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Integration difficulties in the Western art market for contemporary Afro diasporic artists.

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Master in Art Markets

Supervisor:
PhD. Luís Urbano de Oliveira Afonso, Senior Associate Professor,
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SOCIOLOGIA
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

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History Department

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A Vanessa, alleata di vita e sorella.

Ai miei genitori, sempre.

Abstract

This thesis explores the complexities surrounding contemporary African diaspora art, focusing on systemic barriers and evolving dynamics within the Western art market. Aiming to uncover the challenges that Afro-descendant and diasporic artists face when engaging with the Western art industry, the research adopts a multidisciplinary approach that combines theoretical analysis with case studies.

The examination begins by defining "African diaspora art" and delves into the tension between categorization and the broader significance of these labels, highlighting the nuances of identity, culture, and African heritage in a global and historical context. Subsequently, the research analyses the reasons behind the recent surge in interest that the art market has shown towards Afro-descendant and diasporic artists.

As the study progresses, it investigates why these artists still encounter difficulties in navigating the Western art world, despite the growing interest in their work. Through an analysis of key figures in the art market and their ethnic composition, the thesis critically assesses how racism and whiteness predominance shape the art industry. It also highlights how, after decades of stagnation, the situation is now changing for the better.

The exploration culminates with a focus on Portugal. After a historical overview of the country's colonial past and its consequences, it examines initiatives like HANGAR, a Lisbon-based arts centre fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration for artists from the South Globe, especially from the African diaspora. This highlights the importance of spaces that encourage authentic artistic interaction without perpetuating hegemonic narratives, but rather striving for the genuine inclusion of such artists.

Keywords: Contemporary African diaspora art, Western art market, Afro-descendant artists, Afro-diasporic artists, South Globe, Hangar

Resumo

Esta dissertação investiga as complexidades da arte contemporânea da diáspora africana, focando nas barreiras sistêmicas e nas dinâmicas em transformação no mercado de arte ocidental. O objetivo é revelar os desafios enfrentados por artistas afrodescendentes e da diáspora ao se inserirem na indústria da arte ocidental, adotando uma abordagem multidisciplinar que combina análise teórica com estudos de caso.

O estudo começa definindo "arte da diáspora africana" e explora a tensão entre a categorização e o significado mais amplo dessas classificações, destacando as nuances de identidade, cultura e herança africana em um contexto global e histórico. Em seguida, a dissertação analisa os fatores que explicam o recente aumento de interesse do mercado de arte por esses artistas.

A pesquisa analisa os fatores que explicam o aumento recente de interesse do mercado de arte por artistas afrodescendentes, e por que, apesar do reconhecimento crescente, esses artistas ainda enfrentam dificuldades no mundo da arte ocidental. Através da análise das principais figuras de mercado e sua composição étnica, a dissertação avalia como o racismo e a predominância branca ainda influenciam o setor, observando que essa situação está começando a mudar.

Por fim, a investigação foca no contexto português, refletindo sobre o passado colonial do país e suas consequências sociais e culturais. Analisa iniciativas como o HANGAR, centro de arte em Lisboa que promove a colaboração interdisciplinar para artistas do Sul Global e da diáspora africana, destacando a importância de espaços que fomentam uma interação artística inclusiva, sem perpetuar narrativas hegemônicas.

Palavras-chaves: Arte contemporânea da diáspora africana, Mercado da arte ocidental, Artistas afro-descendentes, Artistas afro-diasporicos, Sul Global, Hangar

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Introduction

From a macroeconomic perspective, a market is defined as the meeting point between the demand and supply of a particular good. Each market is characterized by a specific commodity that serves as the object of exchange. Nearly anything can be traded, including art. However, when considering the art market, it is crucial to acknowledge that the goods at the core of these transactions are unique, as are the motivations driving participants within this market. Beyond purely aesthetic reasons, the possession of an artwork serves as a status symbol, fulfilling desires for belonging, esteem, and self-actualization, while simultaneously enhancing the social prestige of its owners. Artworks are considered nearly unique commodities due to their rarity and irreproducibility, factors that often elevate their value far beyond the mere craftsmanship involved in their creation. This exchange value, so detached from the materiality of the artistic product, renders art desirable not only as a cultural asset but also as a safe investment capable of generating profits.

However, analysing the art market offers insights that transcend these economic aspects, revealing dynamics that are also social, cultural, and political. Art, as a tradable good, carries messages and legacies that reflect broader societal contexts, transmitted through the work of the market's key actors—the artists. Understanding the contemporary art market and observing its internal phenomena allows us to grasp the cultural, social, and economic significance of art in today's world. Examining who enters or exits the market, which works are most in demand, and which artists gain prominence provides valuable insights into the changes society is undergoing, how aesthetics are evolving, and the shifting centres of cultural and economic power.

Over the past two decades, a striking trend has emerged within the art world: the rise of contemporary African art. This shift is driven by several historical events, including the 20th-century Black art movements led by African Americans that sought to elevate Black culture, and more recently, the Black Lives Matter movement, which confronts issues of anti-Black prejudice and pushes for greater representation of the Black community in the art industry. As a result, curatorial attention has increasingly turned towards the "African scene" and its artists. This trend encompasses not only artists born and working on the African continent but

also the broader Afro-diasporic community—Afro-Europeans, African Americans, and Afropolitans—individuals who embody African cultural heritage in a cosmopolitan context. This burgeoning curatorial interest has been swiftly absorbed by the art market, which in the last two decades has shown a marked interest in the works of African, Afro-descendant, and diasporic artists, leading to increased demand and a significant rise in their market value.

The impetus for analysing this growing phenomenon and its implications stems from a desire to understand the dynamics of this specific market niche, as well as the reasons behind its emergence. It is rare to witness such a visible and rapid evolution in market attention towards certain artists and themes, allowing scholars to trace these developments in real time. However, the art and artists examined here have long been excluded from the Western art market, which for decades remained an exclusive domain of the Global North. Analysing this newfound openness towards the Global South and its cultural output provides a critical opportunity to assess how far integration has progressed and whether issues such as racism and discrimination persist, despite the commercial interest shown in these artists.

