



1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair

Taking the everyday – a meeting with Ifeanyi Oganwu



Ifeanyi Oganwu
Pedestal, 2016
Moulded Birch Ply, edition of 200
Photo Andy Sutton. Courtesy Expand Design Ltd and Toghal.



Phoebe Boswell
Duniake, 2016
Digital Print on Cotton, Bio-Linen Piping, Foam Inners
Photo Andy Sutton, courtesy the artist, Expand Design Ltd and Toghal.

Returning once again to Somerset House for its 2016 London edition, this year the 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair is thrilled to be showcasing 10 special projects in addition to its 130+ exhibiting artists. With projects ranging from site-specific installations and radio broadcasts to a major UK show of the work of Malick Sidibé, 1:54's special projects offer a rich programme of non-profit artistic endeavours.

As always at the fair, the 1:54 lounge and bookshop will be available to provide visitors with spaces in which to relax and reflect whilst taking a break from the fair. This year, as part of the special projects programme, Ifeanyi Oganwu (<http://www.expand-design.com/#home>) has collaborated with Galerie Armel Soyer (<http://www.armelsoyer.com>), textile firm Toghal (<http://toghal.com>) and artist Phoebe Boswell (<http://www.phoebeboswell.com>) to create a collection of pieces that will fill the lounge and bookshop.

*Ifeanyi Oganwu is an artist and designer of Nigerian origin whose inspiration is gathered from across the globe. His beautifully minimalist, futurist creations explore modernist notions of design in relation to the body, whilst working fluidly between the fields of architecture, art and design. In 2008, Oganwu founded Expand Design Ltd, a London-based studio that explores the boundaries of art, culture and technology. Oganwu has recently exhibited *Splice* with the touring exhibition *Making Africa: A Continent of Contemporary Design*, which will move onto the Kunsthal Rotterdam this Autumn. *Splice's* artfully constructed aluminium panels epitomise the designer's play with materials and exploration of high-tech manufacturing techniques.*



Ifeanyi Oganwu. *Splice*, 2012
Aluminium
Edition of 6 + 2AP. Courtesy Expand Design Ltd and Armel Soyer

Working in collaboration with Oganwu, Pheobe Boswell is a Nairobi born, London-based artist with a Kikuyu mother and fourth generation British Kenyan father. Drawing from this incredibly multicultural upbringing, as well as her own passage of migration, Boswell works in drawing, animation and installation to comment on wider social questions.

As the fair draws nearer and the creation of the works is well underway, we managed to have a chat to Oganwu about the how the project has come together.

For 1:54's lounge, Oganwu has created forty unique stools that will hold cushions produced by Toghal textile firm, and bearing distinctive prints designed by Phoebe Boswell. The name of the stool – *Pedestal* – beautifully expresses the intentions of the collaborative team, and the origins from which the piece grew from. Oganwu explains that the project started after Toghal approached him. The textile firm asked the designer to create a stool that would 'present' their work, and so Oganwu began to explore forms that could display and elevate beautiful furnishings, whilst 'taking a back seat' and not creating distraction.

Using the concept of the pedestal as a starting point, Oganwu then began to develop the design, taking an exploration of arches as inspiration. "We used the arch because it is something that is present in our urban fabric, but that has also completely disappeared. We use arches for the infrastructure of the city, and yet no one pays attention – arches are there but in a way they are also not. And so I became interested in this everyday language, but also in the sorts of things that disappear."

The resulting plywood stools consist of two curved bolsters within which Toghal and Phoebe Boswell's collaborative cushions – titled *Duniake* – rest. Oganwu explains that he is pleased with the multiple associations that the stools generate, and this interpretative freedom offered to the viewer is characteristic of Oganwu's work.

With the forty *Pedestal* stools arranged across the lounge displaying the vibrant cushions, Oganwu envisages a somewhat graphic quality within the space. Created in a variety of colours, the bespoke



Ifeanyi Oganwu
Contoured Crater Desk and Side Table / Bench, 2013
 Birch Ply, Stainless Steel, Lead Ballast. Edition of 10 + 2P
 Photo Gilles Pernet, courtesy Expand Design Ltd and Armel Soyer.

prints of *Duniake* display Boswell's skills of draughtsmanship, whilst taking the traditional Swahili Kanga as a point of departure – an everyday garment consisting of a piece of colourful fabric with a decorated border and central motif. Boswell's resulting patterns appear abstract from a distance, whilst in reality consisting of beautiful figurative forms.

In addition to the interior spaces of the 1:54 lounge, Toghal has also created a collection of cushions in collaboration with artist and designer Lulu Kitololo (<http://www.lulukitololo.com>) that will be positioned on a number of Somerset House's terraces. These spaces will transform the lounge into an outside experience, providing 'soft spaces' that explore the porosity between the exterior and interior.

Oganwu explains: "Working in a collaborative group has been an extremely exciting process for me. It's really interesting how even though maybe we began by all working separately, we came together using the everyday as a collective tool... In the end you have the everyday producing a new way of seating. That's the essence of what it is we've created."

Oganwu's bookshop design will continue to explore ideas of multiple dimensions and flexible space, whilst focussing on the room's circularity and horizontality. Occupying the centre of the bookshop will be a towering bookshelf. This fascinating piece will divide the room into various areas including the live radio station Worldwide FM, which will broadcast throughout the fair as an additional part of 1:54's special projects. Reaching high into the room with a slight taper, the bookshelf warps the viewer's ability to see the object itself or even the room, in its entirety.

"This horizontality and specific visual language is something I have been working with for a while now and I have certainly continued that," Oganwu tells us. "But my concepts have also come from the materials and the exciting space that is Somerset House. So I've had a lot of fun playing around with various configurations."