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THE AFRICAN CONTEMPORARY ART MARKET:

GAPS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

by Barthélémy Toguo

Your Excellencies, the Ministers of Culture and Amassadors of the African Countries, Ladies and Gentlemen, it a great honor to be here today - and a great pleasure!

I wish to speak of the urgent need to support African contemporary art. You are already doing much - but more must still be done! The great exhibitions in Paris, Magiciens de la Terre (1989) and Africa Remix (2005), marked the recognition of African contemporary art on the world stage. African visual artists are increasingly present at international art fairs. Art critics write monographs on their works, collectors endorse their creations... But the African contemporary art market has yet to be built, despite the presence of African artists in auctions in Paris, London and New York.

Outside of the continent initiatives arise and are encouraged. Observing the blatant shortage of African artists in international fairs, in 2013 Ms. Touria El Glaoui created the 1:54, especially devoted to our artists, which took place for the first time one

year later in New York. In 2015, and for the first time, the curator of the Venice Biennial was an African, and there was a strong presence of our continent's artists, 35 percent. What to say about the latest acquisition of their creations by the Tate Modern and the Smithsonian Institution, that bestowed them an important budget... The 1:54 in London, the AKAA (Also Known As Africa) due next December in Paris, the ever increasing number of African countries at the Venice Biennial, the exhibitions of African artists in the world's most important museums lead some people to assert that African art will be the next unavoidable segment of the art market.

All of this is fantastic but let us have no illusions about the fact that even if African artists do acquire a high international visibility, and if around the world Africa and its creative energies seduce, the cultural policies and the African art market are still insufficiently developed.

Speaking of the state of this market, we have to quickly understand that several weaknesses exist. A strong political will must emerge in our countries in order to understand that art is a factor of development, a commercialized product and a generator of income.

In Europe, Bilbao with the Guggenheim Museum and Berlin with the cultural policy of the region, these almost stricken cities have enjoyed renewed prosperity through innovative cultural projects intended to transform the existing artistic potential. Let us follow their example for we have great creative artists whose value is both artistic and economic. We still have a long way to go.

A vast program involving the creation of galleries, magazines, fairs, the activity of picture framers, insurers... should be rapidly implemented. Artists do not content themselves with producing; they need to have the possibility to count on an entire infrastructure for their career-building needs.

Praiseworthy initiatives have arisen in Africa: the Zinzou Foundation in Cotonou and Ouidah, the art center Villa Gottfried of my colleague Mansour Ciss in Ngaparou, located 70 kilometers from Dakar, the Sand School of Germaine Acony, the Cécile Fakhouri Gallery, the Donwahi Foundation - Everybody in Abidjan, the Sindika Collection in Luanda, Doual'art in Cameroon, the Michael Stevenson & Goodmann Gallery in Johannesburg. In Cameroon again, west of the country, there is the art center of Bandjoun Station that I direct, where an artistic project (with a museum, artists' residencies, and an art education program) linked to an agricultural and environmental project has been initiated in order to encourage sustainable and healthy agriculture. It is as well critical to catch up with what Leopold Sedar Senghor calls « the deterioration in the terms of trade », when the export prices imposed by Western countries penalize and impoverish again and again our Southern farmers... and many others.

It is well known that culture is an extremely powerful factor in development: in a recent interview for the French *Journal des arts*, M. Paul Mashatile, Art and Culture Minister of South Africa, said that culture is « a new mine for my country ».

In Europe a 2014 economic survey of cultural sectors (music, visual arts, performing arts, books, television, cinema, etc.) shows that these sectors are the third largest employer of that continent (more than 7 million people!), slightly less than the construction sector and hotels and catering and greater than the automobile industry, telecommunications or agriculture.

The creative sectors, however, guarantee not only the preservation of peoples' cultural heritage, and cannot be put on the same level as other goods: a poem, a work of art, a film have an extra touch of soul compared to consumer goods, and as such must have a special status and enjoy particular protection.

Also, as many economic studies indicate - such as those I mentioned above but also others made in France and Great Britain - the cultural sector is a major sector in terms of employment and of economic growth, therefore of development.

Africa, just as Europe, has a powerful and rich culture demanding to be protected, encouraged and promoted.

By the way, I would like to stress the fact that all the European economic studies have revealed that the visual arts were the first and most important cultural sector in terms of employment and sales. This was a surprise, for everybody thought that music or cinema would rank first. But no, the major sectors are the graphic and visual arts with their thousands of painters, sculptors, photographers, designers, ceramists, etc., along with museums and the art market.

As a visual artist myself, this is also the message I wanted to deliver to you, Ladies and Gentlemen, Ministers and Ambassadors.

In sum, we have understood that African contemporary art and its market must attain their potential from the inside, as the collector Sindika Ndokolo said: « Genuine programs of development and training must be implemented through a real development policy. » Today, only a few colleagues - William Kentridge and El Anatsui - are positioned on top of the world market, but many artists are still in the shadow. Finally I would like to point out what is crucial: the need, in order to protect the African artists, not only to give them the resale rights in their own country, here, on their continent, but also to make this resale right worldwide.

Why? You must know that this right, which is so important for the visual artists (it is a remuneration they receive when their works are resold on the art market and is also the author's right that is

economically the most important, but as well the symbol of the link connecting the artist to his work, even if it has been sold), is not mandatory under the Berne Convention.

That is why this right is recognized only in eighty countries of the world, among which many are African: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Congo, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Senegal and Tunisia. Others are about to follow: Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan, South Africa...

It is very important that this author's right become universal, so that the African artists whose creations are sold in Europe or the United States receive this legitimate payment, this recognition from the art dealers. To this end both the country of origin of the artist and the country where the work is sold must abide by the resale right. Just as a writer is protected everywhere and a film maker has rights in every country of the world, the visual artist must receive a resale right wherever his work is sold and whatever his origin. It is a question of respect and recognition. The artist - particularly the Africans! - must be paid for the wealth he or she provides.

That is why several African countries, notably Senegal our host country, but also the Congo Brazzaville, supported by many other countries (of Europe, Latin America, Asia, like India for example) have become the artists' spokespersons with the aim of making this right universal.

And I would like to make a solemn appeal to you all, your Excellencies, Ministers of Culture and Ambassadors of the African countries, so that you fully support this advance of the rights of the artists and join the countries in favour of a universal resale right. Here, I wish to particularly thank Senegal, Congo Brazzaville, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, but also Kenya for their support of the resale right at the WIPO meetings in Geneva.

This inalienable, non-transferable right belonging only to the artist and his/her heirs is one of the factors of the fair return of the more powerful towards the more fragile, of the dealers towards the artists, of the Northern countries that have art markets towards the artists of Southern countries. It is a tool of economic equity.

I sincerely wish, on behalf of the thousands of artists who have this expectation, that my appeal will be heard. We have to fight and I am sure that you, Ministers of Culture and Ambassadors of the African countries, will take heart and fight with me.

In doing so you will contribute to making the world a fairer place for artists.

I thank you.