Observation and critique become a social imperative when power intersects with marginalized voices, and this thesis seeks to critically examine the integration of Afro-diasporic artists within the Western art market. It aims to explore whether the current surge of interest represents a genuine shift towards inclusivity or merely a temporary trend within a historically exclusive industry. By analysing the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of this evolving market, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the art world's ongoing transformation and the challenges that remain.

Chapter 1

Contemporary African diaspora art, an increased interest

1. An attempt of definition of contemporary African diaspora art

Defining contemporary African diaspora art entails navigating a complex terrain, fraught with dichotomies and paradoxes. While definitions strive to illuminate the essence of the subject by delineating its characteristics and fundamental aspects, they simultaneously risk oversimplification and categorization[1]. Defining often entails grouping disparate entities under a single label, thereby glossing over nuances, differences, and inherent connotations, ultimately distilling the multifaceted nature of the subject for convenience.

This caveat is paramount when engaging with terms such as *Afro-descendent art* and *African diaspora art*, necessitating not only correct usage but also an awareness of their inherent limitations. It is noteworthy that clear, precise definitions of these terms are scarce, both online and elsewhere. Criticisms, however, abound, underscoring the intricacies inherent in the discourse. Jacqueline Francis, Associate Professor and Chair of the Graduate Program in Visual & Critical Studies at California College of the Arts, in her work *The Being and Becoming of African Diaspora Art*, defines African diaspora art as "*a generic label, often summoned to broadly situate modern and contemporary artwork by people of African descent […] It is a valued and celebrated epistemological construct; it is also a social formation driven by doubts about racial and national belonging and the desire for transformative signification and organizing logics of difference*" (Francis, 2013), thus highlighting the fluidity of such expressions and the ensuing challenges in their application. On one hand, the risk of categorizing artworks based on the artist's origin or familial background may divert attention towards secondary aspects not directly related to the artwork itself, potentially foregrounding

[1] According to the definition contained in the Cambridge dictionary the word *define* means "say what the meaning of something, especially a word, is", but also "explain and describe the meaning and exact limits of something". Definition available at https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/define.

information that would be inconsequential for Western artists, such as ethnicity or skin color. On the other hand, however, such "geographical" classifications appear to stem from deeper, more complex reasons rooted in history, particularly within the pan-Africanist movement. From this perspective, the existence of the concepts of *Afro-descendant art* and *African diaspora art* is not constraining but rather reinforces a shared ideology and sentiment.

Given the imperative to comprehend these expressions in their entirety, both aspects will be considered herein, attempting to provide a definition conducive to framing the subject matter of this work, with the caveat of not delineating an immutable perimeter. The objective, therefore, is to engage in critical reflection on the definition, its various layers, and its limitations, endeavoring to raise questions and underscore the inherent complexity of the terms themselves. To achieve this end, a historical overview will be initiated, aimed at examining the centuries-old events from which these expressions derive their roots.

1.1 The African diasporas and their impacts: an overview

The terms *Afro-descendant art* and *African diaspora art* each incorporate a geographical indication, albeit in different forms. The former (Afro/African) explicitly refers the African continent, while the latter, conveyed through the words "descendant" and "diaspora", alludes not to a specific location but rather to a spatial displacement. Specifically, the etymology of the word *diaspora* derives from the ancient Greek verb διασπείρω, meaning to scatter or disperse. Historically, this term was first utilized in reference to the Jewish diaspora, which commenced around the 8th to 6th centuries BCE with the conquest of ancient Jewish kingdoms and the subsequent deportation of their populations by the Assyrians and Babylonians, mainly as slaves. This exile was further compounded by the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, prompting the Israelites to abandon their inhabited lands and migrate to other territories (Ages, 1973).

In contemporary usage, the term *diaspora* generally denotes the dispersion or exile of peoples who leave their places of origin, scattering across various parts of

the world[2]. Diasporas can arise from voluntary or involuntary circumstances: in the former case, the emphasis lies not so much on dispersion as on migration, driven, for example, by the pursuit of better job opportunities or the need for increased life security. This phenomenon has been evident for decades between the Caribbean region and the United States, where the so-called Caribbean diaspora has seen the movement of 4.6 million individuals from the Caribbean to the United States in search of improved working conditions (Fauriol & Mowla, 2021). Involuntary diasporas, on the other hand, occur due to external forces beyond the control of the affected populations, who typically lack agency over the situation. This second type of dispersion can stem from various factors; notably, in recent times, we have witnessed a growing involuntary diaspora resulting from continually changing climatic conditions, compelling entire populations, particularly in the Southern Hemisphere, to abandon their territories due to the transformation into inhospitable environments.

1.1.1. The historical diasporas

Undoubtedly, one of the most historically significant and violent diasporas has been the African diaspora. Tracing the contours of this phenomenon is no simple task, considering not only its vast scale but also its deep roots in a far-from-recent past. An "official" definition of African diaspora, quite broad in scope, has been provided by the African Union as "*Consisting of people of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union*"[3]. Another notable attempt to describe the African diaspora was made by the esteemed historian Joseph Harris, who characterized it as "*the global dispersion (voluntary and involuntary) of Africans throughout history; the*

[2] According to the definition contained in the Cambridge dictionary the word *diaspora* means "the scattering of people from their original country to other places" and indicates "a group of people who spread from one original country to other countries, or the act of spreading in this way". The definition is available at https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/diaspora.

[3] The definition is available at https://au.int/en/diaspora-division#:~:text=The%20African%20Union%20defines%20the,constitutive%20act%20declares%20that%20it.

emergence of a cultural identity abroad based on origin and social condition; and the psychological or physical return to the homeland, Africa. Thus viewed, the African diaspora assumes the character of a dynamic, continuous, and complex phenomenon stretching across time, geography, class, and gender" (Harris, 1993). In another contribution, the same author described the African diaspora as "*a triadic relationship linking a dispersed group of people to the homeland, Africa, and their host or adopted countries*" (Harris, 1996). The different shades of such defining attempts encapsulate a complexity that is often overlooked.

