

Tumelo Mosaka chats CTAF

 By [Ruth Cooper](#)

13 Feb 2017

Over 75 exhibitors from established and emerging art centres will be showcasing their art for the fifth edition of the Cape Town Art Fair (CTAF) at the Convention Centre from 17-19 February 2017. We got in touch with chief curator Tumelo Mosaka to get some insight on what it takes to create and curate an event of this scale.

■ The fifth CTAF promises to be bigger and better than ever. Can you tell us more about the additions to this year's event? Which would be your "must see exhibition or artist" at CTAF?

It is difficult to isolate within a fair that is showcasing so many artists. What I can say is that we have different sections and on entering you will find Tomorrows/Today, which is a curated section presenting 10 individual projects by artists from Africa and the diaspora. Tomorrows/Today explores the ideas inspired by African modernity. These works demonstrate an intense awareness of the changing social and economic landscape defining the various localities on the continent. These artists reflect on current conditions in ways that escape fixed definitions about African realities. It is a great introduction to an artist body of work.

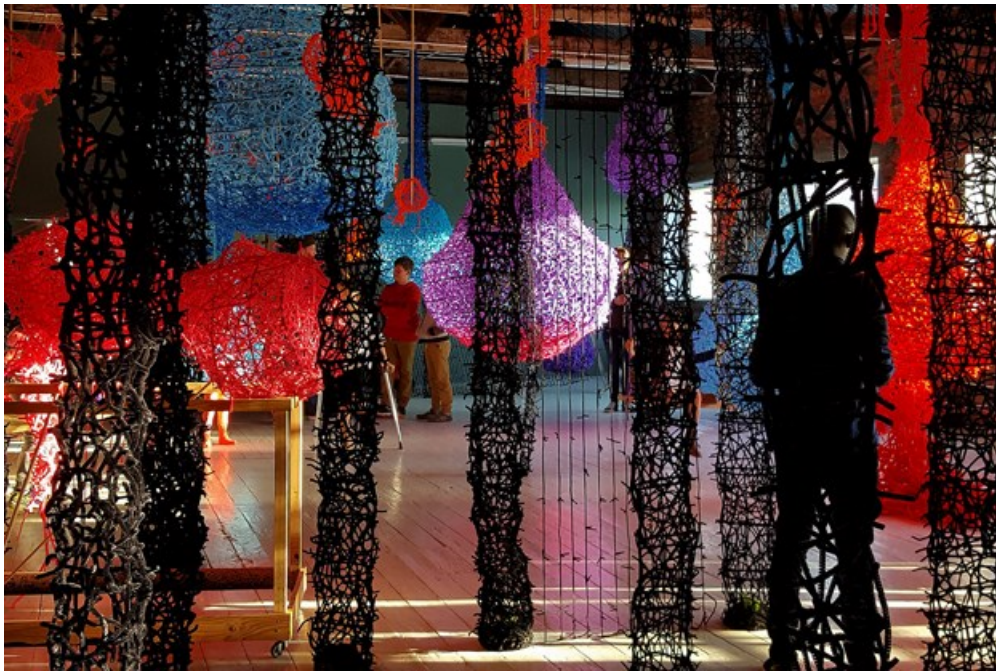


Lwandiso Njara - They came from across the water (scene-2)

I'm also excited about the new section called Unframed. This section presents large-scale sculptures and installations that are not usually seen in this context. It is an opportunity to introduce new works that are not wall-bound and are also experimental. Artists participating include Mary Sibande, Liza Grobler, Katherien de Villiers, and Michael Linders who are all from South Africa. This section is unique as it also attempts to interact with audiences beyond the experience of viewing.

I recently saw the exhibition of artists such as Mohau Modisakeng at the National Art Gallery in Cape Town. He had photographs as well as an installation and video. Another artist is Kemang Wa Lehulere whose exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago was stunning. Both these artists and other African artists are having a profound impact both locally and abroad

and I think it definitely changes how people see Africa around the globe.



Liza Grobler - Barbed Wire Paradise - Immersive spatial drawing in mixed media 2016. Photo by Nenke de Wet

■ ***How did you go about choosing the artists for Tomorrows/Today section of CTAF?***

The selection began with reviewing all the submissions made by galleries for this section. Then I researched other artists that I might have been curious about or had heard about. The challenge was finding artists with gallery representation. This was a challenge as not all artists I would have liked to show have such representation. The reason for working with gallery-represented artists is because the fair is primarily a space for selling art and galleries are the primary place for acquisitions.

■ ***What are your key learnings from working and curating in New York?***

Curating requires having extensive knowledge about art and one of the ways to gain this is by looking at art and looking again. But it also includes being in an environment where art is nurtured and respected as a profession.

What I hope to bring to the art fair is my knowledge about contemporary art and network of collectors and curators to engage more seriously with works from the region. I look forward to fostering partnerships as well as creating more opportunities for artists to show both locally and abroad. CTAF can be a catalyst for greater dialogue and exchange with regional artists and international institutions.



