

Sguardi sull'Africa

Curated by Samuele Menin and Paolo Giglio

Traditional art and emerging voices, contemporary art and the Casablanca School: 250 artworks and artifacts, exhibited together for the first time, reveal the richness, diversity, and complexity of African artistic production.

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Comprising 54 nations, endowed with extraordinary natural resources, rich in cultures and traditions, and widely regarded as the cradle of humankind, Africa continues to exert a powerful fascination within today's intercultural and global landscape.

From **March 1st**, the historic halls of **Palazzo Gotico**—one of **Piacenza's** oldest buildings—will host **Sguardi sull'Africa**, an exhibition curated by **Paolo Giglio** and **Samuele Menin**. Through a selection of **250 artworks and artefacts**, the exhibition explores the richness, complexity, and diversity of African artistic production.

Emerging from the **growing recognition** of African artists and their ability to bridge tradition and contemporaneity, **Sguardi sull'Africa** also highlights the **longstanding relationship** between **Piacenza and Africa**. This connection dates back to the 1960s, with the construction of the Kariba Dam on the Zambezi River, which involved a local company, and has been further strengthened by figures of profound humanitarian commitment such as **Father Vittorio Pastori**, founder of the *Africa Mission Movement*, active since the 1970s—particularly in Uganda.

The exhibition brings together works from **two major collections**—the **Giglio Collection** of Paolo and Bruno Giglio and **Collezione54** of Rosario Bifulco—and is structured into sections dedicated to **ritual objects and sculptures**, 1930s **Moroccan painting**, and **contemporary African art**, featuring both emerging and established artists. The display, designed by Studio Fosbury, establishes a dynamic dialogue with the historic architecture of Palazzo Gotico.

Rather than following a chronological or didactic approach, the exhibition adopts a **relational structure** inspired by the metaphor of a **medieval choir**. This unified spatial device highlights both the individuality of each work and the resonances between them, offering a layered and non-linear experience. Sculptures, ritual objects, masks, and paintings inhabit the space as active presences rather than simply exhibited artefacts.

The section devoted to **Ritual Objects and Sculptures** presents works originally created for use rather than contemplation: **masks, statues, ritual instruments, and everyday objects**

that act as mediators between the visible and invisible worlds. These objects embody functions related to **protection, healing, fertility, knowledge, and identity**, where value lies not in **formal aesthetics** but in symbolic and **spiritual efficacy**. Drawn from the collection of Professor René Marcy (University of Caen Normandy), these works were a **fundamental source of inspiration for many twentieth-century artists**, including Picasso, Brancusi, Modigliani, and Giacometti. Their extraordinary variety, when displayed together, reveals the richness of **cultural exchange** that characterises the African continent.

The section ***The Casablanca School and Modernism in Morocco*** presents works by Mohammed Ben Ali **R'bati**, Farid **Belkahia**, Ahmed **Cherkaoui**, Fatna **Gbouri**, Hassan **El Glaoui**, Jilali **Gharbaoui**, Fatima Hassan **El Farouj**, Mohamed **Melehi**, Mohamed **Kacimi**, Chaibia **Talal**, and Jacques **Majorelle**. These artists addressed a shared question: how can one be contemporary without abandoning visual and symbolic memory? While artists of the *Casablanca School* such as **Farid Belkahia and Mohamed Melehi** sought to construct modernity from within tradition, others—including **Chaibia Talal, Fatna Gbouri, and Fatima Hassan El Farouj**—developed highly personal and intuitive approaches, equally innovative in their outcomes. Together, these practices reflect a broader tendency in twentieth-century Moroccan art to **transform memory and lived experience into contemporary visual language**.