What often occurs simplistically and erroneously is the association of the African diaspora with a singular phenomenon, namely the transatlantic slave trade. This term mainly refers to the trade of individuals enslaved by European colonialist countries and transported by force from West Africa to regions such as Brazil, the Caribbean, Spanish America, and North America, from the late 15th century onwards (Eltis & Richardson, 2023). In reality, the diasporas emanating from the African continent have been numerous, varied in nature, and extensive. Neglecting, for instance, the fact that Africans, like all ancient peoples, were travelers, merchants, and navigators long before the imposition of European white predominance on the continent would amount to denying a historical truth. The risk would be to perpetuate extremely dangerous stereotypes and myths, such as the notion that African peoples are inherently predisposed to slavery because they are unable to develop complex and well-structured societies and economies, being deemed inferior and uncivilized (Harris, 1996). Although slave trade is documented before (and during) European presence in Africa, namely through Trans-Saharan trade and maritime Swahili trade, it is essential to remember that the initial migrations that characterized the continent were voluntary and free, involving movements towards Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. It is precisely voluntariness that distinguishes these migrations from subsequent diasporas, whose trajectories are depicted in the map below.

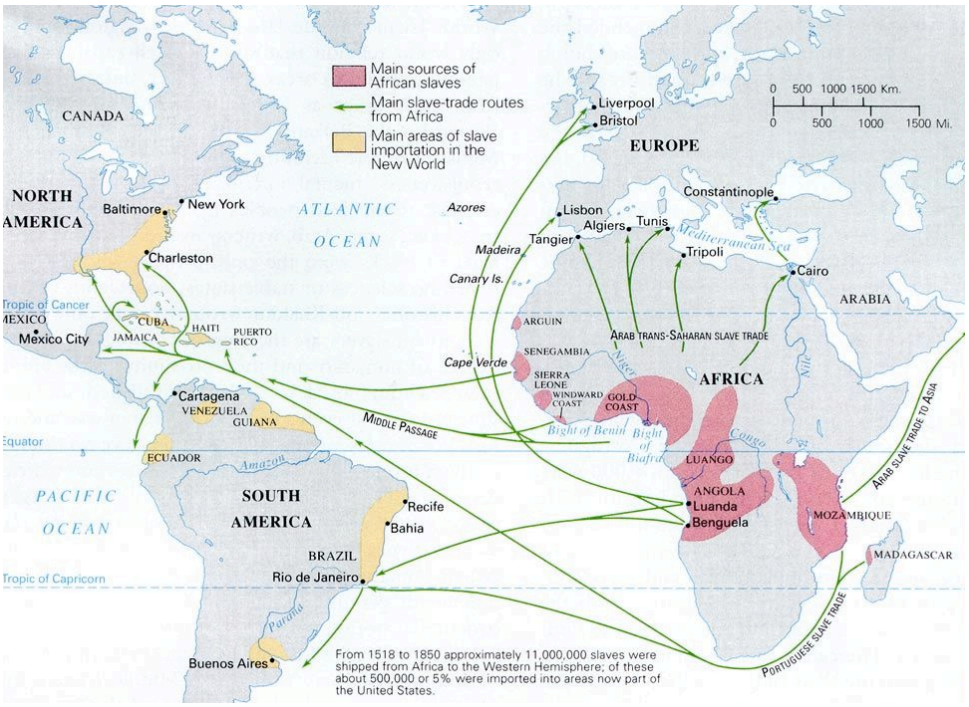

Fig. 1 African diaspora map. Source
https://scalar.chapman.edu/scalar/beginagain/the-african-diaspora-in-latin-america

Beginning in the 7th century with the Islamic conquest of North Africa, individuals subjected to enslavement began to be exported from their territories, primarily from Central and Eastern Africa, to the Middle East, the Indian Ocean, and North Africa. These routes, aimed primarily at providing labor to Arab countries, are referred to as the Eastern or Arab slave trade and the Trans-Saharan trade. While it is impossible to provide precise data due to the temporal and spatial extent of the phenomenon and the lack of comprehensive documentation, historians assert that from the 7th to the 19th century, these trades saw the exportation of a number of individuals ranging from 14 to 17 million (Gakunzi, 2018).

However, it was not these trades that globalized the presence of Africans, but rather what Michael Gomez has termed as the "*quintessential moment of transfiguration, the height of human alienation, and disorientation of a group of people unlike any other in history*" (Gomez, 2005), namely the transatlantic slave trade. This phenomenon, though more recent and thus shorter in duration compared to other slave trades, was characterized by unprecedented systematicity and violence. The commencement of these atrocities is often traced back to 1444 when a society dedicated to the slave trade from Africa was established in the town of Lagos, south of Portugal. Within four years, the exchange of goods and people

between Arguin, an island west of Mauritania, and Portugal became regularized, with enslaved individuals utilized in mines, construction, as servants, guards, concubines, and more. Subsequently, other countries also began to fuel the Mediterranean slave trade, notably Spain, the Netherlands, England, France, and Italy. However, it was with the introduction of sugar, coffee, and cotton plantations by the Portuguese in Madeira Island, Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe that the relationship between plantation economies and slave labor, the foundation and purpose of the transatlantic trade, began to emerge. In the 1520s, the first slave ships began to sail from these islands to Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, inaugurating the violent diaspora across the Atlantic that soon involved three continents. To comprehend the transatlantic slave trade in all its historical and social complexity, it must be viewed as part of a more comprehensive scheme implemented by colonial European countries, characterized by a triangular dynamic economically based on the trade route of merchant ships involving three territories and markets: Europe, West Africa, and the Americas. This triangular trade originated from the production of weapons, fabrics, tools, alcoholic beverages, and other goods in Europe, which were transported by ships to ports on the West African coast. There, these products were exchanged for enslaved individuals mainly originating from various territories in Central Africa, who were forcibly taken to the coast to be sold to European merchants. This exchange of goods for people marked the beginning of the second stage of this triangular trade, known as the Middle Passage. This term refers to the transatlantic voyage of slave ships, particularly destined for Brazil and the Caribbean, where slaves were employed in plantation cultivation. The products of this labor were then shipped to Europe and sold, completing this unhuman blood-stained triangle.

