upright and uncompromising, is attached, and from both of them hangs an array of metallic pots and pans. Proud, intimidating, raw, stoic, vulnerable yet refusing pathos, the pair of cattle-herders in Gérard Quénou's "Femmes Peul" bring to mind street life, shattered childhoods, broken bodies, man and beast, junk art, consumer culture, voodoo, masks, Picasso, Warhol, Giacometti...

It is politically incorrect, a daring colonial anachronism, to mention western art history when discussing African work such as the superb piece that this young Benin artist created in his studio in Porto Novo surrounded by smashed dolls and other urban debris. "I chose the dolls because they give me a very strong image," says Quénou. "When children play with them, they leave them in a state which is interesting. I also collect objects, bones, everything which I find and which talks to me within. I am a little united with everything that is suffering, refugees, people in hospital."

I hope that the British Museum, which has had "Femmes Peul" on reserve (for the bargain price of £6,500) ever since it was made in 2007, buys it fast and displays it as a compelling 21st-century introduction to its African collection.

Yet the primitivist allusions still bite, because historic African art had such a shaping influence on European modernism. I suspect that it is to confound Europe-drenched viewers like me that Chris Spring, curator of the British Museum's African galleries, has put together *Angaza Afrika*, a weighty book and smaller exhibition just

opened at the October Gallery, which attempts to showcase Africa's leading mid-career artists on non-western terms. The book, though sadly not the show, includes Congolese Chéri Samba's iconic painting of a cartoon-like Picasso with massively enlarged hands caught between his own early canvases and a thought bubble shaped as a map of a blue-green idyllic Africa inset with a tribal masquerade: a work called "As there was nothing left... Africa remained a thought". As Spring comments: "Picasso's ignorance of Africa is matched only by his debt to the continent."

Angaza Afrika - the title means "Look Around Africa" - invites us to reconsider African contemporary art through many names that are familiar from recent biennale circuits at Venice and Kassel, but here are individualised and in dialogue with each other alone, not paraded as exotic treats spicing up a western context. El Anatsui, whose shimmering jewel-like "cloth" made of bottle tops hung as a façade over a Venetian palazzo last year, has a smaller but similarly ambivalent, luscious/hard metallic drapery here. Like the folk tale, it appears to have spun gold from dross in a magical transformation, but the sharp, flattened bottle tops - evocative of the liquor that was a chief commodity exchanged for slaves - have a sinister resonance too.

Romauld Hazoumé, who won the prestigious Arnold Bode prize at last year's Documenta for "Dream", his installation of an immigrant boat made of petrol cans, a vessel of hope and death, is represented by images from another petrol-can ship of terror, "La Bouche du Roi", also referencing slavery and current illegal, lethal practices in the petroleum trade. Seeing Hazoumé, Anatsui and Quénou in juxtaposition, one perceives at once a common idiom of violent urgency and urban shock-materiality, recycling rejected but symbolic objects in what Hazoumé calls "a kind of modern-day archaeology".



cloth, the fall of a sleeve, the stillness of a dancer's pose - are rooted in African tradition but also converse with ancient Cycladic figurines, and with Arp and Brancusi in their exquisite formalism. Yinka Shonibare's "Culture Flower" is a hand-blown glass vase filled with gardenias, camellias, peonies, roses, constructed in Shonibare's trademark African-Dutch batik fabric: a bright fusion of European *memento mori* with street-market kitsch. In the large black-and-white canvas "Free", Osuwu-Ankomah paints the human figure in movement, in a pose recalling the Statue of Liberty, but composes it from *adrinka* symbols, each representing a proverb of the Akan people in Ghana.

"I'm an artist who paints for humankind and who just happens to come from Africa," says Osuwu-Ankomah in the opening lines of the catalogue - a sentiment echoed by Shonibare, who says: "I don't give a toss about Africa."

But that is too easy: how then do you justify the show at all? African, Chinese and Indian art all have distinctive features that make them increasingly attractive in a global art world. Although the quality of work in *Angaza Afrika* is mixed, as it was at the Hayward Gallery's *Afrika Remix* in 2005, the range is of vital interest in allowing western viewers to disentangle specific talents and traditions at a moment when African art is surging in status and ambition.

Signs of this are everywhere. There have been pioneering solo shows in Britain for lesser-known African artists - 85-year-old draughtsman Frédéric Bruly Bouabré at Ikon, Cameroonian conceptualist Pascale Marthine Tayou at Milton Keynes - in the past few months. In 2007, Malian photographer Malik Sidébé became the first African ever to win the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale. The portraits of his Malian contemporary Seydou Keita are a highlight of Tate Modern's newly refreshed galleries.

