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Art and Life

Breaking News from Art Twenty One

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Uzoma

Chux Ohai

Contemporary art might seem very apt, but Art Twenty One provided art lovers with a different name recently in their spacious studio at Eko Hotel and Suites on Victoria Island.

'Breaking News' is hardly a title that anyone will connect with an art studio, but that was precisely what Art Twenty One chose to exhibit – works by eight artists. And connoisseurs were not disappointed at the fewer than 20 works on display. Hanging on the white-painted Art Twenty One Studio were Obinna Makata's 'Basket Full of Blood' and Bob-Nosa Uwagboe's 'The Illicit Proliferation of Large and Small Arms'. On the floor nearby, scores of sealed vases filled with flower-like pieces arranged in a military formation.

Native Makari, Abraham Oghobase, Chibuike Uzoma and Uche Uzorka were the other Nigerian artists whose works were exhibited. The only non-Nigerian, Jakob Boeskov, had a collaboration with Tecu Benson by way of a Nollywood film shown on television in one part of the studio.

'Breaking News', according to the curator of Art Twenty One, Joseph Gerges, an American, "explores the politics and mechanisms of the mass media...questions how information is disseminated, fact is constructed, and how social media and political life are filtered the lens of the culture industry."

Using their creative resources, the artists show, in different ways, the various vices Nigeria is contending with nowadays, from corruption to bribery, violence and the increasing menace of area boys.

The artists', an in-house document boasted, "are critical about divergent social and political issues in Nigeria, from violence and government corruption to Nollywood and popular consumer trends. They look at how Nigeria is defined in the local and global news media, and how cultural myths are articulated and perpetuated...rather than succumb to the commercial pressures of the media industry, they create a visual language to portray new perspectives and alternative narratives."



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What Art Twenty One Studio can also chest-thump on is its devotion to promoting art in Nigeria and internationally. The studio itself arguably occupies the largest exhibiting space in Nigeria with 600 square metres. It has its share of exhibitions – both solo and group. It is also one of the few studios with a record number of auctions of indigenous artists. Their aim, says Khaleed Chellarams, a Lebanese art dealer, “is to contribute to and solidify the growing art scene in Lagos, as well as position the city as a major force in the international art world, the space is designed to make art accessible to a large and growing audience who will be able to engage with a rich and diverse range of contemporary art, cultural practice and educational art programmes.”

Breaking News fulfils that objective perfectly and it will run till June 22, 2016.

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