A comprehensive analysis of the transatlantic slave trade would require a separate study to be considered at least sufficiently exhaustive. However, what is noteworthy here is to understand the extent of the dispersal to which Africans were subjected. The Middle Passage, spanning nearly four centuries from the early 16th century to the mid-19th century, saw the transportation of of approximately 12.5 million of persons (Eltis and Richardson, 2023)[4]. Additionally, it is crucial to

[4] These numbers vary significantly according to different authors. Harris advances a much higher number, between 12 and 25 million persons (Harris, 1993).

account for the approximately 1.2 to 2.4 million slaves who perished during transportation under ominous conditions, as well as those who lost their lives in revolts and uprisings and during the so-called seasoning period, the period of "adaptation" to which slaves were subjected upon arrival overseas.

As previously emphasized, what unfortunately made the transatlantic trade infamous, when compared to other aforementioned trades, was the systematic nature in which it occurred, its numerical and territorial breadth, as well as the profound and dramatic impact still experienced by African societies today. These societies not only endured those atrocities, but also directly experienced the imposition of White supremacy and the consequent exploitation of human and material resources in the homeland during the colonial era, which began in the 19th century and formally ended only a few decades ago in the late 20th century. Over these centuries, European colonial powers conquered and colonized African territories, whose official partition occurred during the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, resulting in an unnatural and disastrous division of the continent. During this event, Western leaders allocated African territories among themselves, redesigning states and borders without consulting any representatives of the African peoples or considering the populations residing there. The outcome of this purely political and economic operation was further internal diaspora, leading to the separation of once-coexistent cultures and the forced coexistence of conflicting peoples.

1.1.2 The contemporary diaspora

The diasporas described so far are known as historical, as they did not occur in contemporary times. The African diasporas, however, are not limited to slave trade, but is a phenomenon still in existence, though generated by other driving forces. Especially since the 1950s-1960s, the African continent has experienced what is described as the *Postcolonial African Diaspora*, *Fourth Great Migration*, or the *New African Diaspora*, a contemporary diaspora characterized by constant growth and multi-directionality. These movements, as shown in the diagram below, occur particularly within the African continent itself, but also outside, mostly towards the United States, Europe and Asia, where they are increasingly growing. According to data collected by the United Nations, Africans who in 2024 can be called *migrants* are about 43 million. This number, however, is not complete, as it only considers

those people whose movements are in some way recorded. This means that irregular migration numbers are not included into this data, as does not the number who perish - almost 40,000 recorded deaths and disappearances on all African routes since 2014 (Williams, 2024). Likewise, UN world population projections, suggest that the population in Africa will continue to grow along the 21st century at a much higher pace than any other continent, creating additional migration pressions.

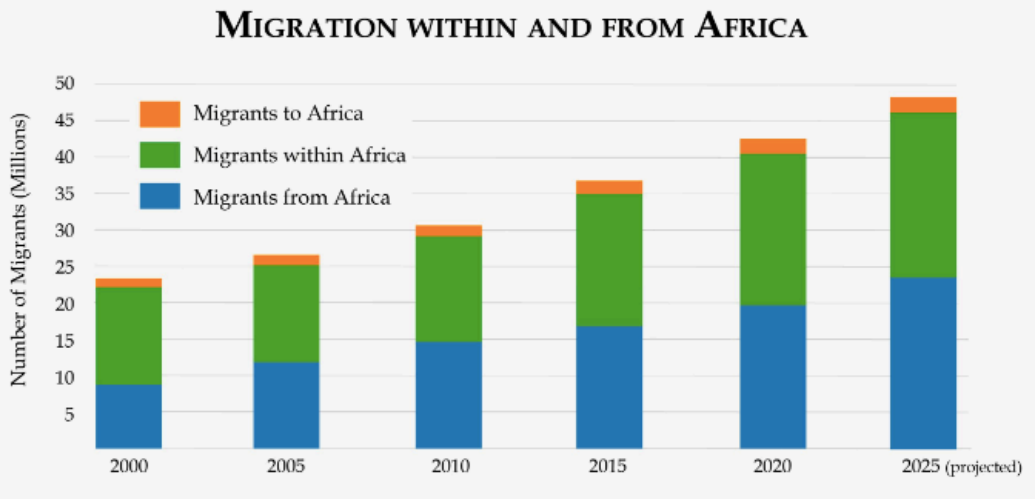

Fig. 2 Migration within and from Africa. Source: UN DESA

These movements can be traced back to four main reasons, the first of which undoubtedly has economic origins. Although the continent has experienced steady economic growth since the early 2000s, in fact, Africa continues to be the region with the lowest average per capita income in the world, where 35% of the population of the sub-Saharan region lives in poverty. This pushes the population to move inside and outside the continent in order to seek better job and life opportunities. This happens also because, and this is the second reason for moving, Africa is the youngest continent and whose population grows faster, which implies that it is also the territory that offers the greatest workforce. To this must be added the situations of conflict occurring within the continent itself that lead to the dispersion of thousands of people. In this sense Africa has marked the record of forcibly displaced population due to unresolved conflicts[5]. Finally, a last factor

[5] The outbreak of conflict between military factions in Sudan in 2023, for example, has generated an additional 6 million cross-border displacements. This adds to the population movements generated by conflicts in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic

causing migration is surely climate change, whose effects are felt particularly in the South Globe regions. In particular, climate change is predicted to be the driver of up to 10% of all African cross-border migration by mid-century. This is largely a result of more severe flooding, drought, and storms (Williams, 2024).

