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Bajaj, Kriti. "4 West African photographers to know now," *Art Radar Asia* (March 21, 2014).



Art Radar Asia

Contemporary art trends and news from Asia and beyond

4 West African photographers to know now

Posted on 21/03/2014 by Kriti Bajaj

African photographers are challenging stereotypical representations of their countries and people through art.

As the art world turns its attention to African artists, new narratives and portrayals of the continent and its people are coming into focus. No longer represented merely through the lens of western photographers, Africa's own artists are now gaining exposure and addressing issues of identity and post-colonialism through their work.



Fabrice Monteiro, 'Mbeubeuss' (work in progress), from the series "The Prophecy", 2013. Image courtesy the artist.

How African photography is changing today

A century ago, photography was practised by the coloniser to objectify and exoticise. Academic and artist Salem Mekuria, **in her essay "Representation and self-representation"** (pdf download), says of the representation of

Africa:

For centuries, in western literature and art, then in cinema beginning with the earliest films made at the turn of the century, our histories and our images have been the subject of manipulation and denigration. We have been relegated to the margins and used to reinforce, please and glorify western desires.

Foreign photojournalists covering Africa have tended to focus on poverty and suffering, creating a unilateral, stereotypical image of this vast and diverse continent. Though African photographers have depicted the everyday lives of their fellow citizens, such images have only recently begun to find an audience in Europe and America.

Kenyan photographer Joe Lukhovi told *The Guardian* that Africans have “**been the victims of twisted foreign reporting**” that showed only one side of the story. In the same article, South African photographer Anthony Bila was quoted as saying:

I want to step off the one-dimensional view that is being fed to us by international mass media. Africa is anything but lost; instead it's a place full of possibilities and beauty. We Africans can tell our own story in our own way.



Andrew Esiebo, 'Bamako No. 2', from the series "Nuances", 2012. Image courtesy Tiwani Contemporary.

The *Al Jazeera* **documentary series** *The New African Photography* explores how a new generation of African photographers has reclaimed the way that their people are represented, by focusing on the uniqueness as well as the problems facing their communities.

Art Radar spotlights four visual artists from West African countries who use unique and diverse means of representing themselves, their country, people and culture.



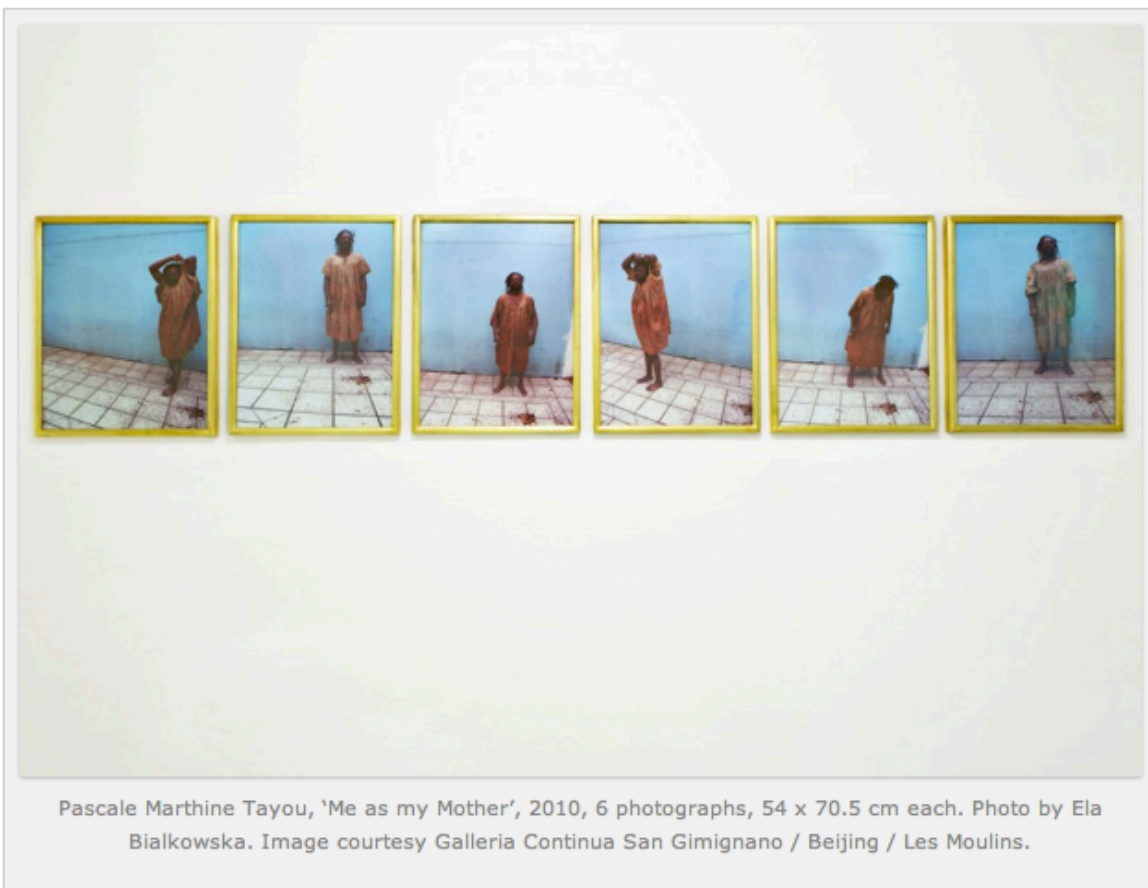
Fabrice Monteiro, 'Untitled 1', from the series "Signares", 2011. Part of the Seattle Art Museum's private collection. Image courtesy the artist.