The section dedicated to ***Contemporary African Art*** from **Collezione54**, assembled over more than thirty years by Rosario Bifulco, includes works by Admire **Kamudzengerere**, Amani **Bodo**, Patrick **Bongoy**, Wim **Botha**, Edson **Chagas**, Meschac **Gaba**, Maimouna **Guerresi**, Fathi **Hassan**, Pieter **Hugo**, Cyrus **Kabiru**, Bonolo **Kavula**, Abdoulaye **Konaté**, Teresa Kutala **Firmino**, Ibrahim **Mahama**, Zanele **Muholi**, Kelechi Charles **Nwaneri**, Chéri **Samba**, Barthélémy **Toguo**, and Raymond **Tsham**.

Spanning painting, photography, textile works, and installation, these works reflect the multiplicity of perspectives and contexts that define contemporary African art today. They address themes such as **materiality and memory**, identity and representation, and the transformation and reuse of materials. The result is a dynamic **field of relationships** capable of generating new narratives of the present.

The final section, ***Young Voices***, brings together works by **Ako Atikossie, Ibrahim Ballo, Soly Cissé, Binta Diaw, Adjie Dieye, Victor Fotso Nyie, Francis Offman, Odinakachi Okoroafor, and Pedro Pires**. It presents a generation of young and emerging artists whose practices engage with contemporary **transformations** of identity and the complex relationships between African cultures, **migration**, and diaspora.

Coming from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds, often shaped by migratory experience, these artists explore the **diaspora** as a dynamic space of exchange and **transformation**, where roots and change coexist in constant negotiation. Through **painting, photography, sculpture, installation, and archival practices**, they address themes of **memory, colonial legacy, and systems of representation** that have historically shaped **simplified narratives** of Africa and its communities.

Accompanied by a rich programme of collateral events, ***Sguardi sull'Africa***, in collaboration with the social cooperative *Arti e Pensieri*, places particular emphasis on **educational activities**, including **workshops** for **schools, families, and adults**. The exhibition is further enriched by **talks and round tables** on contemporary Africa curated by **Mauro Molinaroli**, as well as performances of **dance, music, and theatre**, offering a multifaceted portrait of a continent in constant transformation.

Entitled ***Young Voices***, this section brings together a generation of predominantly young and emerging artists whose practices offer attentive and informed perspectives on the transformations of contemporary identities and on the relationships between African cultures, migration, and diaspora. Like a choir, in which younger voices contribute intonation, energy, and momentum, the artists presented here bring strength, clarity, and sensitivity to the renewal of cultural debate, introducing fresh perspectives and new imaginaries.

The metaphor of the choir also suggests a balance between individuality and collective expression: each artist pursues an autonomous practice, yet together these works create a shared space of reflection. What emerges is a polyphony of experiences and viewpoints that conveys the complexity of the present and testifies to the active role of younger generations in redefining contemporary languages and narratives.

Coming from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds, often shaped by transnational life experiences, these artists reflect on what it means today to grow and form one's identity across multiple places, languages, and cultural frameworks. In their works, migration is not merely a physical displacement but a condition that reshapes memory, belonging, and relationships with both past and present. Diaspora thus emerges as a dynamic space of exchange and transformation, where roots and change coexist and continuously evolve.

Through a variety of media—including painting, photography, sculpture, installation, and archival practices—the artists address themes related to historical memory, colonial legacies, and systems of representation that have contributed to the construction of often simplified narratives about Africa and its communities worldwide. Their works challenge these imaginaries, proposing more nuanced readings and restoring the complexity of contemporary experiences.

At the same time, the works express the energy, vitality, and innovative spirit that characterise African cultures and their diasporic expressions. Far from static or stereotypical representations, what emerges is a dynamic and evolving landscape shaped by research, experimentation, and constant redefinition, in which tradition and contemporaneity engage in an ongoing process of mutual transformation.

Taken together, the works presented in *Young Voices* function as a space of awareness and dialogue. Like voices in a choir that, while distinct, come together to form a shared harmony, these artists offer individual contributions that collectively articulate a more nuanced and plural understanding of mobility, identity, and intercultural encounter in the contemporary world.