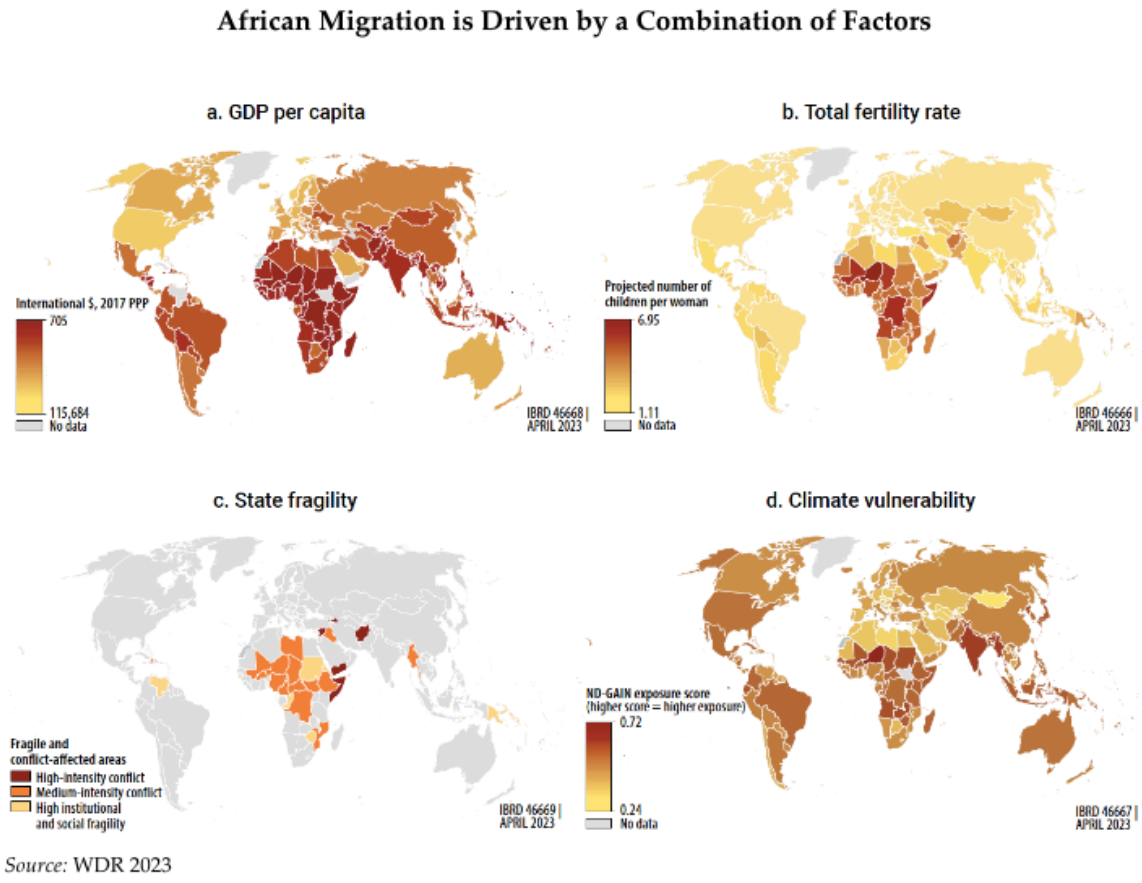

Fig. 3 Factors driving African migration. Source: WDR 2023

These migrations have multiple effects: from an economic point of view, who benefits are both the recipient countries, because they meet the needs of the labour force which are increasingly lacking, and the countries of origin, because those who move send money and material resources that contribute to the maintenance of their families of origin giving greater stability to fragile economies and thus ensuring the satisfaction of basic needs and education. In addition to this aspect, as will be said later, the cultural impact of these movements, particularly in the countries of destination, cannot be overlooked.

of the Congo, the Central African Republic, and Somalia, among others (Williams, 2024).

1.1.3 The sides effects of the diasporas

Briefly outlined the context and modalities in which the African diasporas took and are taking place, as well as the fact that it occurred in multiple directions, it is necessary to consider that when speaking of diasporas, as emphasized by Jaqueline Francis in a series of online lectures organized by the Museum of the African Diaspora of San Francisco[6], dispersion is never exclusively physical but always carries with it also a linguistic and cultural dispersion (Museum of the African Diaspora, 2021). Regardless of whether this happens voluntarily or involuntarily, in fact, such movements of peoples have consequently the coexistence in the same territory of various cultural and intellectual heritages that over time integrate with each other, mutually influencing, absorbing, and modifying themselves, thus giving rise to new cultural hybridizations. This phenomenon is called *transculturation* or *neoculturation* and can be described as a system of exchanges "*in which something is always given in return for what one receives, a system of give and take. It is a process in which both parts of the equation are modified, a process from which a new reality emerges, transformed and complex, a reality that is not a mechanical agglomeration of traits, nor even a mosaic, but a new phenomenon, original and independent*" (Malinowski, 1947).

Africans who have been forcibly dispersed around the world, as well as those who have moved and are still moving autonomously, have continued to speak their native languages and practice and transmit their cultural, religious, culinary, and artistic traditions in new territories. In doing so, they have maintained part of their identities and the memory of the homeland, but at the same time, they have adapted to the new societies, thus creating new mixtures and giving rise to communities such as the Afro-American or Afro-European one. It is evident that this phenomenon brings with it identity complexities and intrinsic contradictions that cannot be ignored. To refer to this sense of cultural split common to Afro-descendants, the sociologist, historian, and prominent leader of the Pan-Africanist movement W. E. B. Du Bois in the book *The Souls of Black Folk* (Du Bois, 1903) speaks of double consciousness. With this expression, he refers to that "*sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others*" (Du Bois, 1903), a common

[6] Museum of the African Diaspora's official website available at https://www.moadsf.org/.

feeling, in the specific case of many Afro-Americans, of ego-distonia or, as defined by the scholar, of *two-ness*, that is, of a perception of oneself as dual based on two or more cultural universes often in conflict with each other, and whose coexistence often results in inner conflict[7]. Inserting into this analysis, the historian Paul Gilroy has stated that *"[…] Talking about diaspora requires a mental exercise of understanding that one can exist in many places at once. That the place of one's existence and residency may be different from the place of origin. In this sense, genealogy and geography are to be understood in their tension*" (Gilroy & Eyene, 2008). Accepting, in fact, that one's family history and context derive from the impositions and violence perpetrated by the same society in which one has grown up implies both belonging and rejection of the same, generating an inner tension fraught with ambivalences.

