

Art & Film

Accra's art scene skyrockets

The pandemic seems to have accelerated the city's creativity, producing its most exciting explosion of artistic activities yet.





This page: ADA by Nii Odzenma. Opposite: Adora Mba by Ofoe Amegavie

Since 2006 the world-renowned Nubuke Foundation has stood as a beacon of hope and support for Accra's arts community. Joining it two years later was the Artists Alliance Gallery. Founded by highly respected Ghanaian artist Ablade Glover, the Labadi gallery's three marbled floors display some of the most significant pieces in the country. However, aside from these two stalwarts, visitors wanting to access Ghana's art scene still had to make quite some effort to be introduced to it.

That was until Accra's first internationally operating exhibition space, Gallery 1957, opened at the Kempinski in 2016. The following year, art historian, writer, and filmmaker Nana Oforiatta-Ayim launched the innovative ANO Institute's gallery in Osu. Through these venues, and events such as the inimitable Chale Wote Street Art Festival, Ghanaian artists began to receive a lot more recognition and support than they had previously. Naturally, this encouraged the creative community and more exciting artists began to emerge.

"Ghana had an abundance of talent – so many exceptional artists – but it didn't really have an art infrastructure," explains contemporary African art advisor Adora Mba. "Other than Nubuke Foundation and Gallery 1957, there was nowhere for these artists to show, so a lot of them left Ghana to work in Europe or the US."

Adora had planned to open her brainchild, ADA\ Contemporary Art Gallery, at the swanky Villagio Vista complex in early 2020. "Then, of course, the world stopped," she says. "But it's actually been a blessing in disguise for me because I've had six months to really think about strategy and the type of artists I want to work with. The international art market is finally looking at African and Black art; our artists are the hot "du jour" so it all feels aligned." ADA\ is achieving phenomenal success with local and international exhibitions celebrating rising talents such as Theresah Ankomah and Emma Prempeh.

Another Covid baby is the Noldor Residency.

Launched in November 2020, this thriving independent hub facilitates emerging artists through robust residency and fellowship programmes. Noldor's 2021 junior fellows are most certainly artists to keep your eye on. Abigail Aba Otoo uses mixed media to examine the Black female form and mental health. In his drawings and paintings Joshua Oheneba-Takyi explores displacement through ubiquitous objects.

Elsewhere Ghanaian art is quite literally taking off. Accra-born Vienna-based Amoako Boafo has seen a meteoric rise to collector favourite with one of his paintings selling at an auction in February 2020 for over 800,000 euros. US company Uplift Aerospace recently commissioned the artist to paint exterior panels of a rocket they will send into space in Autumn 2021. With Boafo talking of plans to start an art school in Accra, and numerous other independent endeavours gaining traction, the creative scene here is bound to continue soaring skyward. ■