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The Best Booths at Marrakech's 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair

BY SARAH BELMONT

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The scene at the 1-54 Contemporary Art Fair in Marrakech.

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The 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair's Morocco edition is back. As usual, the fair is being held at the prestigious Marrakech's Mamounia hotel, but for the first time, it is also taking place at DADA, a multidisciplinary art space that is currently mid-renovation. The

hope, with this new location in the heart of the historical Medina quarter, is to draw a younger crowd. “We may attract even more people,” said founding director Touria El Glaoui.

The fair’s fifth iteration launched yesterday and will close on February 11. Some 27 exhibitors are participating. Fourteen are from the African continent, and eight are based in Morocco—twice as many as last year. Many have brought not one, not two, but three artists, as if it were this year’s lucky number. Among those artists, many work produce textiles, adding to a centuries-long tradition in Morocco.

Below, a look at seven of the best offerings at 1-54.

Gallery 1957

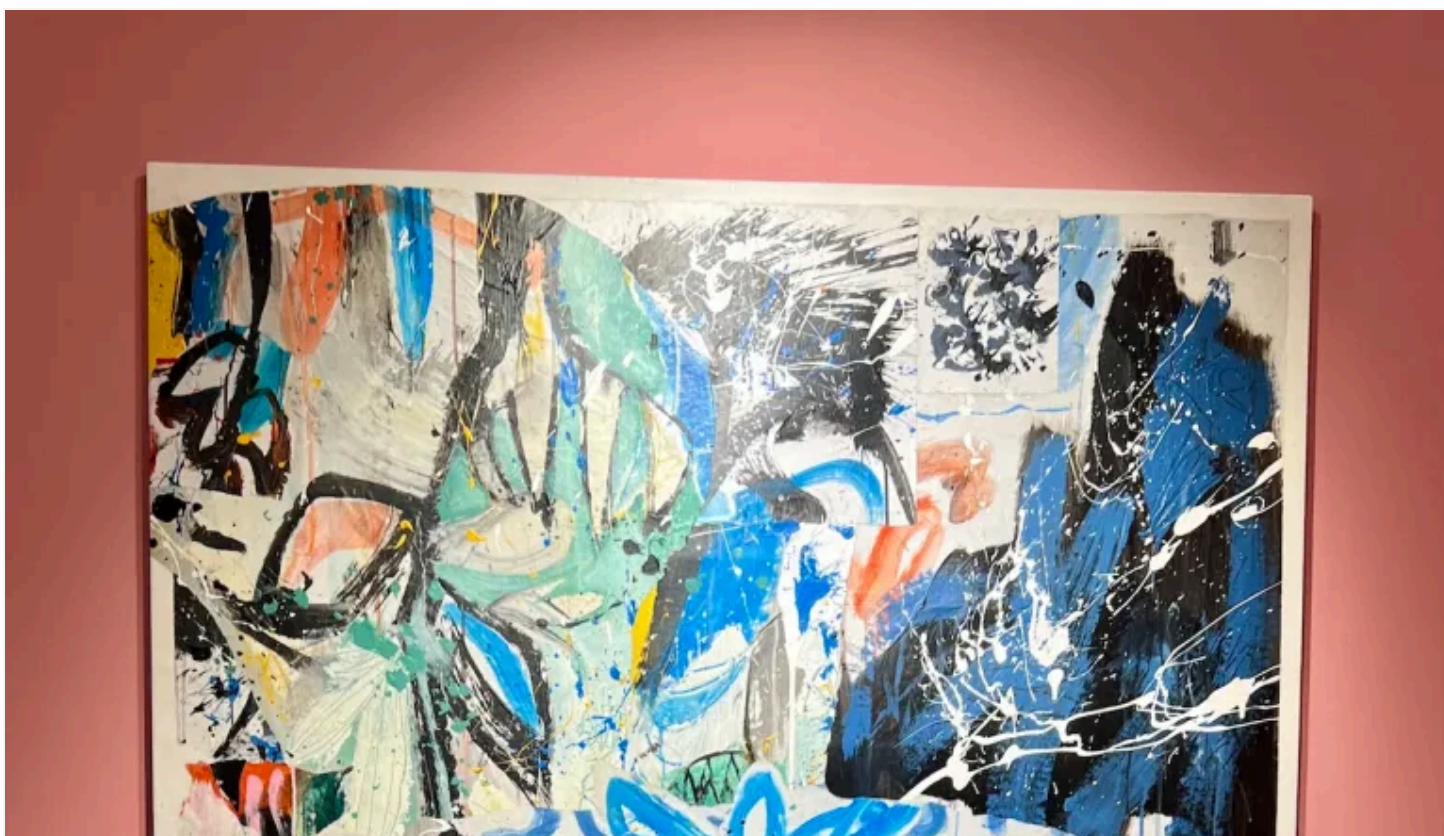


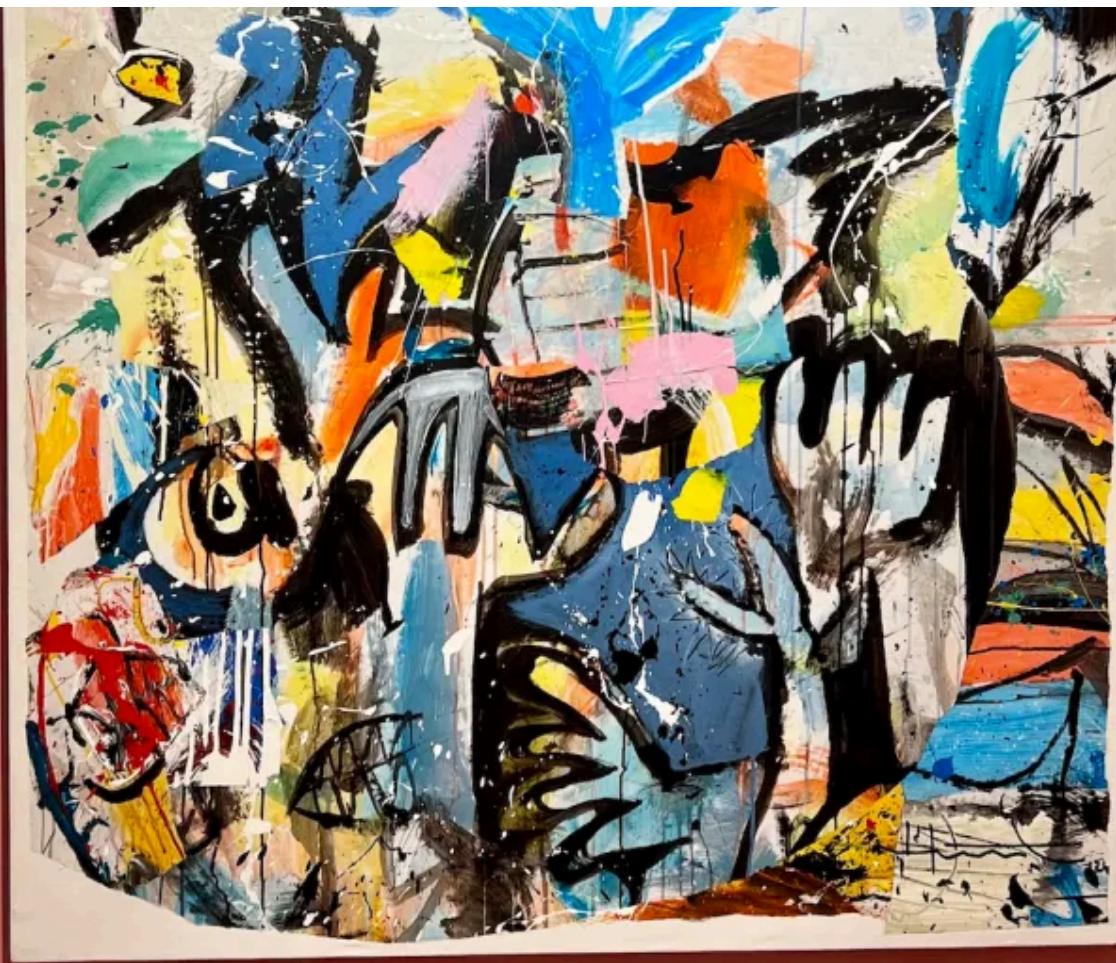
Work by Amoako Bofo at Gallery 1957's booth.