1.2 African diaspora contemporary art, defining as political act and its critique

Starting from the difficulties generated by this irreconcilable sense of bifurcation, it is necessary to return to the main question, namely whether it is correct to use the expressions *Afro-descendant art* or *African diaspora art*. Doubts arise for two reasons: firstly, such expressions encapsulate all the bloody and violent history previously described, from the slave trade to colonialism. These terms could be perceived not only as painful but also as unjust and limiting, as they reduce such artistic production to Western history and its supremacy, highlighting a long chapter marked by impositions, exploitation, and uprooted roots. In addition to this, and this is the second reason for doubt, using such expressions there is a risk of reducing to the same label experiences that are distant and extremely diverse from each other,

[7] Du Bois states that "From the double life every American Negro must live, as a Negro and as an American, as swept on by the current of the nineteenth while yet struggling in the eddies of the fifteenth century, — from this must arise a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence. The worlds within and without the Veil of Color are changing, and changing rapidly, but not at the same rate, not in the same way; and this must produce a peculiar wrenching of the soul, a peculiar sense of doubt and bewilderment. Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism." (Du Bois, 1903).

nullifying or neglecting the complexities inherent in them and alienating Afro-descendants from full citizenship in their own countries of birth in Europe or America.

Analyzing the issue from a theoretical perspective, African diaspora art still struggles to find its place in art history, as it does not inherently arise as an artistic category, but is the result of anthropological studies focusing on the cultural mixtures resulting from the historical processes analyzed so far and their influence on the formation of modern and contemporary West (Thompson, 2011). In the 1920s, one of the first scholars to study the social, cultural, and artistic institutions among enslaved populations of African origin in the Americas, as well as their formation process, was the anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits. It was precisely two of his students, Roger Bastide and William Bascom, who in the 1950s began to examine in detail the Africanisms, i.e., the characteristics of African culture that can be traced through societal practices and institutions of the African diaspora in the Americas, with particular attention to artistic and religious expressions. At the same time, the artist and art historian James A. Porter began to further investigate in the work *The Trans-cultural Affinities of African Art* (Porter, 1958) the concept of *transculturation* or *neoculturation* mentioned earlier. Through the analysis of a series of both sacred and profane artistic expressions, Porter attempted to identify "*the 'striking African survivals' and their 'visual modifications' in the arts on both sides of the Western hemisphere*" (Thompson, 2011, p. 16), examining the impact and influence that different African artistic traditions had on the development of Western culture, looking for the first time at the mixtures between them and no longer at Africanisms as a separate bubble dropped into the overseas reality. It was thus that Porter was also the first to indicate the way for a theoretical development of African diaspora art in art history. From his writings, Thompson[8] wrote the book *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American art and philosophy* (Thompson,

[8] According to J. Francis, Thompson's work was one of the three pillars that led to the emergence and recognition of African diasporic art. In her already mentioned work *The being and becoming of African diaspora art,* in fact, Francis states that there are three "artistic, institutional, and scholarly interventions that laid out and advanced the terms of African diaspora art as a category: (i) a 1960s-era essay by art historian Robert Farris Thompson that organizes nineteenth century material culture under this heading (without naming it as such); (ii) David Hammons's moves to cultivate an audience for African diaspora art, from the 1970s onwards; and (iii) the founding of the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) in San Francisco in 2002" (Francis, 2013).

1983) where he developed the term and the consequent concept of the Black Atlantic, which refers "*to more than cultural fusion but captured as well how African streams of creativity transformed all sides of the Atlantic and the Pacific as well. It emphasized an expanded conceptual frame in which to examine the transformative global influence of African diasporic culture*" (Thompson, 2011, p. 16).

Thompson, probably influenced by the independence and post-colonial movements in Africa, the Caribbean, and South America in the late 1950s and 1960s, using this expression wants to emphasize not only the fusion and influence of diasporic cultures and art with and on those of the *host countries*, but also the unifying role of *Mother Africa*: in his vision, African diasporic cultures actually form a whole, despite being distant and diverse, as they share a common heritage plunged in black roots. In those years of struggle and multiculturalism, Thompson's theory became a political idea that further strengthened the Pan-Africanist movement, i.e., the ideology that encourages all Africans and Afro-descendants to conceive and fight as a single people, as only by sharing the same interests they can achieve an economic, social, and political strength such as to no longer fall into the trap of White supremacy (Adi, 2018)[9]. It was this passage that led to the recognition of African diaspora art as a separate artistic niche. Once the common denominator of diasporic art was identified, namely a multifaceted and shared heritage, it also found a classification and its space in art history. This idea then found further adjustments in broader contexts than just the artistic sector thanks to other scholars, who took care to analyze how, despite the existence of common roots, diasporic identities are not a certain and immutable fact based solely on a past that must be remembered and restored, but a process in continuous evolution, which changes and renews itself and precisely for this reason endowed with an existence independent of the only culture of origin. In this sense, the works of two intellectuals were particularly important: the first was that of Stuart Hall, who in the early 1990s emphasized how the nature of African diasporic cultures is inherently prone to continuous transformations, as it is a "*matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being*" (Hall, 1990). In the same years, Paul Gilroy became interested in

[9] See also the definition of "Pan-Africanism" in Brittanica available at https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pan-Africanism and also the definition provided by the Tate's glossary available at https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/pan-africanism.

the "*affinities and affiliations which link the blacks of the West to one of their adoptive, parental cultures: the intellectual heritage of the West since the Enlightenment*"(Gilroy, 1993). He further expanded and changed the scope of application of the concept of the Black Atlantic from the artistic to the economic and social aspects, arguing that the formation of modern Western culture has been and is still deeply connected and informed by diasporic cultures. According to Gilroy, the entire Western system and its history as we know it today, from the industrial revolution to capitalism, would not exist if it were not for the contribution of the diaspora and, in particular, of "*the most massive acculturational event in human history*" (Mintz & Prince, 1992), namely the transatlantic slave trade. For these reasons, "*in order to understand fully many categories of knowledge since the Enlightenment, whether ideals of freedom, citizenship, nationalism, nationality, property, capitalism, or the human, one must come to terms with how African diasporic peoples often embodied, expanded on, or evinced the limits of these concepts*" (Thompson, 2011, p. 21). Regarding specifically art, the scholar in his work states that since the Enlightenment Western notions of beauty, aesthetics, and artistic taste must be read considering the perspective of the Black Atlantic as they are built in relation to and often in opposition to it, that is, in contrast to what was perceived as "*other*" and different. From these theories, a series of studies developed between the 1990s and 2000s aimed at deepening these ideas by examining not only African diaspora art but also modern American and European art, highlighting their frequent references to African art. In the following years up to the present day, the various themes and expressive forms used in the broad context of contemporary diasporic art have become the subject of separate studies, thus reinforcing the need to conceive it as a specific branch of art history, albeit encountering many difficulties in this process. Among these emerge the frequent overlaps and mixtures between African diaspora art and African art both at the research level, in fact, it is much more difficult to find contributions exclusively related to African diaspora art, and at the professional level[10].

