

SINGAPORE ART GALLERY GUIDE



Art Befitting A Queen – OKINKA African Art Exhibition

The OKINKA African Art Exhibition has officially launched on 22 July 2015 at The Art Space in Suntec City Mall in Singapore. The exhibition is the first in a series of exciting activities to foster closer business and cultural ties between Singapore and Africa by the Centre for African Studies, under its Distinguished Visiting Fellowship Programme. The Centre for African Studies was jointly established by the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and the Singapore Business Federation (SBF) last year.

Organized by Paulo Gomes & Partners, the exhibition is supported by the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), Pacific International Lines and the Africa-South East Asia Chamber of Commerce. SAGG Editor-in-Chief Irene Marx interviewed Paulo Gomes to find out more about the exhibition and the intentions behind it.

Irene Marx: Please tell us something about the cultural significance of the artworks in "OKINKA" for the African continent.

Paulo Gomes: The exhibition "Okinka" is named after the last queen of Guinea-Bissau, Queen Okinka Pampa Kanyimpa. The Queen was entrusted to protect the spirits of the Bijagós Islands in Guinea-Bissau. Queen Okinka is a name that carries weight not only in Guinea-Bissau but also worldwide for representing the strength of women on a continent that used to be dominated by men.

The Okinka African Art Exhibition will present more than 50 art pieces from different African countries, especially West and Central Africa. The main themes of the art pieces evolve around protection, prosperity, and fertility. African art is often adopted as an agent of religion, social stability and social control. For example, the Bijagós people carry out their animistic religious rituals and ceremonies with traditional masks and dances. Some of these ceremonial masks will be displayed in the exhibition.

African art generally embraces ethical or religious values as well. An artwork considered "beautiful" is often also believed to be "good". In fact, in many African societies, the words for "beautiful" and "good" are the same ones, suggesting a strong correspondence between these two ideas. At the Okinka African Art exhibition, we hope to bring across both "beauty" and "good" to the visitors in Singapore.

IM: Why did you choose to bring this collection to Singapore?

PG: The Okinka African Art Exhibition's mission is to promote African art around the world, beginning with Asia. We chose Singapore as the premier location as we have strong ties with this beautiful country.

Since Mr. Lee Kuan Yew visited Africa about fifty years ago, the friendship between Africa and Singapore has been established and nourished. In the past few years, there has been a re-focus on the Africa-Singapore relationship among the economic and business communities. African art and culture, however, may still be unfamiliar to our friends in Singapore and this is where I believe the Okinka African Art Exhibition has an important role to play.

Personally I believe culture is an important component of development. It is what gives Africa the "African identity", what differentiates Africa from other continents, and what makes Africa really Africa. In the context of SG50 celebration, I find it a good opportunity to showcase the cultural sides of Africa by premiering this exhibition in Singapore.

We have received strong support from African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), the Singapore-based Pacific International Lines, the Africa-South East Asia Chamber of Commerce, and the NTU-SBF Centre for African Studies. After the exhibition here, we plan to bring Okinka to other Asian cities including Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Jakarta.



IM: Does the exhibition present mostly traditional or contemporary African art?

PG: Currently the exhibition presents mostly traditional African art to project the African values and cultures to the Singapore visitors.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that African art has a deep influence on Modern art. For example, some of the masterpieces of Matisse and Picasso are inspired by African sculptures. You may find this connection between some of Picasso's paintings and Okinka exhibits, such as the human figure in Picasso's "The Standing Nude" and the Baule judgement figure sculpture from Ivory Coast.

Contemporary African art still has its roots in traditional African art. We also aim to bring in contemporary African artists to Singapore during the Okinka exhibition period, to increase the experience of appreciation of African art amongst the visitors.

IM: In another interview with Lorenzo Rudolf (who is founder and President of Art Stage Singapore), he mentioned that (contemporary) art from Africa is likely to be the "next big thing" in the global art market. This sounds almost like a new "Scramble for Africa" in the art world. How do you feel about this? Do you think we'll soon see more work by contemporary African artists at galleries worldwide?

PG: I agree that contemporary African art will be more and more popular and appreciated across the world. There are many African artists who are passionate and talented. Their African roots enable them to see the world and

express themselves in a way different from artists from other continents.

I know a very gifted Guinea-Bissau contemporary artist, Mr. Nu Barreto (www.nubarreto.com). He recently held an exhibition in Paris, and is planning to visit Singapore in August. I expect to see more contemporary African artists playing active and significant roles in art galleries worldwide soon.

Date: 22 July – 30 August 2015
Time: 10am to 10pm Monday to Sunday
Venue: The Art Space, #01-444/445/448-450, Suntec City Mall Tower 1, Singapore 038983
Nearest MRT: Esplanade Station and Promenade Station
Admission: Free
Website: www.okinkart.com

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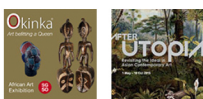
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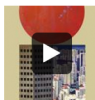
A little preview of our upcoming Cover Story. (Raymond Yap, Untitled (blue and red) - DETAIL, Gloss paint on aluminum panel. 61 x 46 cm)



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