Tumelo Mbsaka

■ ***In these disruptive times, art that addresses topics such racial injustice, discrimination, and identity are vitally important. How do you see art changing the world for the better?***

It's true that these are uncertain times. What can we do to change this? I don't think art can change the world. It's not the work of art to change the world even though we might desire this. What I think is possible is that art can change how we see the world today. How we communicate and are able to transcend the divisiveness by finding different language to communicate new possibilities.

■ ***What upcoming local designers and artists would you say are the ones to watch?***

It is hard to select one over the other, because all the works present different perspectives. The best approach is to question my response to what I'm confronted with. This way I can appreciate the works based on its individual merits.



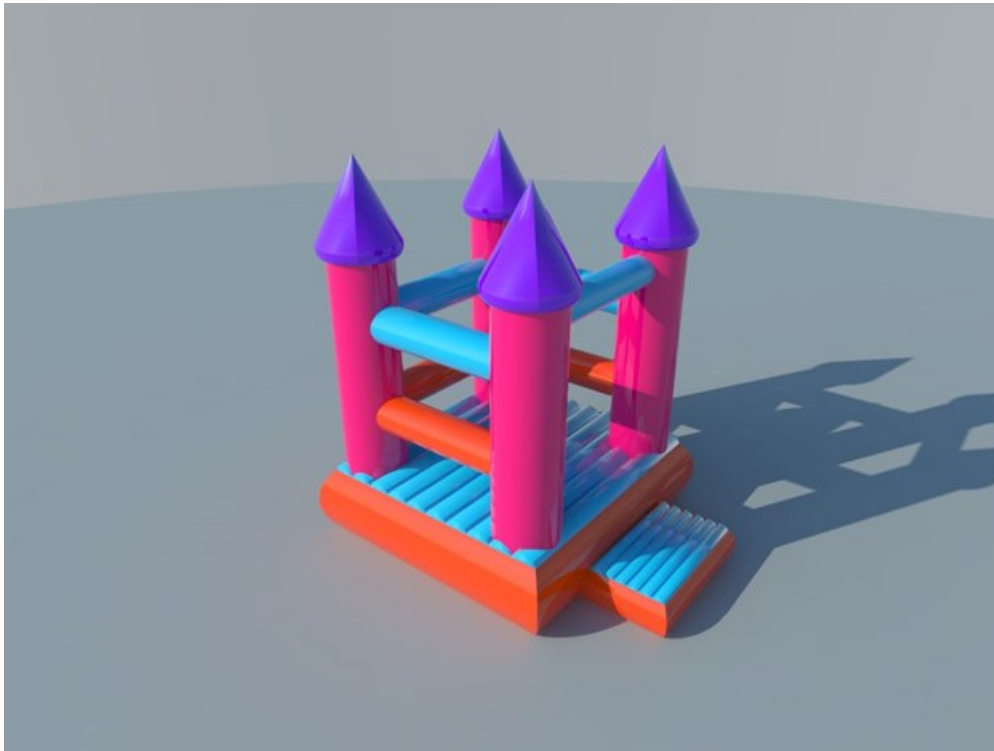
Zander Blom- Painting Volume II 2013

■ ***What are the challenges when working on an event of this scale?***

There are many challenges, because when the galleries apply, sometimes the work of the artists doesn't exist yet, so we all end up working with a rough idea which inevitably changes along the way. The other challenge is trying to satisfy the exhibitors to the best of our ability, as they are our clients. So you have to think about the work, but also you need to keep an eye on the business side of things. Then there is the public and their expectations, which are sometimes difficult to anticipate.

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

What is important is support for existing cultural institutions and education. Without culture and education, we will forever be reinventing the wheel and lack the perspective and history of who we are and where we've come from. Artists need to be supported as they offer imaginary possibilities of tomorrow's world. This is important, because it allows us to look beyond the current realities.



Michael Linders - Jumping Castle (sketch 1)

African art has not escaped the fascination of being the “mysterious other”. It's a slow process to change people's minds that Africa is not a country and has more complex language and culture than previously considered. As Africans, we need to take charge of how we want to be seen and heard. This is why the fair's focus on contemporary pan-African art is important and necessary. There are still too few platforms for African artists to present their artworks locally and internationally. Therefore the fair provides access by bringing artists, curators, galleries and collectors together.

We have created a platform for contemporary artists from Africa and the diaspora to be in dialogue. For this reason it is important that the fair is held in Africa. In a small way, we are building networks and redefining what it means to be African today. Holding the fair in Cape Town is a further assertion of how this city continues to be a crucial space for conducting trade as well as being the gateway to the world. Although access remains limited because of costs and visas for artists, the Mother City offers an alternative to the western markets.



Yinka Shonibare MBE - Champagne Kid (Fallen) 1 2013

■ **Is the CTAF affiliated with [LIVE ART](#) or the [Public Art Festival](#) also taking place in Cape Town this month?**

No we are not, but this is one of the things we have to change looking into the future. We have two artists who are participating in both events. I think the more we can collaborate, the greater an impact we can have.

■ **What would you say are the top five qualities that make a great curator?**

Being a good listener, having patience, being open-minded, being a negotiator and being detailed oriented.

CTAF runs from at the Convention Centre from 17-19 February 2017. Tickets are R140 for adults, R100 for students and pensioners and free for under-12s – tickets are available from [Computicket](#). For more information, visit capetownartfair.co.za.

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