[10] In his work Thompson, after an analysis of the job advertisements posted with the College Art Association from 1991 to 2010, observes that those that mentioned the African diaspora totaled 117 listings. Of these only twenty-one positions listed "African diaspora" alone. This means that "In 80 percent of the job advertisements published by the College Art Association over the last twenty years in which the words 'African

What has just been outlined shows how the label *Afro-descendant art* or *African diaspora art* reflects not only an artistic categorization, but also a political dimension. What seemed to be a weakness of the expression African diaspora art, could in some ways be its strength: Afro-descendant artists have created and continue to create a common universe, a network of bridges that branch out from Africa in all directions and vice versa, at the same time eliminating any geographical boundaries and influencing the artistic traditions of the territories they touch, creating mixtures and sharing an activist drive towards social justice and the dismantling of stereotypes. As stated by Peffer in this regard, "*Peoples in diaspora become like signs of some elsewhere and some other time for the mainstream culture in the 'host's' country. As a result they too, in a sense, misrepresent the homeland as a mythic and homogenous locale, lost in time. Nostalgia for this homeland-made mythic, and the experience of displacement within the host culture, can be a powerful nexus for personal and collective identity. Another more affirmative but paradoxical characteristic of diasporas is that they often have a profound influence on their host culture, even while becoming in most respects assimilated to it*" (Peffer, 2005). The peculiarity of diasporic art, therefore, lies precisely in the construction of a community reality that is both separate and parallel to contemporary art scenes in the countries of origin, which are deeply influenced by it.

In this discourse, however, it would be erroneous to ignore those who criticize the use of such labels and their underlying motivations. Since the art world and its market have opened to non-Western artists and expressive forms, artistic classifications based on ethnicity and the origin of the artists have spread. This focus on identity carries the risk of highlighting secondary aspects of artistic productions, projecting the cultural identities of the artists themselves into the works even when they do not constitute the real object of investigation (Petersen, 2012). This mechanism of induction of identity into the work once again nourishes a Western-centric view. The separation between Western artists – Americans and Europeans – and the "Other", which can be declined in various terms such as *ethnic art, indigenous art, aboriginal art, African diaspora art, Black art*, etc., can easily

diaspora' appear, they are accompanied by 'and/or': 'African diaspora and/or African art history'" (Thompson, 2011, p. 7).

become a tool to reaffirm white cultural hegemony, masking it in the apparently inclusive form of multiculturalism. What persists is the dichotomy between Western and non-Western (Petersen, 2012), which is translated into a binary way of thinking "*whereby the West is associated with uniformity and universality, whereas the rest of the world is associated with multiplicity and difference*" (Petersen, 2012, p. 201). This general view is specified with reference to the expression *African diaspora art* in the works of the Nigerian art critic and curator Okwui Enzewor. He openly criticizes the association of the term diaspora with the concept of art, stating the erroneous use of it as "*there does not exist any network – outside of the historic African diasporic community in Europe and the Americas – of expatriate Africans that can be said to have molded itself into a visible and cohesive community*" (Enzewor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009, pp. 14-15). Enzewor also states that for some artists being identified as Africans could lead to economic disadvantages, as Africa, systematically marginalized in the Western view, is not perceived by the latter as a landscape where art and culture can constitute means of livelihood (Enzewor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009). This latter factor could have negative consequences on the careers of artists who risk being exploited by the market without the right recognition or protections.

From the analysis, it seems possible to reach two orders of conclusions: first, it would be appropriate for any definitions to be adopted by the direct interested parties, i.e., by those who must adhere to such labels, and not imposed on them from above. It would be useful for the current object of discussion to become the subject, giving the possibility to those who recognize themselves in the political and social strength of such categorizations to have full control over them, but at the same time leaving the freedom to those who do not identify with such classifications to not fall into them just because they are not white or originate from non-Western countries. Secondly, it seems that the main problem regarding African diaspora art has more substantive than definitive character. It is not uncommon, in fact, that even today African diaspora art is not given the same importance as, under the same production conditions, is given to non-diasporic contemporary art forms coexisting in the same territory. As emphasized by Price, the growing interest of the art world in this type of production and its achievement of a certain label parity with other artistic currents has not led to parallel equalities. The reception of *Afro-descendant art* by the elitist art world has, on the contrary, led the latter to believe that it has

the right to the last word, as if it were a concession where the counterpart to being recognized in salons is the total freedom of disposal by the latter on the art they accept (Prince, 2001). This mechanism, as will be seen, has often relegated artists to mere producers, without giving them the possibility of being active subjects in relation to their own art. In this regard, Prince effectively summarized by saying "*supplying the product is one thing; having a say over what it represents (aesthetically, iconographically, referentially, historically) is quite another*" (Prince, 2001, p. 9).

2. The increased interest of the Western world of art for the contemporary African diaspora art

The phenomenon of the incomplete inclusion of non-Western artists in the Western art world has often been obscured by market dynamics and the growing interest in these artistic niches. Regarding African and Afro-descendant artists, in particular, the past two decades have seen a significant increase in sales, as well as a proliferation of exhibitions and venues specifically dedicated to diasporic art. The roots of this newfound attention can be traced back to the period between the 1980s and 1990s when the Western art world had to acknowledge its own limitations and open its doors to everything that had previously been deliberately excluded.

