

Africa Is Now 2015

This year, in the second edition of its Africa Is Now project, Design Indaba traces the contours of an uprising of grassroots creative collectives on the continent.

From Egypt to Senegal and Angola to Kenya, artists are organising themselves into groups driven by a common commitment to social activism, creative freedom and skills sharing.

Africa Is Now 2015 presents five creative collectives that embody a new generation of outspoken, creative polymaths. Each embodies a node of creative energy in the North, South, East and West of the African continent:

- Darb 1718 (Egypt)
- Les Petites Pierres (Senegal)
- Beyond Entropy Africa and Colectivo Pés Descalços (Angola)
- The Nest (Kenya)

They are multi-disciplinary groups of musicians, filmmakers, writers and designers, who are not waiting for government or foreign support to come to their aid. They are doing what they can with their innate creativity and the resources they have to initiate projects, commission work, broaden their skills and promote the power of art and design.



Their members are cosmopolitan and outward-looking, defying repressive legislation even if it means state harassment. Each collective has its own creative proclivity but what binds them all is a spirit of independence and the desire to make their craft matter to everyday life in their community.

These collectives have formed outside of the traditional networks of government-funded programmes, national festivals, museums and academic institutions. They embrace newer kinds of expression such as street and performance art, comics, music videos and fashion films, and find an audience through informal channels such as pop-up markets, street festivals and social media.

Africa Is Now 2015 includes a special feature exhibition at Design Indaba Expo that presents a curated selection of creative projects by these groups. Representatives from each group will share their stories in discussions at the Expo's Events Arena and present their work on stage at Design Indaba Conference.

Darb 1718 is a Cairo-based arts and culture centre that promotes Egypt's burgeoning contemporary art movement. It supports, cultivates and sustains the art scene through educational workshops, exhibitions, concerts, festivals, independent film screenings and arts activities. Darb 1718 provides local artists with opportunities for international exposure and invites foreign artists to experience Egyptian culture and share their knowledge. Anchored in its surrounding neighbourhood of Fustat, rife with poverty and unemployment, the centre engages the local community through outreach programmes.

The Nest is a multidisciplinary art space that describes itself as the "home of Nairobi's alternative art thinkers". Its Chico Leco programme facilitates artistic collaborations and interventions such as fashion films with Kenyan designers, stylists, photographers and directors. The HEVA project helps creative ventures in East Africa to achieve meaningful commercialisation by providing essential business skills and pragmatic action-oriented training. The Nest's full-length narrative film depicting gay life in Kenya, "*Stories of Our Lives*", received worldwide acclaim when it debuted at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2014.



Beyond Entropy Africa is an Angolan architecture agency that conducts in-depth research into the city of Luanda's urban fabric - in particular, its "musseques" (informal settlements). The agency has made a series of bold proposals that argue for a response to urban development in Africa that is in keeping with everyday people's lived realities. It is the African arm of the larger network of Beyond Entropy, whose interests stretch across the globe to areas of territorial crisis.

Colectivo Pés Descalços (Portuguese for the "Barefoot Collective") is a nascent arts and culture collective, also based in Luanda, that develops and promotes cultural and educational projects. Working across disciplines, it provides a forum for artists to learn from each other, holds panel discussions and connects locals to resources and opportunities in the art world in Africa and further afield.

Les Petites Pierres is a large group of visual and performance artists who are ushering in a new wave of Senegalese creativity. Its members see the city of Dakar as a "space of conviviality" - the stage, canvas and meeting place for artists of different backgrounds to make their work as accessible as possible to everyday citizens. The group's name - meaning "the small stones" - alludes to its activist stance of using creativity "to change the world little by little, stone by stone; everyone is invited to contribute to build a common building."

These five groups are examples of a wider movement of collectives that includes: Morocco's L'Appartement 22, which promotes art in the country's capital, Rabat, through exhibitions, artist residencies and other projects; Raw Materials Company, a centre for art, knowledge and society in Dakar, Senegal; The Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos, a platform

for the development of contemporary visual arts and culture in Nigeria; PICHA, an art centre in Lubumbashi, DRC that supports musicians, artists and writers; Doual'art in Cameroon, which invites visual artists, architects and designers to create public installations; and Kenya's PAWA254, which harnesses creativity to foster social change

Visit the Africa Is Now exhibition on the Expo floor to meet the artists and see the work produced by these do-it-yourself creative collectives.

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