Fabrice Monteiro

Fabrice Monteiro grew up in a multicultural environment: his mother is Belgian, his father Beninese. Originally trained as an engineer and later a model, his passion for photography grew and developed gradually as he found his own voice through the medium. He was influenced and mentored by American photographer Alfonse Pagano. His work is an ethnographic exploration of his homeland and people through photojournalism, portraiture and fashion photography.

In his series "Marrons: Les esclaves fugitifs", he employs the shackles that were used to bind, subdue and punish slaves in a tableau recreating the terrible practice of slavery. The images are intended to make the viewer uneasy, and to depict the inhuman things people can do to one another for material gains, power and dominance. The series was inspired by Monteiro's own family history. In his "Signares" series, Monteiro's models are the descendents of Senegal's Signares women from the 15th century, who were the official wives of European colonisers for the duration of their stay and influenced the socio-economic development of Senegal.

Monteiro lives and works in Dakar, Senegal.



Pascale Marthine Tayou

Born in Nkongsamba, Cameroon in 1966, Pascale Marthine Tayou is an artist working with diverse media such as sculpture, installation, drawing, photography and video. Tayou is currently based between Ghent (Belgium) and Yaoundé (Cameroon), and his work often addresses the post-colonial hybrid experiences of living in both countries. Art critic Roberta Smith wrote in *The New York Times* that Tayou is **"a nomad in his life, in the materials he uses, in his artistic sources, and in the way he thinks."**

According to his **profile** on Mudam Luxembourg's website, Tayou considers Cameroon as his 'trademark', where he originated, and which he wants to include in all his work. His work explores the relationship between personal and collective histories, the creation of national and cultural identities, and economic and cultural exchange between Africa and western countries. His art is fluid and transgresses established frameworks.

Tayou's work has been exhibited internationally at Vienna's Kunsthalle, Tate Britain, Grand Palais in Paris, **Documenta 11** (2002, Kassel) and the **Venice Biennale** (2005, 2009).



Iké Udé, 'Sartorial Anarchy #20', 2013, pigment on satin paper, 45.7 x 36.5 in. Edition of 5, 3 AP.
Image courtesy the artist and Leila Heller Gallery, New York.