In *Angaza Afrika* we see how Keita's and Sidébé's elegant formality, touched with profound psychological and social insights lightly worn, has evolved in the next generation to the high-camp mannerism and more direct political statements of Samuel Fosso, in flamboyant, bejewelled, satirical photographic self-portraits such as the sunflower-grasping "The Chief: The One Who Sold Africa to the Colonial Powers".

"With this photo I wanted to say to westerners: '... it was our ruler that you came and got rid of, and in his place you set up your hierarchies, your systems'," Fosso says.

It remains hard for western audiences to see African art outside those systems. I enjoy Fosso's outrageous self-inventions in terms of a Cameroonian high-camp Cindy Sherman: Anatsui's cascading metallic cloth recalls Klimt's golden, over-laid *fin-de-siècle* portraits, and the entire European tradition of drapery painting. The October Gallery has hung it from the wall, but in Nigeria, where it was made, it would as likely be shown stretched across the floor. "I wonder whether, just maybe, the definition, the very conception of art that you have in the west is not a little limited," says Bruly Bouabré, whose delicate, naive, comic, thoughtful drawings I cannot help associating with those of Rousseau.

In a decade from now, some of the artists in *Angaza Afrika* will be household names and we will have a more subtle response to their work. Meanwhile, here is African art's inventiveness, abundance, striking metamorphoses of materials, and ability to tread a line between love of the visual, an instinct for narrative and a conceptual edge. "Whereas the Europeans have lost their God, there are still several thousand here in Africa," says Marthine Tayou. "Some have started to disappear, but the work is only just beginning."

'Angaza Afrika', October Gallery, London W1, to June 28. Tel: +44 (0)20-7242 7367. 'Angaza Afrika, African Art Now', by Chris Spring, is available from Laurence King Publishing, £25, www.laurenceking.co.uk



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"Art is all around in Africa," Spring argues: among the Cairo tent-makers and Ghanaian fantasy coffin-makers, blacksmiths and weavers, in hand-painted hairdressers' signs and photography studios. Western historical divisions, museum and media strategies don't apply: thus *Angaza Afrika* emphasises art forms that collapse hierarchies between high and low, sophisticated and folk art.

Rachid Korachi's calligraphic textiles are infused with Sufi mysticism and Abdoulaye Konaté's "Gris-gris blancs" are a series of serene abstract textiles layered with hunters' charms. Madeleine Odundo's red clay vases, anthropomorphic in their allusions - to a Kenyan woman bound in layers of

The Daily Telegraph

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Tuesday, May 6, 2008

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A continent out of the shade

AFRICAN ART

Colin Gleadell

Angaza Afrika (Swahili for "shed light on Africa") is the title of an exhibition and a new publication about contemporary African art. So is someone tipping African art as the next big thing?

The book, which illustrates 350 works by 70 artists, has been compiled by Chris Spring, curator of the African galleries at the British Museum, who began to introduce contemporary art to the museum's collection in 1995. First there was a commission from the Nigerian-born, UK-educated sculptress Sokari Douglas Camp, followed by the acquisition of drawings and ceramics by Kenyan-born Magdalene Odundo, who also lives in the UK.

The African galleries in the British Museum opened in 2001, and Spring spread his wings further afield, showing the work of the Egyptian Chant Avedissian, El Anatsui from Ghana, and the Benin artist Romuald Hazoumé.

The museum now owns about 100 works by contemporary African artists. The idea, says Spring, is to display them within the ethnographical collection to challenge the notion that African art is simply tribal masks and carvings. Hazoumé's *La Bouche du Roi*, a boat-shaped installation

assembled with empty plastic oil canisters, was considered an appropriate exhibit for Tate Modern.

Perhaps unanticipated by Spring is the way the market for these artists has grown. Odundo's pots were selling at auction last year for as much as £27,000 each. Spring says they can now command between £50,000 and £60,000.

A work by Avedissian, who paints on recycled cardboard, sold for a record £36,000 at Christie's in Dubai last year. El Anatsui's wall hangings, made with metallic bottle tops that fold and crease like cloth, were acquired for the British Museum by the Art Fund when they cost about £10,000 each. Major new works by El Anatsui and by Hazoumé can now sell for up to £250,000 each.

Most of these artists are represented at *Angaza Afrika*, which opens at the October Gallery in Holborn, London WC1, on Thursday week.

