

Gerald Machona, *Ndiri Afronaut* ('I am an Afronaut'), 2012. Decommissioned zimbabwean dollar, foam padding, fabric, wood, perspex, rubber, plastic tubing, nylon thread and gold leaf. At Frieze London, 2014. Courtesy of Goodman Gallery.





London Art Week

Siobhan Keam interrogates the Frieze and 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fairs

Thanks to the prominence and size of Frieze Art Fair taking place from the 15th to 18th October, the week has officially become London Art Week. The art scene players take full advantage of the masses of art-lovers and collectors who descend on Regent's Park, organising concurrent events to tempt these crowds into expanding their art viewing beyond Frieze. One such event is 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair, now in its second year.

Being my first time in London during Art Week, I was admittedly more excited about attending Frieze. After all, it is one of the largest art fairs in the world, with people coming from all over to view some of the globe's top contemporary art. However, by the end of the week, I found that 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair had made a bigger impression.

Housed in two wings of Somerset House, 1:54 was easy to engage with. Each gallery was given its own room, allowing them to present individually curated shows. The works are given the space to make an impact; a level of personal engagement is created by these intimate spaces. Works like Peju Alatise's *Missing*, a bright graphic series that looks at the young women recently kidnapped in Nigeria, is given the space and prominence it deserves, visually engaging the viewer. After drawing you in with its aesthetic appeal, the text alongside the work explains the intention behind it, bringing awareness to the story of the kidnapped girls.

For some, the smaller scale of 1:54 might be an element to lament, but in truth it's size allows for a far deeper engagement with the works on show.

The organisers admit that trying to represent an entire continent is impossible, and the fact that we even need a fair of 'African Art' is problematic. Yet invariably we do. Art from

"The organisers admit that trying to represent an entire continent is impossible, and the fact that we even need a fair of 'African Art' is problematic."

the African continent has been both mis- and under-represented, and until this imbalance has been addressed, we need events like 1:54 to bring attention to even a small portion of

the art coming from and representing Africa. I spoke to Touria El Glaoui, founder of the fair, who explained that 1:54 is not claiming to represent African Art, but instead gives a platform to artists, showcasing the huge variety of cultures and artistic practices that make up the incredibly diverse continent. It is a valuable step towards promoting art influenced by the African continent in an international arena.

Showcasing 27 galleries from around the world, with art from both the continent and the diaspora, 1:54 illustrates how 'Africa' has become more of an affinity or sense of belonging than a geographic location. The old divides between the diaspora and those who live on the continent seem to be finally disappearing. Miriam Syowia Kyambi (Kenyan-based) and Arlene Wandera (London-based), both represented by ARTLabAfrica, agreed that while we have a long way to go in getting people to look at an artwork beyond its geographic location, the preconceptions of the boundaries that define 'African' art are widening. Artists do not limit themselves by these arbitrarily imposed restrictions.

One of the aims of the fair itself is to redress these old views, and the variety of works on show succeeded in doing this. 1:54 does not simply take advantage of the supposed 'boom' in the African Art market (or as El Glaoui more accurately describes, the "steady growth"), but rather takes the opportunity to portray