Photo : Sarah Belmont for ARTnews

Gallery 1957 (<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/market/gallery-1957-marwan-zakhem-ghana-art-scene-1234663790/>), whose name refers to the year when Ghana declared independence, has one of the first booths one sees upon entering the fair. One of the three artists included is Zanele Muholi, who is showing photographic self-portraits in which the artist appears in the nude. These are being shown alongside three captivating portraits of Black figures by Amoako Bofofo, the fast-rising Ghanaian painter known for applying his materials with his fingers. There also textiles by Mawuena Benissan, a young artist born in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, and raised in the United States. Benissan draws inspiration from the history of royal umbrellas, which are meant to protect monarchs from the sun, to demonstrate their power. Her embroideries on velvet are made in collaboration with the same artisans that craft those symbolic umbrellas in the Kumasi region.

Jean-Marc Hunt at 193 Gallery





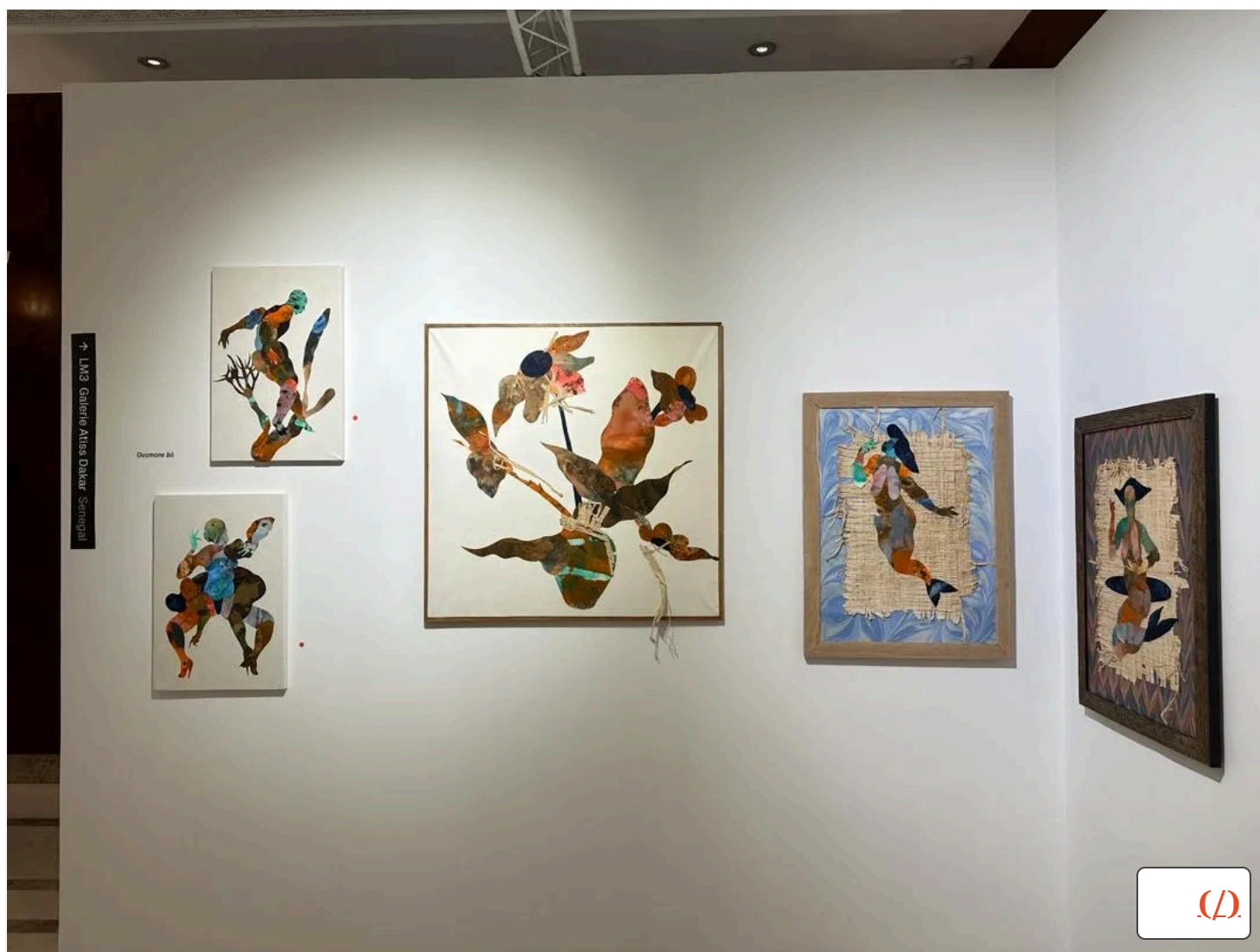
Work by Jean-Marc Hunt at 193 Gallery's booth.