The gallery's director, Elizabeth Lalouschek, who collaborated with Spring on the exhibition, was reluctant to disclose the price of an 8ft hanging cloth by El Anatsui because there were so many collectors lining up to buy it.

Hazoumé is going to show some newly editioned photographs for which the



Cart art: **ARTicle 14**
by Romuald Hazoumé
is priced at £80,000

price has not yet been settled. But in a storeroom, because it is too big to include in the show, she has his *ARTicle 14*, a typical Benin-style trader's cart festooned with detritus gathered by schoolchildren in the UK, priced at £80,000.

Also in the show are embroidered textiles by Algerian artist Rachid Koraichi, whose work reached a new auction record of £30,000 at Christie's in Dubai last week, and Ghanaian artist Owusu-Ankomah, now based in Germany, whose symbolic paintings have risen from £3,500 to £20,000 each within only a few years. "The market has expanded generally by 10 times in the

past two or three years," says Lalouschek.

The expansion has been taking place since the groundbreaking show *Magiciens de la terre*, held in Paris in 1989. At the Venice Biennale last year, coinciding with the opening of its first African pavilion, there was a display of works from the 500-strong collection of African art owned by the Congolese businessman Sindika Dokolo.

Like Spring's book, which includes illustrations of Western superstars Chris Ofili, Julie Mehretu and Yinka Shonibare, the exhibition questioned what is African art.

In his introduction, Dokolo regretted that much was just "superficial, decorative

craftsmanship" made to "feed what the public expects". But he also noted how the global art market was opening up to African artists who explore their "Africanness" in an original and creative way.

The problem in marketing African art is that the serious artists do not want to be labelled. "I'm just an artist who happens to come from Africa," says Owusu-Ankomah. "To hell with Africa," says the French-based Sudanese artist Hassan Musa. "I don't give a toss about Africa!" says Shonibare. These are not easy sentiments for market-makers to package.

'Angaza Afrika: African Art Now' is published by Laurence King on May 19.

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African art*

See Art p61 for 'Angaza Afrika' Photography **Romuald Hazoumè**, 'Bidon Armé'

Art

The invisibility syndrome

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Red for the blood... Mohamed Omer Bushara's violent and beautiful collage, 'Untitled', 2007

AFRICA

Ossian Ward says 'Angaza' as he looks at the contrasting fortunes of African artists and why many remain underappreciated

How African is African art? A similar argument (How black are you?) raged in the late 1980s over the Rasta livery – the red, gold and green of the Ethiopian flag – when it became a popular accessory among African Americans, Afro-Caribbeans and even a few dreadlocked white folk, to signify a similarly confused range of messages from African pride through to vague musical appreciation of reggae. The colours were emblazoned on T-shirts, beaded trinkets and Africa-shaped leather pendants, supposedly in a show of African solidarity and of protest against South African gold, but just how 'conscious' were the wearers of their meaning? (Red for the blood of the martyrs, gold for the sun and green for the land, in case you're interested). Was this really an Afrocentric movement or just a dedicated following of fashion?

The same question could be asked today, when faced with an art world currently in thrall to all things African. Some might say it's high time, because

even a century after explorers and cartographers nicknamed Africa 'the dark continent', western curators and collectors rarely set foot there. Perhaps the clearest response comes from the artists themselves, who are being celebrated in a new book 'Angaza Afrika', launched this week with an accompanying show in Bloomsbury.

'I don't give a toss about Africa'; 'To hell with African art' and 'I'm an artist who paints for humankind who just happens to come from Africa', are just some of the forthright opinions gathered by the book's author, Chris Spring, who has been to Tunisia, Egypt, Kenya, Mozambique, Senegal and many other countries in his capacity as the British Museum's curator of African art. 'Angaza' means to 'shed light' or 'look around' in Swahili and Spring has spread his search to include a good number of artists who work outside their native Africa, in the art capitals of the western world. Many of these outsiders, who have escaped what Ghanaian artist El Anatsui calls 'the invisibility syndrome' of those who remain, might well feel aggrieved to be lumped into the unformed mass of African art when they've been steadily chipping away at wider contemporary art acceptance for years.

'I'm not rejecting my background,' says Sudanese artist Mohamed Bushara, who's been based in Oxford

since 1999, 'but I'm just an artist. People might be expecting a certain kind of tribal or traditional art from Africa but nobody would group together work by English artists in the same way.' Bushara's colourful abstraction differs wildly from the junk-metal aesthetic of London-based Sokari Douglas Camp, but in the book she too admits to feeling somehow 'outside' the cultural heritage of both Britain and Nigeria.

