

Strengthening the African art ecosystem - Q&A with Cape Town Art Fair director, Laura Vincenti

 By [Ruth Cooper](#)

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The eighth instalment of the Investec Cape Town Art Fair starts at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) tomorrow and runs until Sunday, 16 February. Showcasing over 400 artists, 93 galleries, informative talks, art documentaries and much more the fair is one of the largest and leading events on the African art calendar.

We got in touch with Art Fair director Laura Vincenti to find out what goes into putting on an event of this scale, cultivating a pan-African dialogue and art trends for the year ahead.



Laura Vincenti

Which would be your “must-see exhibition or artist” at ICTAF?

With over 103 exhibitors and over 400 artists participating it is impossible to single out one exhibition or artist but here are a few artists, galleries and art movements that visitors to the Fair can experience for the first time, such as artists, Mario Merz and Michelangelo Pistoletto of the Arte Povera movement, founded by Giorgio Persano. The American artists; Andy Robert, Amelia Etlinger and Riley Holloway. Taking cognisance of our overburdened planet a host of artists exhibiting at the Investec Cape Town Art Fair 2020, are using the detritus of human life as inspiration or raw material for their work. These artists include, Portuguese artist Joana Vasconcelos and Nigerian artist Nnenna Okore.



Michelangelo Pistoletto

■ ***Is there an overarching theme for the fair?***

No, there isn't an overarching theme for the fair other than we only showcase contemporary art. Two sections within Investec Cape Town Art Fair – *SOLO* and *TOMORROWS/TODAY* – do work to specific themes and/or guiding principles.

SOLO, is a curated section featuring works by a number of emerging and established artists from around the world, offering a more in-depth view of varied artistic practices from a wide cross section of contexts – in the form of curated solo presentations.



Sungi Mengeya

In its third iteration, *SOLO* will focus on the notion of space and how it presents itself thematically in artworks; through an amalgamation of mediums and concepts that tie into each other, with themes ranging from the representation of the black body and its movement to issues of exile, migration, mythologies and leisure. Through this focus, *SOLO* aims to encourage fair audiences to take note of the power relations that help to shape the boundaries of spaces and what is possible within them and who may enter, with which identities, discourses and interests.

TOMORROWS/TODAY is structured as a curated exhibition, with a prestigious award attached and is a portal to new visions in the visual arts. The aim of *TOMORROWS/TODAY* has, from its inception, also been to shine a light on emerging and under-represented and under-recognised artists, set to be tomorrow's leading names. It is open to those working on and beyond the African continent and as the title implies, the ongoing theme is one of transformation, and experimentation showcasing unorthodox art forms addressing current social and political issues.



Isabelle Grobler

■ ***What are some of the challenges of putting on an event of this scale?***

Our key challenge is to continually grow the fair to an international standard and to ensure Investec Cape Town Art Fair is one of the biggest appointments on the international art fair calendar. To ensure that the Fair is the largest and leading fair on the continent means to create an inherently consistent space that caters for galleries, artists, collectors and visitors. My very first challenge was looking at the space from different perspectives whilst simultaneously trying to meet priorities and needs that sometimes deviate from each other.

We are a part of quite a prolific art ecosystem, so to develop and strengthen the collaboration between local institutions, museums and cultural associations to make Cape Town 'the place to be' in February each year has been a very significant part of my challenges. We constantly need to be innovative and intriguing each and every year to attract more exhibitors and collectors from around the world. The key is passion.



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■ ***It must be gratifying to play a role in the reason that Cape Town was recently named Africa's art capital, what are your thoughts on this?***

Yes we are extremely excited to see the report results.

After almost a decade of groundwork, our consistent drive to bring together galleries and artists from Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, United Kingdom, Europe, Middle East and the USA is yielding remarkable results. A third of our exhibitors due to showcase at Investec Cape Town Art Fair 2020 will be new to the event, and close to 40% from the rest of the world.

The city of Cape Town is a key inspiration for Investec Cape Town Art Fair. It supplies a world-class setting that provides a space for internationally-renowned names in contemporary art to work and be alongside the most exciting emerging artists

from across the African continent, something you cannot find at other fairs.

The list of great artists due to land in Cape Town shortly is staggering, reflecting on the significance of the moment. With the proliferation of art fairs in the world, Investec Cape Town Art Fair is the only international fair on the continent. The Investec Cape Town Art Fair stands as a medium for creating a dialogue between the northern and southern hemisphere - it is fair to say that the 2020 edition of the Investec Cape Town Art Fair presents itself as a unique and special opportunity to experience an international platform for artists from all over the world.



Fathi Hassan



Fathi Hassan

The Investec Cape Town Art Fair 2020 will happen on what can be described as a veritable world stage, showcasing talent, dialogue and curated display. Expect to find the works of veteran Egyptian Fathi Hassan care of Lawrie Shabibi Gallery in Dubai; Shirin Neshat care of Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg, Ghanaian painter Gideon Appiah care of Afikaris Gallery of Paris, Onyis Martin care of Circle Art Gallery in Nairobi, Luc Ming Yan care of Apalazzo Gallery in Brescia, Brazilian Beto Shwafaty care of Prometeo Gallery in Milan and local performer and sculptor Athi-Patra Ruga care of WHATIFTHEWORLD in Cape Town.

This showing of some of the foremost art galleries in the world illustrates Cape Town's ability to serve as a destination for international galleries seeking access to a new market of enthusiastic collectors, and insight into the region's art scene, currently one of the fastest growing in the world. Investec Cape Town Art Fair offers an immersive and intimate experience of an entirely unique art capital, with plenty to offer international galleries and collectors to make the trip worthwhile.

The Investec Cape Town Art Fair team promotes the city of Cape Town when we travel abroad, functioning as unofficial ambassadors. The fair is produced by Fiera Milano Exhibitions Africa (FMEA) of Fiera Milano S.p.A, a global leader in exhibition management and the organisers of Miart Art Fair and they constantly promote the fair. International people know the city primarily as a tourist destination. But now its relevance as a cultural destination is growing. The connection between the two is very important.

■ ***How does local art still need to be supported?***

More art residencies equal accessibility. Art still needs to be made widely accessible in the public domain and not consumed only in private spaces this to ensure that we can invite a wide participation of individuals and initiatives in order to create new forms of interaction and ecosystems. We need to bridge the divide between the art and cultural sectors as well. But even more so, government also needs to take a concerted effort to channel funds into the arts.

■ ***What trends in the arts do you foresee developing in 2020?***

Locally, we can see our youth becoming more experimental in their attempts to try and move away from the West's formal art making processes and moving towards making art centred on Africa's values and tastes. It's exciting to see African artists in Africa producing African-centred content for Africans and not needing external validation.

Internationally, we see people dabbling in radical and new artistic practises as well. Artists worldwide are looking to move away from the reality of art patronage. We are seeing the decolonisation of art history departments more and more, artists swinging to abstraction and moving to the digital realm and galleries are now forced to enhance their presence online.

ABOUT RUTH COOPER

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