Photo : Sarah Belmont for ARTnews

Mary-Lou Ngwe-Secke, head of curation at the Paris-based 193 gallery, praised 1-54's Marrakech fair for its small size, which "allows a certain proximity with artists and collectors," she said. This year, in an attempt to reach them, Secke has organized a presentation called "The Moment After," which features three Caribbean artists who explore creolization of the world, or the means by which various cultures blend. "Why the Caribbean art scene? Simply to draw more attention to it," Secke said.

In addition to the Bahamian artist April Bey's figurative tapestries and the Haitian artist Adler Guerrier's landscape collages, there is work by French painter Jean-Marc Hunt, who showed in the 2019 Venice Biennale. He has been living in Guadeloupe for the past 15 years, and draws in black on colorful backgrounds that look as tormented as they are distorted. His canvases are where his memory of French streets and his current experience of Guadeloupean gardens meet. These are works that embody the zigs and zags of history, with drips of paint and letters that refer to his beginnings as a graffiti artist.

Ousmane Bâ and Ngimbi Bakambana at Galerie Atiss Dakar



Work by Ousmane Bâ at Galerie Atiss Dakar's booth.

Photo : Courtesy Galerie 38

Galerie Atiss Dakar, the oldest gallery in Senegal, was founded in 1996 by Aissa Dione, who started off as an artist herself and therefore understands the implications of being one. Dione has never taken part in 1-54 Marrakech before, but after visiting the fair a couple times, she thought it was time she did.

For her Moroccan debut, she has brought the young French artist Ousmane Bâ, who moved to Tokyo to slow down and find peace. His collages consist of Japanese papers painted with mineral pigments and cut to form human figures, as well as papyrus pieces woven by Senegalese women. There is something soothing about those tie-dye bodies, which appear

to float, as though they were suspended in time.

Next to Bâ's work, there are two paintings by Kinshasa-born artist Ngimbi Bakambana Luve from a four-piece series titled "Senghorian Interiors." A blue composition depicts the room of Léopold Sédar Senghor's son, who died in a car crash. One in yellow shows where the Senegalese politician and poet, used to sleep. "The idea was to explore through my painting the syncretism and diversity that Senghor sang about in his poems," said Bakambana Luve. "I wanted to bring objects of his daily life together through my painting."