Other artists have held their ground and waited for the international scene to find them. 'Would I ever leave Africa for

The world's foremost collector of Africa's art has not been there

Europe? No, absolutely not,' is photographer Samuel Fosso's blunt response to the identity crisis facing many expatriates: 'When I look in the mirror I am not looking to find out if what I see is an Ibo, a central African or even a black American. The only thing I can see is Samuel Fosso, who is trying to make himself as handsome as possible before taking a self-portrait.' Fosso had to wait 20 years for his discovery in the West; another photographer Malick Sidibé's first real honours were awards for lifetime achievement in 2003 and

2007, while the self-taught portrait photographer Seydou Keita died eight years before his work reached its current dizzy heights at Tate Modern.

However, even hard-won success can come at a price. Keita's first New York show (aged 76) featured his pocket-sized prints of mid-century Malian natives blown up to giant, market-friendly size, and control over his imagery has been fraught ever since. The world's foremost collector of African art, the Swiss buyer Jean Pigozzi, whose holdings are now hanging at the Tate, once claimed ownership over Keita, despite never having visited the continent himself.

As Spring's book suggests, the work being made in Africa is as diverse as the socio-cultural mix therein, and that's what makes it such an enthralling ride. Africanicity is not a blanket term or a coat to be worn and taken off – by its very nature, it's sprawling, unknowable and unstoppably energetic. It's not just red, black and green, like the colours of the Pan-African flag, but comprises all kinds of light and, inevitably, some darker shades.

'Angaza Afrika: African Art Now' by Chris Spring is published by Laurence King on Monday and 12 of the artists will be shown at The October Gallery (see Soho to Hampstead). Also, see page 18 for African photos at Tate Modern.

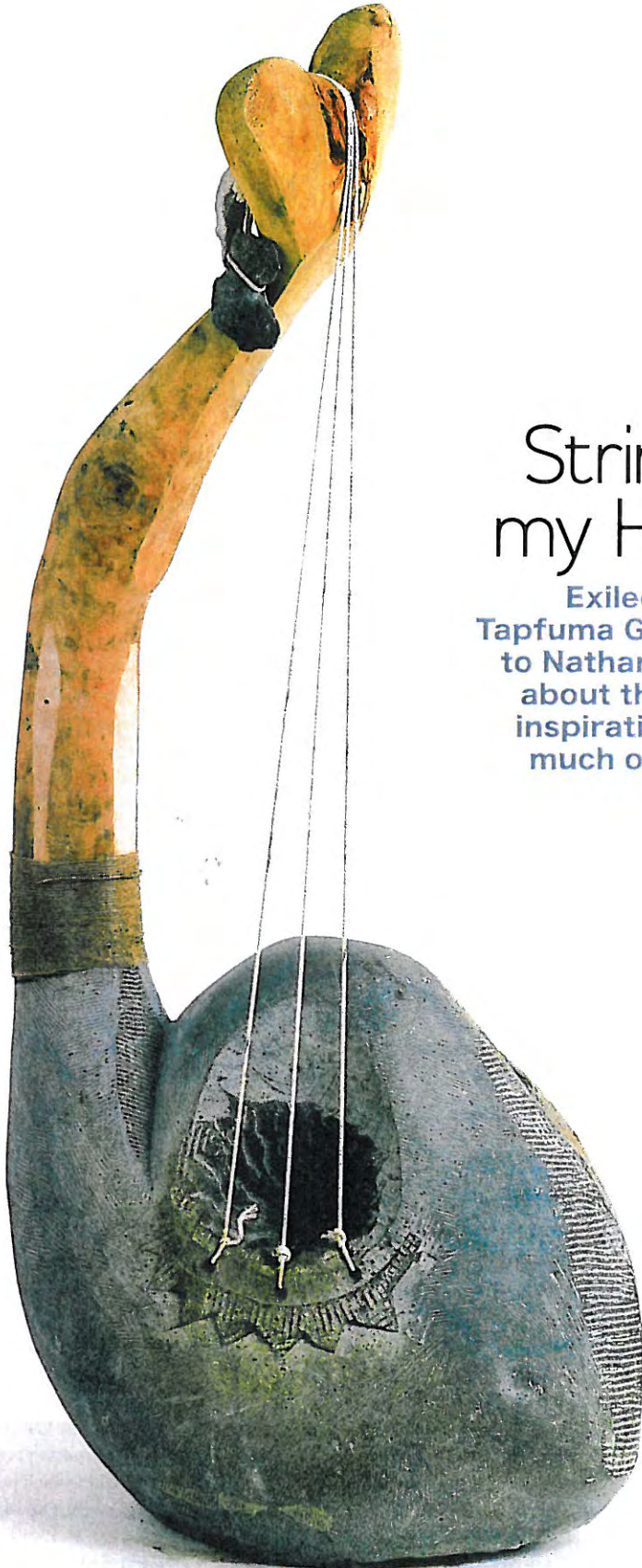
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String of my Heart

