artnet news

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See the Top 10 Artists at 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair

By Rain Embuscado

Frances Goodman, *Randela 100/2* (2016). Courtesy of Rain Embuscado.

1:54 New York is back for a second swing at Pioneer Works, and it packs a satisfying punch.

A brisk sweep takes you across the length of the floor and back again in good time, with the promise of works by 60 artists from across the continent, including South Africa's William Kentridge, Frances Goodman, and Billie Zangewa. Unsurprisingly, Africa's second-richest country, per capita, is heavily represented in this year's edition.

However, this year may mark the bursting point of the contemporary African art fair, as 1:54 can only expand as much as Pioneer Works' space permits. But as artnet News' Ben Davis wrote last year, the scale makes savoring the art easy, and closer inspection tells us that the standouts this year belong to a little-discussed wave of artists.

Issues tied to Africa and related diasporic traumas, while treading on predictable territory, remain central to the fair's loose curatorial theme. But in defense of certain artists, like Beatrice Wanjiku, Omar Ba, and Phoebe Boswell, the works successfully outmaneuver these tropes in ways that demote their experiences of Africa as backdrops (or secondary subtexts) that hit hard. Here, identity plays assistant to imagination.

Notably, a handful of the artists at 1:54, like Wanjiku and aida Muluneh, appeared in a 2015 summer exhibition hosted by Richard Taittinger's space in the Lower East Side. The gallery, which joins the fair for the first time this year, offers a selection of works by Goodman.

Amidst panel discussions and artist talks this weekend, the space maintains its regular Second Sundays programming. Kenya (Robinson) and Doreen Garner will be hosting their hilarious and trenchant Clocktower Radio show, #trashDAY. Upstairs, "Muse: Photographs by Mickalene Thomas" are on view, and downstairs, there will be music by Ghana Seprewa and the Mandingo Ambassadors.

See artnet News' top picks from the fair below.

1. **Beatrice Wanjiku at ARTLabAfrica**

Beatrice Wanjiku, *Untitled* (2016 at ARTLabAfrica. Courtesy of 1:54.

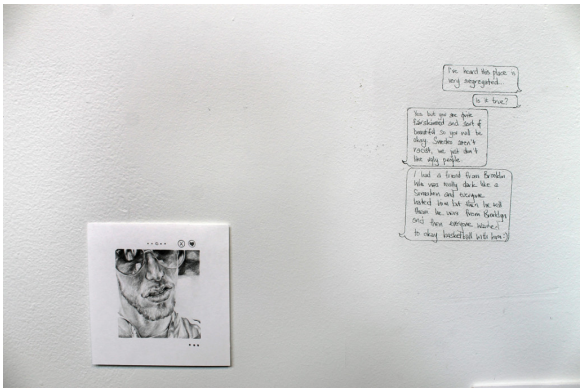
2. **Omar Ba at Galerie Anne de Villepoix**

Omar Ba, *Guantanamo* (2016) at Galerie Anne de Villepoix. Courtesy of Rain Embuscado.

3. Billie Zangewa at AFRONOVA Gallery

Billie Zangewa, *We Mourn Our Loss* (2016) at AFRONOVA Gallery. Courtesy of Rain Embuscado.

4. Phoebe Boswell at TAFETA + Partners



Phoebe Boswell, *Stranger in the Village* (2015) at TAFETA + Partners. Courtesy of Rain Embuscado.

5. Aida Muluneh at David Krut Projects

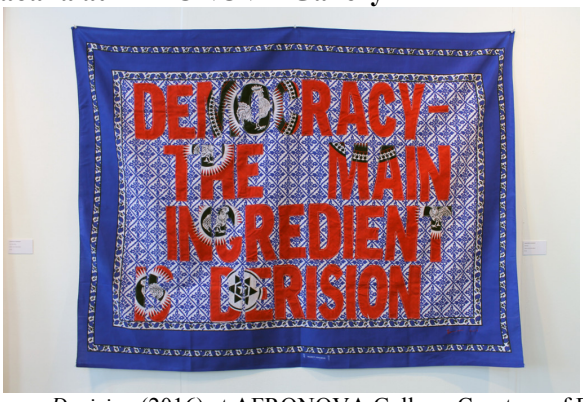
Aida Muluneh, *Dinkenesh Part One* (2016) at David Krut Projects. Courtesy of 1:54.

6. **Zohra Opoku at Mariane Ibrahim Gallery**

Zohra Opoku at Mariane Ibrahim Gallery. Courtesy of Rain Embuscado.

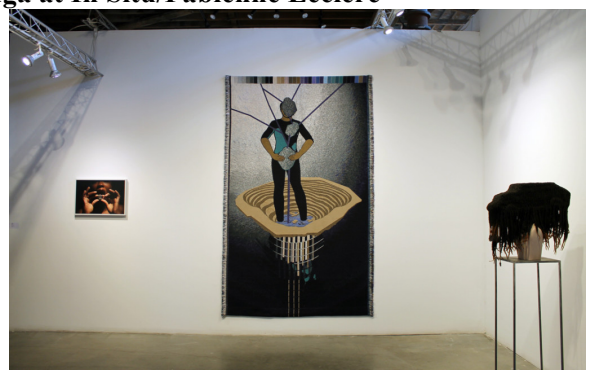
7. **Ibrahim Mahama at A Pallazzo Gallery**

8. Lawrence Lemaoana at AFRONOVA Gallery



Lawrence Lemaoana, *Derision* (2016) at AFRONOVA Gallery. Courtesy of Rain Embuscado.

9. Otobong Nkanga at In Situ/Fabienne Leclerc



Center: Otobong Nkanga, *Infinite Field* (2015) at In Situ Fabienne Leclerc. Courtesy of Rain Embuscado.

10. Yashua Klos at Galerie Anne De Villepoix

1:543 Contemporary African Art Fair 2016 New York Edition runs from May 5 through May 8.