Sheila Fuseini at the African Art Hub

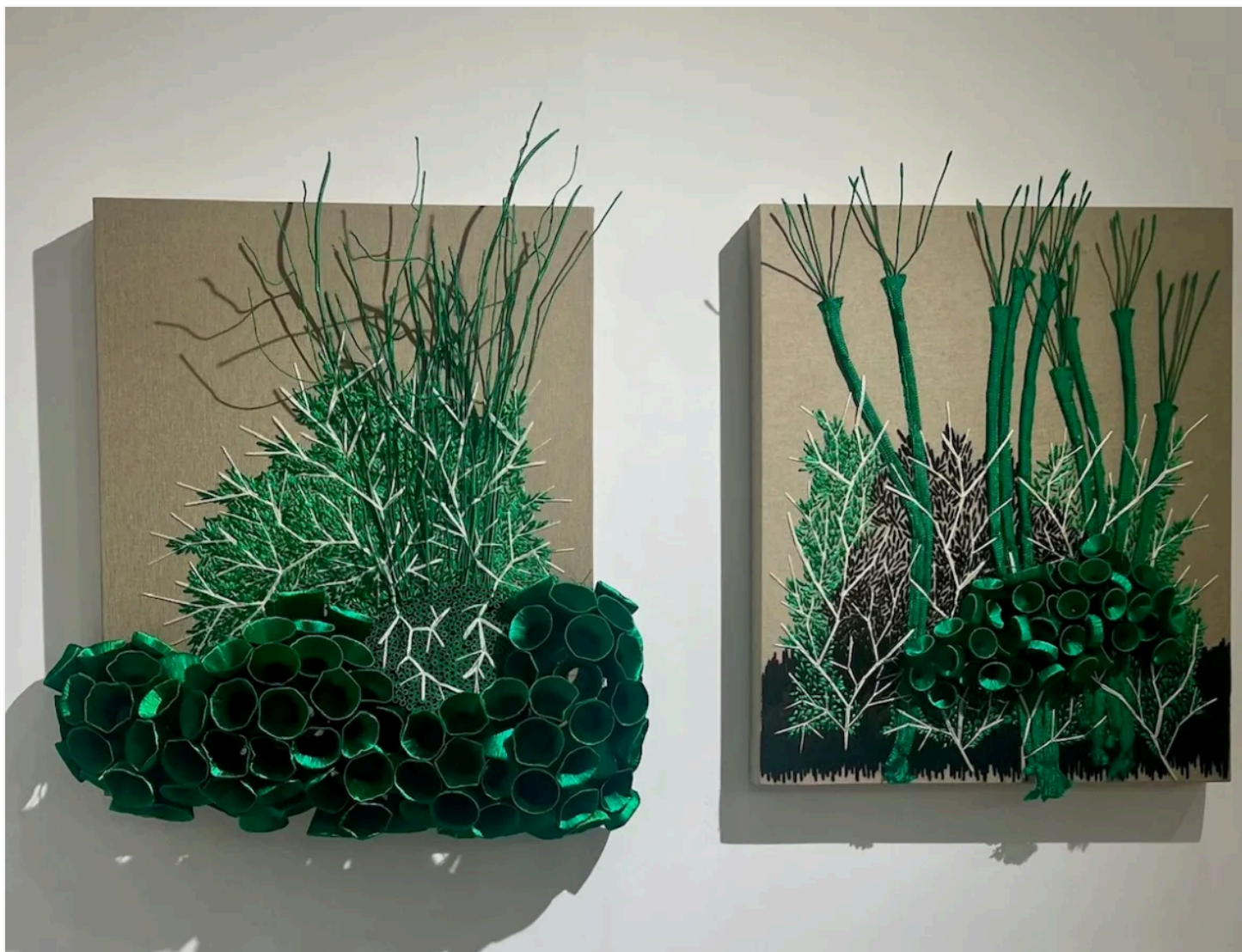


Work by Sheila Fuseini at the African Art Hub's booth.

Photo : Courtesy the African Art Hub

It is this UK-based online platform's first time in Marrakech. The platform relies on a team of ambassadors to scout new African talents, and as such, a fair like 1-54 is an opportunity to connect its 14 artists with collectors. TAAH has brought works by Ghanaian painter Sheila Fuseini, whose compositions are made of leather scraps. "I resorted to the same colors I did when I was working with acrylic paint back in art school," at the Kwame Nkrumah University of science and Technology," she said. "As for collage, I have shifted toward this technique, because for me, it has always been about putting pieces back together."