Exiled sculptor Tapfuma Gutsa talks to Nathaniel Handy about the musical inspiration behind much of his work

Tapfuma Gutsa is one of the foremost Zimbabwean sculptors working today. Born in Harare in 1956, he won a scholarship to study sculpture in London from 1982-85. On returning to Zimbabwe he began supporting younger artists, but was forced into exile by the instability of his homeland.

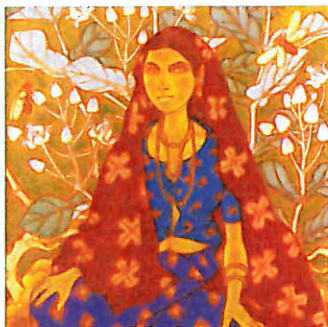
He is known for sculpting using metal, string and animal parts such as horns and porcupine quills, as well as wood and stone. His works often evoke traditional African musical instruments, such as *String of my Heart* (1989, stone, wood and string). "I listen to Zimbabwean *mbira* music from Mbira dze Nharira, Stella Chiweshe and Albert Chimedza. I also have great respect for the size and concept of Jimi Hendrix's music and the voice of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan," Gutsa explains. "Silence and sound complement one another. Many of my early string instruments were silent substantiations of things unsaid or unsayable." Gutsa is deeply concerned by the negative impact of current events on Zimbabwe's artists. "There is a rise in propagandist art," he says, "I see this as a trap of fashion and short-sighted opportunism. Zimbabwean sculptors have some of the best stone resources in the world and among them are thinking people who may soon be revealed. In these artists lies the future." ●

Tapfuma Gutsa's work forms part of the *Angaza Afrika: Africa Art Now* exhibition at the October Gallery in London from May 15 to June 28
www.octobergallery.co.uk
www.tapfumagutsa.com

GALLERIES

16. GALLERIES JUNE 08

INDIA AT THE TOP



A Ramachandran 'Portrait of Komala' (detail)
Grosvenor Gallery

Badri Narayan 'King and Queen' 2007
Ashni Art Gallery

El Anatsui 'Metal Cloth' 2008
October Gallery

Andrew Cooper 'Twelve Apostles' from 'Art of Africa', an exhibition of African themed art, photography & sculpture showcasing some of South Africa's most highly regarded artists at Smithfield Gallery, London EC1

While Bill Jackson's article (p17) explores the extraordinary explosion of interest in Chinese contemporary art among Western collectors over the last 5 years or so, the boom in modern and contemporary Indian art over the same period is barely any less remarkable, particularly given that it has largely been fuelled by Indian collectors both in this country as well as on the sub-continent itself. Thus London has seen a huge growth in recent years in specialist Indian galleries and is very likely to see more soon.

One of the most recent arrivals is **Ashni Art Gallery**, their position, in Blenheim Street, just round the corner from both Bonhams and Sotheby's, saying everything about the gallery's scope and ambition. They are dealing in both modern (viz 20th Century) and contemporary art, though with the best of the former e.g. Rasa Hussain and Prabha now becoming increasingly rare and expensive, contemporary artists such as Shibu Natesan and Gr. Iranna may well represent the more dynamic future. This, certainly, is the view taken by the New Delhi gallery Vadhera who, a year or so back, formed a partnership with the **Grosvenor Gallery** in St James's. Grosvenor Vadhera, as it is sometimes also known, still deals in big modern names like F.N. Souza, but they too are focusing increasingly on the contemporary market, this month's show by A. Ramachandran a good example of a respected contemporary of the older generation. Both these galleries' focus is very much on North Indian art and artists however, a fact which gives the **Noble Sage**, based in North London for several years now, something of a unique position in the London/Indian scene. Run by extremely lively and well-informed British born Sri Lankan, Jana Manuelpillai, the emphasis here is especially on Southern Indian, and also on the often more affordable.