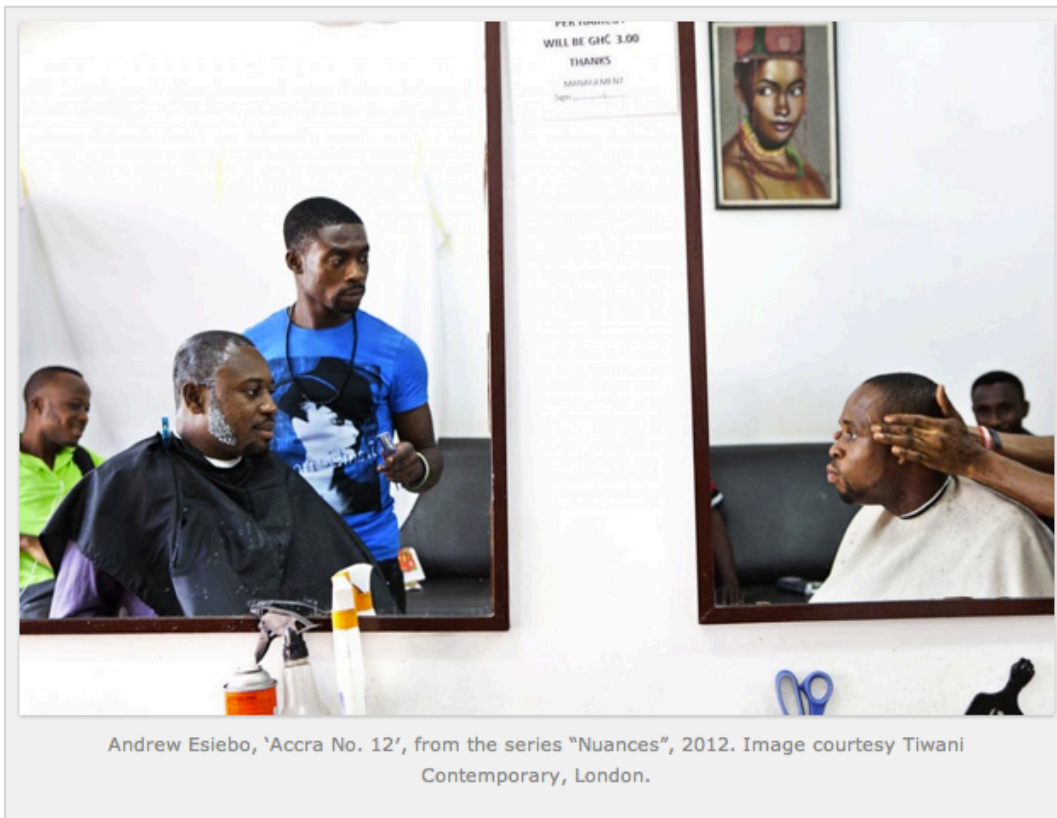
Iké Udé

Nigerian artist Iké Udé lives and works in New York City. As a photographer and performance artist, he explores the theatricality and multiple guises of the self: the artist then also becomes the spectator. For instance, Udé's "Cover Girl" series featured self-portraits on mainstream magazine covers, exploring the politics of representation along the lines of race and gender.

In "Sartorial Anarchy", Udé uses rich colours and fabrics in a fashion portraiture series that, **according to the *Huffington Post*:**

...transcend[s] the traditional aesthetic of portraiture by adopting a post-modern twist. The portraits show a highly stylised world of colour and improvisational virtuosity, in which the artist employs men's fashion ensembles that have been culled from various historical times and geographies.

Udé also writes on sexuality, identity and moving beyond stereotypes, and runs the art, culture and fashion magazine *aRUDE*. His work has been widely exhibited and published, and is included in collections such as those of the Guggenheim and Smithsonian, as well as many private collections.



Andrew Esiebo, 'Accra No. 12', from the series "Nuances", 2012. Image courtesy Tiwani Contemporary, London.

Andrew Esiebo

Andrew Esiebo is a photographer from Nigeria, born in Lagos in 1978 and a member of the Lagos' collective Black Box. His work explores themes such as the politics of gender and sexuality, immigration, religion and popular culture.

Several of his photographic series – such as "Urban Aesthetics" (2012), "Nuances" (2012), "The Barbers" (2012) and "Style" (2012) – have focused on barbershops across eight cities in West Africa. Through this documentation, Esiebo investigates relationships between hairstyle and social identity, the iconography of global culture inside the shops, as well as the external landscapes of barbershops.

London's Tiwani Contemporary hosted Esiebo's first solo exhibition in London from 10 January to 8 February 2014. Titled "Pride", the show exhibited work from the barbershop series to highlight the social and spiritual significance of hair in African society. Esiebo's work has been exhibited in France, Italy, Austria, Brazil, Bangladesh, Mali and China. He has also explored other multimedia practices such as video and film.