

# French Gallerist Nathalie Obadia On The Contemporary African Art Market

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Art gallery owner [Nathalie Obadia](#), who runs three namesake art spaces in Paris and Brussels representing African artists such as Seydou Keïta, Nú Barreto, Collin Sekajugo and Youssef Nabil, shares her insights on the contemporary African art scene.





Nú Barreto, *Ossements (États Désunis d'Afrique)*, 2018

Photo courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia

## **How has the contemporary African art scene evolved over the past decade?**

The African continent has become an exciting art scene with highly invested artists who are now exhibited worldwide. What has changed is that artists have studied at art schools in African countries, and those who have studied at art schools abroad choose to work in Africa or spend a significant part of their time there. More and more galleries are doing international promotional work, more and more collectors from the African continent are active and numerous, and museums and private foundations are also emerging.

## **Why is the international art community finally turning its long overdue attention to Africa?**

The fact that good African artists are more and more frequently exhibited

at major international events such as Documenta, the Venice Biennale, Dakar Biennale and Sharjah Biennale has been a very important accelerator for the visibility of artists from the African continent. Personalities such as Simon Djami and Okwui Enwezor have allowed better knowledge of the African scene, as did Jean-Hubert Martin with the exhibition "Magiciens de la Terre" at the Centre Pompidou in 1989. Regarding prices, I would say that there is global inflation that affects "hot" artists from all continents. The only thing that is perhaps embarrassing is that there are profiles that are very much in demand in contemporary African art: figurative painting, very narrative, and the risk is to lock young artists into this type of production in order to sell quickly and a lot. The interest of collectors and museums to focus too much on one part of creation means that other directions like abstraction or conceptual installation are neglected.







Nú Barreto, Traços Diário 3, 2020

Photo courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia

## Who are the biggest buyers of contemporary African art today?

There are collectors of African art all over the world, ranging from the most enlightened amateurs who also buy non-African artists to some – a

minority at the moment – who are looking to make a quick profit. This has always existed when a new scene emerges, as was the case in China 20 years ago. But there are a few emblematic collections that have been constituted for more than 30 years without concern for speculation like that of Jean Pigozzi. He lends his works to the greatest museums, as in 2017 to the Louis Vuitton Foundation for its exhibition on the African scene. The Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C. is also today at the head of an exceptional and ever-growing collection of African art.

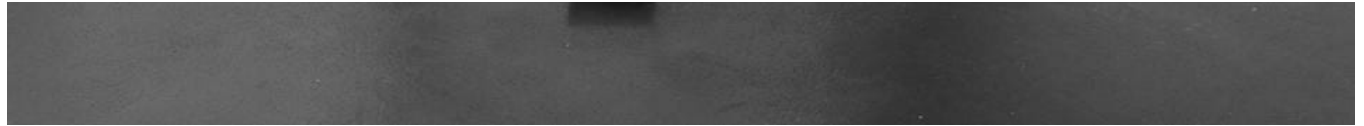
**Which are the three most interesting contemporary African artists to collect today whom you feel have the greatest potential?**

Seydou Keïta because he is underestimated and is an extraordinary portraitist. He worked at a time of caesura when we see the end of the colonial presence of France. He inspired American artists of African descent such as Kehinde Wiley and Mickalene Thomas. We have sold works by Seydou Keïta to major American museums over the past three years. Nú Barreto has a very interesting political view of the African continent, especially after the decolonization of the continent. His work is of great artistic but also conceptual strength. I highly esteem El Anatsui's work, which has brought new attention to the African scene. His work is magnificent both artistically and historically. It is accurate, very elegant and uncompromising.









Nú Barreto, Bailleurs Pro-Fonds (États Désunis d'Afrique), 2018, acrylic on canvas, structure (3 ... [+]

Photo courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia



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## **By how much have prices for contemporary African art increased over the past decade?**

The interest in the contemporary African art market has accelerated over the last 10 years with exhibitions such as the Dokolo collection in 2007 at the Venice Biennale, the opening of the Zeitz Museum in South Africa in 2017 and the “focus” on African art at fairs such as Frieze, Art Dubai and especially the creation of 1-54 in London in 2013, followed by New York and Marrakech. The fact that African artists have studied in London, New York and Paris has also allowed better dissemination of their work through internationally-recognized galleries. Everything was therefore organized and structured so that Western collectors and museums were ready to buy African artists.

## **What’s the general price range of the African artists represented by Galerie Nathalie Obadia?**

Between \$6,000 for a small format by Seydou Keïta and more than \$100,000 for a video by Youssef Nabil. The works of Nú Barreto are between €4,000 and €70,000. The prices of artists like Youssef Nabil

reasonably increase by between 5 and 10 % every two years, like those of Nú Barreto and Seydou Keïta. I am very wary of the infatuation of a certain speculative market for artists from the African continent. I prefer to keep prices reasonable and to bring works into serious institutional and private collections that are not looking for a quick increase in value.