Nicholas Usherwood

Over the last decade the radically exploratory, cliché-exploding energy of many artists with African backgrounds has asserted itself internationally. It is a phenomenon which makes the exhibition of a dozen contemporary artists, featured in the **October Gallery's** June show 'Angaza Afrika' of really significant interest. Drawn from across Africa and the diaspora, they cover, between them, a wide, highly representative range of extremely diverse achievement. A new book, of the same title, by Chris Spring (Laurence King £25) is being launched to accompany the show which features all these artists and fifty more. Of particular interest are the works of Ghanaian/Nigerian artist El Anatsui whose monumental, optically fluctuating tinfoil cloths ('subverting' he says, 'the stereotype of metal as a stiff, rigid medium and showing it rather as a soft, pliable, almost sensuous material') caused a real stir at the 2007 Venice Biennale. Equally impressive is Romuald Hazoumé from Benin, whose epic, *Bouche du Roi*, shown at The British Museum last year, was based on 304 petrol can 'masks' eerily laid out to resemble the appallingly inhumane cargo of a slave ship. Other artists to note are Algerian-born Rachid Koraïchi, who embroiders silk banners with partly Sufi-inspired calligraphy and North African symbols to highly original effect, Julien Sinzogan whose spectacularly intricate coloured ink drawings imagine the triumphant subversive return of the spirits of transported slaves on galleons to their Yoruba roots and Zimbabwean-born, Tapfuma Gutsha's stone, wood and horn sculptures representing both beleaguered humanity and exquisitely poised abstract forms poignantly affirm the human spirit. So many works here powerfully bear out Camus' claim that 'the individuality of the artist and consideration of the good of mankind cannot be separated . . . We must serve simultaneously beauty and sadness.'

Philip Vann

JUNE 2008

TREASURES



Top: Mohamed Omer Bushara, *Untitled* (detail), 2007, Collage.

Left: El Anatsui, *Flag for New World Power* (detail), 2004, Aluminium and copper wire.

Below: Jorge Dias, *Habitation to the Zero*, (detail), 2005, Wire insects, shallow basket and painting.

All art from *Angaza Afrika: African Art Now* by Chris Spring. Published by Laurence King on 19 May and distributed in the UK via Thames & Hudson (£25 paperback, 350 colour illustrations, 336 pp ISBN 13: 978-1-85669-548-0).



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Jorge Dias

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METRO

Monday, May 19, 2008

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ART: In Swahili, the word *angaza* means 'to shed light on'. No prizes for guessing, then, what new exhibition *Angaza Afrika* hopes to do. Twelve artists will lead viewers through the artistic practices and diasporas of the continent, with pieces spanning Rachid Koraïchi's Sufi-inspired black-and-white appliqué work to thought-provoking photography by award-winning Benin artist Romuald Hazoumé. The exhibition launches a book of the same name.

Until Jun 28, The October Gallery, 24 Old Gloucester Street WC1, Tue to Sat 12.30pm to 5.30pm, free. Tel: 020 7242 7367. Tube: Russell Square/Holborn

Klimt of the rubbish bin

May 24th 2008
From Economist.com

African artists who craft beauty from what's left behind

AFRICAN contemporary art rarely comes up for sale at the big auction houses. Sotheby's achieved some success in 1999 when it sold a few treasures from Jean Pigozzi, who holds the world's biggest private African contemporary-art collection. But the event was staged as a benefit for UNICEF and was heavily underwritten; many did not see it as a real auction.

In 2000 Bonhams tried something more conventional, again in London, with a sale of modern and contemporary art, mostly from Nigeria. The estimates were low, yet many pieces did not sell. Those that did went for the asking price or less.



October Gallery

Since then, apart from Bonhams's recent (and phenomenally successful) South African sales, sub-Saharan African artists have had only the odd work in public auction. George Lilanga, a Tanzanian painter of magical figures in cheery acrylic, had a small picture in the second half of Christie's Tettamanti sale in Milan a year ago. On the whole, though, they are as rare as hen's teeth, which is a shame because some wonderfully vibrant and evocative work is being created in Africa.

For those who do not have Mr Pigozzi's resources (he is heir to the Simca motor fortune, which allows him his own private curator, André Magnin), a handful of specialist curators in Europe and America have begun regularly putting on exhibits in public and private galleries. Chris Spring, himself an artist and the energetic curator of the Sainsbury African galleries at the British Museum, has gathered together what he knows in "Angaza Afrika" (KiSwahili for "shed light on Africa"), a book highlighting the work of 60 of the continent's most thoughtful and creative artists, to coincide with a new show at the October Gallery.