Ghizlane Sahli at Galerie Christophe Person



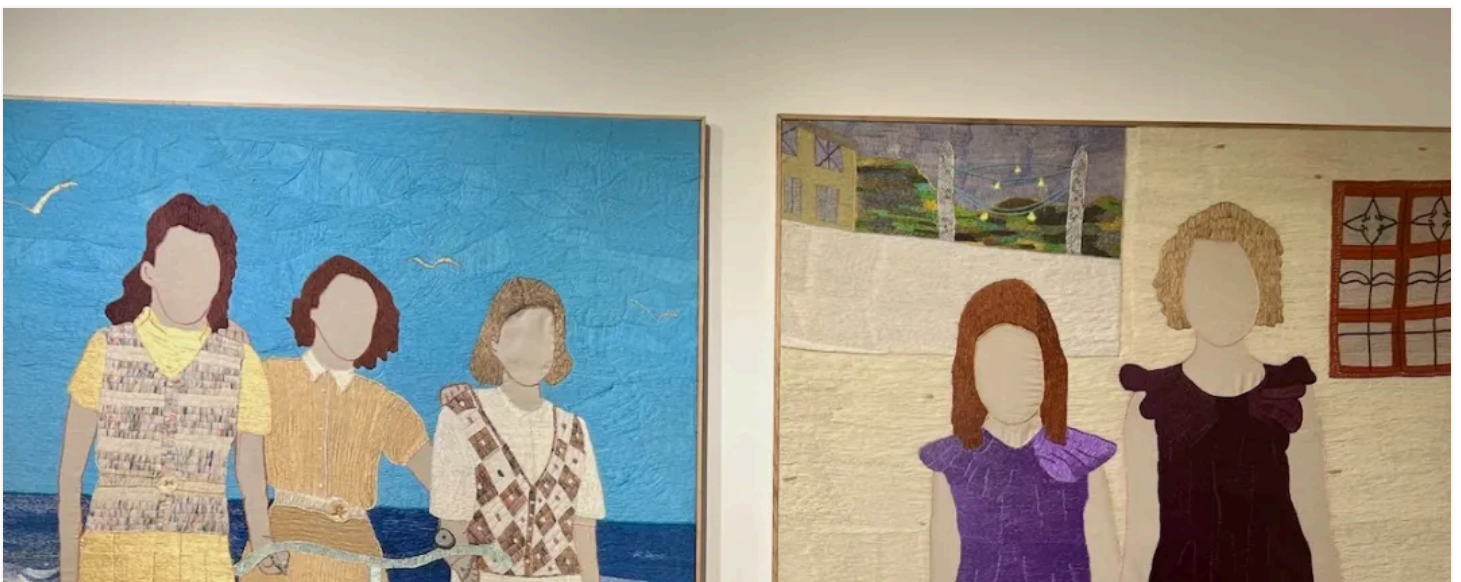


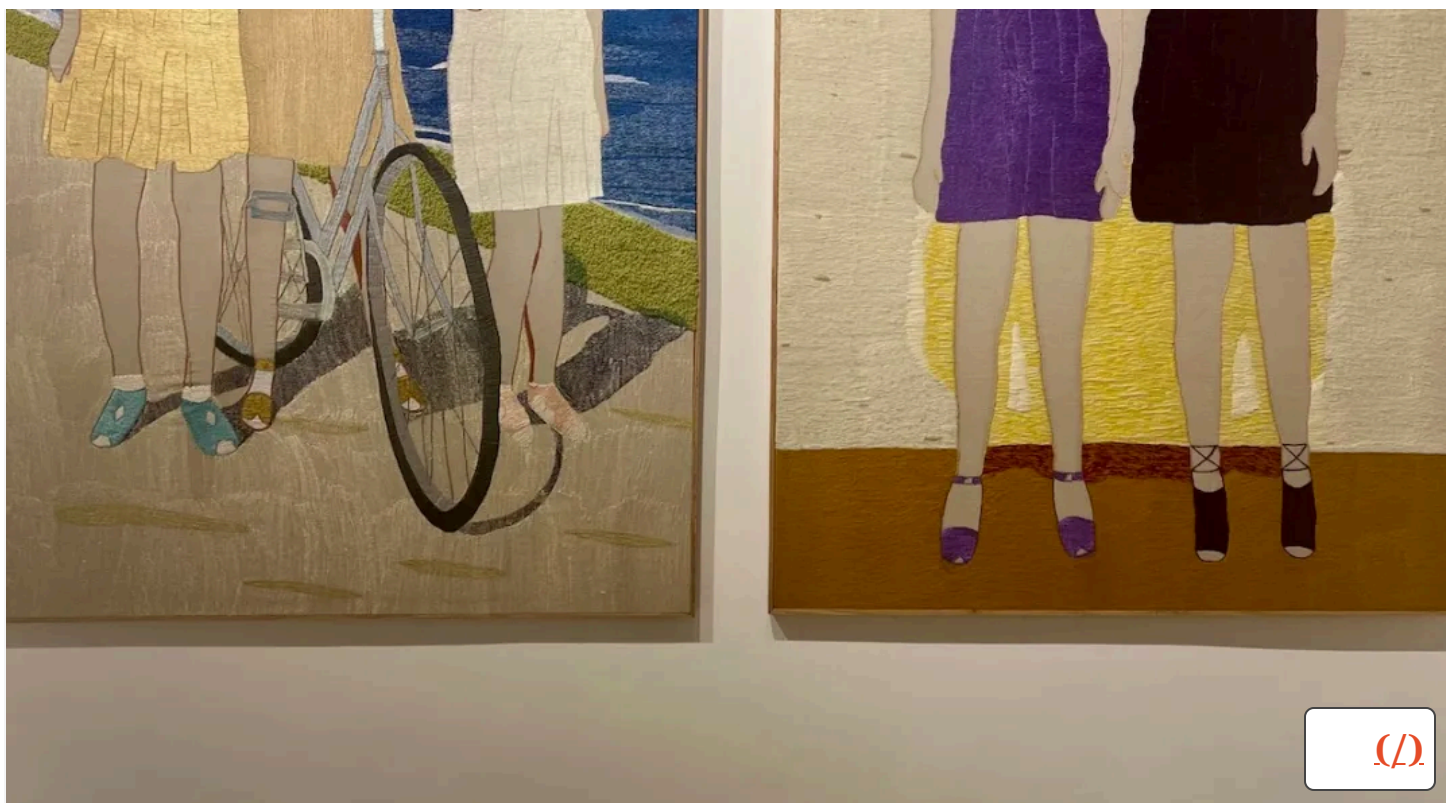
Work by Ghizlane Sahli at Galerie Christophe Person's booth.