Mr Spring explores the work of the tentmakers of Cairo, the vibrantly coloured fantasy coffins of Teshie, near Accra in Ghana, the subversive sign-painters and *kanga* weavers of eastern Africa, the studio photographers of Mali and Mozambique who manage to be both formal and cosy at the same time, as well as potters, blacksmiths and metalworkers from across Africa.

Among the most inventive are those who make their art out of the continent's detritus. The accumulation of rubbish has considerable artistic resonance in Africa—beginning with the narrative of the “empty” continent that was filled up with colonial mores and Christian beliefs, with all the sub-stories of rampant consumerism, environmental degradation, religious fundamentalism, costly food imports, new diseases, outdated medicines and unrecyclable waste.

“Junk keeps following me like a pilot fish, because I won't let it rest,” says Dilomprizulike, a Nigerian artist known as “the junkman from Africa” who lives with his family in the Junkyard, an isolated compound on the fringe of one of Lagos's less lovely beaches. Trained in fine art at the University of Nigeria, Dilomprizulike is increasingly preoccupied with the explosive growth of African cities. He scours the city for junk to bring home: driftwood, tyres, cast-off clothing. Mr Spring says he sees his studio as “a kind of artistic hospital”, where he coaxes all manner of figures out of bruised and battered outcasts.

Gerard Quenam is a 30-year-old from Benin who seeks out dolls on scrapheaps and scorches them black before inserting them in spooky works like “Chevalier” (pictured above). El Anatsui is a Ghanaian artist based in Nigeria who brought his rubbish to “Africa Remix”, a popular exhibition that travelled from Dusseldorf to London, Paris, Tokyo and Stockholm between 2004 and 2007.

Mr Anatsui uses colourful aluminium bottle tops from imported spirits, flattened out and stitched together, to create cloths of gold. Imported liquor was one of the staples of the slave trade, and many a man grew rich on it. The cloths bring to mind the draping kente cloths of Mr Anatsui's home country. It also makes you think of Klimt, and his dazzling gold-flecked portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer that is in the Neue Gallerie in New York.

Mr Anatsui's work has become quite sought after since “Africa Remix”. Mr Spring persuaded the British Museum to buy two pieces, one of which hangs in the director's office. Last year, another huge piece was draped across the front of Palazzo Fortuny at the Venice Biennale. A third smaller piece on show next to Mr Quenam's “Chevalier” at London's October Gallery, has been fought over by several collectors who have been on a waiting list for Mr Anatsui's work for over a year. Even the impressive list price, \$300,000, did not deter them. Rubbish to riches indeed.

“Angaza Afrika” is at the October Gallery in London until June 30th. “Angaza Afrika: African Art Now” by Chris Spring is published by Laurence King and distributed by Thames & Hudson; 336 pages; £25

African Artists Lure Collectors, Fail to Make Auction (Update1)

By Scott Reyburn



May 23 (Bloomberg) -- Africa is the best-kept secret in the contemporary-art market, dealers say.

Works by the artists [El Anatsui](#) and Romuald Hazoume have sold to U.S. and European museums and private collectors for as much as \$450,000 at the October Gallery, London, and the Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. At auction,

neither artist has fetched more than \$10,000, according to Artnet, which tracks salesroom results.

"African art is still mainly a gallery-based market," said Elisabeth Lalouschek, artistic director of the October Gallery. "It has yet to become part of the international auction scene."

Works by a dozen of the continent's leading contemporary artists are on show at the gallery to coincide with publication of "Angaza Afrika: African Art Now," by Chris Spring, curator of the British Museum's African galleries.

El Anatsui, a Ghanaian sculptor whose hangings made out of thousands of flattened metal bottle tops were lauded by critics at last year's Venice Biennale, is represented by a new 12 foot-wide "cloth" -- as his works are known -- reserved at \$300,000, Lalouschek said.

The [Smithsonian Institution](#), Washington, and the [Pompidou Center](#), Paris, are among the museums that have bought El Anatsui cloths, according to Spring.

"I have quite a long waiting list of buyers," Lalouschek said. "I get e-mailed requests every day."

Three photographs of motorbike-riding gas-smugglers, issued in an edition of six, by Benin-based Hazoume, are priced at 3,000 pounds (\$5,900) each. In 2006, the British Museum paid the October Gallery 100,000 pounds for Hazoume's slave ship installation, "La Bouche du Roi," made using more than 300 black plastic gas cans, according to an annual report published in 2007 by the Art Fund.

'Big Stuff

"It's big stuff for the right names," said Giles Peppiatt, director of African art at the London-based auction house Bonhams. "But trying to develop the auction market for

African contemporary art is hard work." Gallery prices don't automatically translate into high prices at auction, he said.

"There isn't a large enough stable of good artists, and there just isn't enough money in Africa at the moment," he said.

Africa has just four billionaires, according to Forbes Magazine's 2008 Rich List.

In January, the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York's Chelsea held a sell-out show of 13 bottle-top cloths by El Anatsui, priced at \$125,000 to \$450,000, said Claude Simard, co-owner of the gallery.

"Nobody's putting major works by El Anatsui up for auction," Simard said. "It's not like the market for Indian or Chinese art. Collectors buy these works because they love them, not as an investment."

Jumbo Work

El Anatsui will produce a new cloth for Shainman, measuring up to 30 foot wide, that will be exhibited at the Art Basel fair, previewing on June 3, he said.

"The market will develop eventually," [Jean Pigozzi](#), the world's leading collector of African contemporary art, said in a telephone interview. "But it really has to come from local collectors, or if rich African Americans start to buy this material, it could also become big."

Pigozzi, who lives in Switzerland, said he has amassed more than 10,000 works of African contemporary art over 20 years.

"Africa is the last place the auction houses haven't got their teeth into," said the London-based dealer John Martin, director of the Gulf Art Fair, in a telephone interview. "The galleries don't want to release works by the top internationally established names to the salerooms, and the people who buy these works don't need to be reassured by high auction prices."

([Scott Reyburn](#) writes about the art market for Bloomberg News. Any opinions expressed are his own.)

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LONDON'S QUALITY NEWSPAPER

Evening Standard

Africa's timely brush with tradition

Wednesday 4 June 2008

EXHIBITION

Angaza Africa: African Art Now

October Gallery, W1

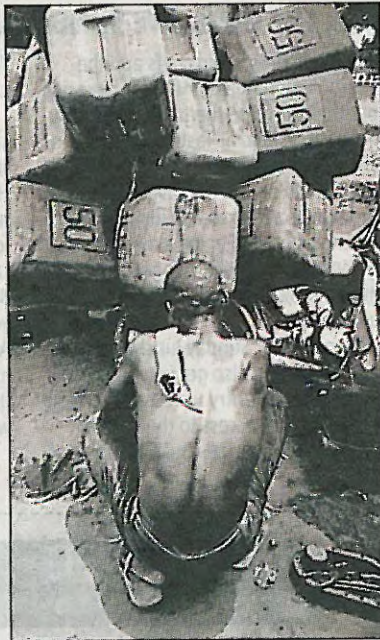
★★★★★

SUE STEWARD

ANGAZA Africa coincides with the launch of Channel 4's latest "4" logo, a 50-foot construction by the Ghanaian artist El Anatsui, made from recycled printers' plates. His best-known work is part of a group show of African artists, which makes a timely intrusion into the media frenzy over Indian and Chinese artists.

This elegant, elegiac showcase reveals how African artists come to conceptualism from different values and references, often involving traditional methods and materials which are categorised as "craft" rather than mainstream art. El Anatsui presents a trademark hanging, constructed from thousands of shimmering bottle-tops stapled together into sheets reminiscent of Ghanaian Kente cloth and even Gustave Klimt's mosaics of colour.

The Benin artist, Romuald Hazoumé exploits the symbolic



Oil meets poverty: Romuald Hazoumé's *La Panne*, with its bloated petrol cans

potential of plastic petrol cans. Photographs of bloated cans (heated to expand capacity) tied to motor bikes like balloons document their use in Nigeria to transport gasoline illegally over the border — a comment on the poverty surrounding the

international oil industry. Earlier works converted single cans into painted masks which connect back to the traditional Benin sculptures which influenced French Cubists.

An appliqué hanging, *Gris-Gris blancs*, by the Malian Abdoulaye Konaté, plays with Western sensibilities. A soft cream seersucker sheet, draped with small, stuffed charms (*gris-gris*) inspired by the fetish objects carried by hunter-healers, is transformed into a tasteful, Western decoration fit for any loft apartment while also signifying Mali's belief system.

Following clear lines through Western abstraction, South Africa's Karel Nel arranges huge woody leaves of *Coco de Mer* palm in abstract designs, the crude staples anchoring the leaves lending a pleasing vernacular rawness.

This stimulating exhibition coincides with the publication of *Angaza Africa, African Art Now* by Chris Spring (Thames & Hudson), an excellent companion to this complex work which waits in the wings to explode onto the market.

■ Until 28 June (020 7242 7367, www.octobergallery.co.uk).