Photo : Sarah Belmont for ARTnews

Paris's Galerie Christophe Person, another first-time participant in 1-54's Marrakech fair, has devoted a solo presentation to Ghizlane Sahli, an artist based in the Moroccan city whose work typically explores the female body and mind. The works here, created especially for the fair, are part of her ongoing series "And There Was Sap...", whose pieces are mostly green, a color meant to symbolize hope. Sahli's embroideries on rough linen canvas depict bits and pieces of landscapes. She has made roots and stems out of pieces of pipes and iron threads wrapped in wool or silk. Some were stitched to the canvas; others stick out of the frame. "By shifting from women's sap to nature's, I am not even sure if I have zoomed out or zoomed into my primary subject," she said. "They are part of a whole. What is intimate can be universal."

Margaux Derhy at Revie Projects





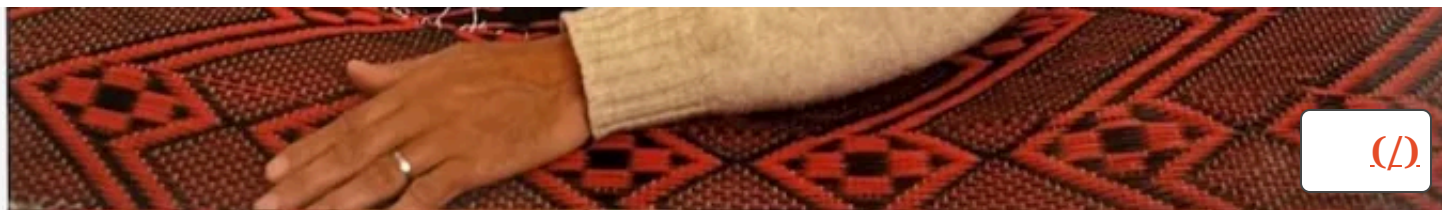
Work by Margaux Derhy at Revie Projects's booth.

Photo : Sarah Belmont for ARTnews

Revie Projects is a multipurpose curatorial platform based in Montrouge, near Paris, that doesn't have a formal exhibition space yet, but whose production studios are open on a regular basis. Among the artists that they are showing at DADA is textile virtuoso Margaux Derhy. Born to a French mother and a Moroccan father, Margaux Derhy, was primarily trained as a painter at London's Central Saint Martins and Royal College of Art before turning to embroidery in 2017, during a residency in Cape Town. In Morocco, where she lives part-time, she founded a studio with seven single women who now help her produce larger pieces that would otherwise take years to achieve working alone. All of these pieces are inspired by family pictures, but the faces are devoid of features. Derhy, who sees those blanks as "zones of silence," also tells the stories of her collaborators by mixing in the traditional stitches from which they came. "In the 45-meter embroidery installation on view at the Jaal Riad resort, I wanted to explore even more the untold stories of those women who profoundly influenced both my artistic journey and personal life," said Derhy, who also features in a group show curated by Achraf Remok at the Izza hotel.

Hicham Benhoud at Katharina Maria Raab





Work by Hicham Benohoud at Katharina Maria Raab's booth.

Katharina Maria Raab returns to 1-54 with new works by Moroccan photographer Hicham Benohoud, whose practice is rooted in Marrakech. After perfecting his self-portrait techniques, the Moroccan photographer has opened up to new models and media. For his series “THE HOLE,” he convinced residents from Marrakech’s Medina district to let him knock holes in their walls, floors, or ceilings, and to pose for him with their heads, their hands, or their feet popping out of those improbable openings. There is a spontaneity to Benohoud’s photographs. Especially because none have been retouched, they hint at the surreal and the uncanny elements that are part of everyday life.



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