In order to understand these changes and why the concept of *openness* is being discussed, it is crucial to define the terms *West* and *Western* in this context. These terms are broad, evolving, and subject to multiple interpretations. Initially, there is a geographic connotation: in this context, referring to the *West* primarily means the European continent and the states within it, as well as North America, specifically the United States and Canada. However, this definition is not exhaustive, as individuals who live, work, and contribute to these states come from various parts of the world, not exclusively from Western backgrounds.

Thus, rather than solely a territorial matter, the *West* can be understood as a set of economic, social, and cultural structures created by and for white individuals, who predominantly hold decision-making power. The concept of *Western* thus takes on the connotation of *whiteness*, term that "*refers to the way that white people, their customs, culture, and beliefs operate as the standard by which all other groups of are compared. […] This white-dominant culture also operates as a social*

mechanism that grants advantages to white people, since they can navigate society both by feeling normal and being viewed as normal"[11]. It is from this alignment between *Western* and *whiteness* that the reasons for the emergence of discussions about social and economic openness at a certain historical moment onwards need to be investigated, analyzing their scope and, ultimately, their validity.

2.1 Impact of globalization and migration on the art industry

The years between the late 1980s and the early 1990s were marked by a series of historical and geopolitical events that completely changed dynamics and scenarios worldwide. While the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 are undoubtedly the most well-known events, it is essential not to overlook significant developments on other continents during this period. Events such as the first direct universal suffrage elections in South Korea in 1987, which marked the defeat of dictatorship, the Tiananmen Square massacre in China in 1989, and the end of the Apartheid regime in South Africa in the early 1990s were equally transformative. The dismantling of physical barriers and the opening of communist regimes to the rest of the world led to greater fluidity of peoples and cultures, facilitated by advancements in technology, which experienced significant acceleration during those years. The apex of the last century's digital revolution not only changed the ways of conceiving the economic and work systems, referred to as the "new economy", but also altered modes and opportunities for communication, interaction, and information exchange. These radical social changes removed barriers to the triumph of capitalism, giving rise, collectively, to the complex phenomenon of globalization, characterized by economic, social, and cultural integration and interdependence among different world regions[12]. Consequently, migration flows were facilitated and accelerated, leading to a much more intense and rapid cultural and social mingling compared to previous decades.

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[11] See the definition available at https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/whiteness.

[12] According to the definition contained in the Cambridge dictionary the word *globalization* means "the development of closer economic, cultural, and political relations among all the countries of the world as a result of travel and communication becoming easy". Definition available at https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/globalization.

When using the term globalization, typically only its economic effects are considered. However, it would be erroneous to ignore the cultural impact of this phenomenon and the changes that the art world has undergone as a result. It was in the second half of the 1980s that the idea of cultural globalization began to take shape and enter academic discourse. *Cultural globalization*, concept "*as opposed to economic, political, or technological globalization, refers to the transmission or diffusion across national borders of various forms of media and the arts. […] It is recognized as a complex and diverse phenomenon consisting of global cultures originating from many different nations and regions*" (Crane, 2002, p. 1)[13]. Riding the wave of cultural globalization, the Western contemporary art world witnessed a growing number of accusations of institutional racism leveled by non-Western artists against the system itself during those years. The response to these accusations initiated a period of significant academic debates that on the one hand, led to a growing attention towards the concept of *cultural identity*, understood as the necessity for diverse identities to find concrete representation in the art world, and, on the other hand, to an openness towards institutional multiculturalism, a concept that "*embraces the coexistence of diverse cultural groups within a society, recognizing and valuing the richness and contributions of different cultural backgrounds, fostering tolerance and understanding among individuals of different backgrounds*" (Al-Zadjali, 2024, p. 233). Starting from these debates, the Western art world began to redefine itself and seemingly alter the mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion of non-Western artists. As highlighted by Petersen and previously mentioned, the multicultural reaction of those years was not a neutral attempt by the established art system, but rather a *regulatory instrument* appropriated and deployed by the West to continue its cultural hegemony. It segregated white artists from non-white artists by categorizing art by the latter as *ethnic art*. According to some critics, the identity politics of institutional multiculturalism is a severe obstacle to 'true' artistic recognition because it

[13] The author, in order to thoroughly elucidate the concept of cultural globalization, references four distinct theoretical models that are employed to explain or interpret this phenomenon. Each model is characterized by a specific process/direction of cultural transmission and distinct consequences. Crane identifies the following models in particular I) Cultural imperialism / media imperialism; II) Cultural flows / network; III) Reception theory; IV) Cultural policy strategy, such as preservation, resistance, reframing, and glocalization, e.g. preservation, resistance, reframing and glocalization.

perpetuates a hierarchy in which Western artists obtain recognition based on their individual artistic merits, whereas non-Western artists are only recognized as representatives of the ethnic community and local culture to which they or their ancestors belong (Petersen, 2012).

Despite the negative aspects of institutional multiculturalism, it would be equally wrong to deny the increased attention that African art and African diasporic art have garnered since those years. This visibility was facilitated by various factors, including the dismantling of borders, attention to new themes, the emergence of postcolonial theories, etc. These factors led, on one hand, to an increase in the number of international curators integrated into the Western art system and, on the other hand, to the establishment of a global network of exhibition systems, including museums, biennials, art fairs, art schools, galleries, and art residencies, with venues previously outside the art circuit (Enzewor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009), such as the Dakar Biennale first held in 1992 and the Johannesburg Biennial in 1995. The relevance of this network, geared towards exploring and developing increasingly heterogeneous practices and in direct competition with the established system, is noteworthy. While the birth of new exhibition scenes and the inclusion of non-Western artists in museums and biennials have not necessarily changed power dynamics, there has been a redistribution of artists' visibility and a consequent increase in collectors interested in African and Afro-descendant art.

It is not coincidental that "*one paradigmatic moment that helped break the border of marginality of African artists*" (Enzewor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009, p. 10) occurred in 1989 with the exhibition "Magiciens de la terre" held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris and La Villette in Paris, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin and an international team including Aline Luque, Mark Francis, and André Magnin[14]. For the first time in history, a European institution organized an international exhibition of contemporary art with about a hundred artists from around the world, with 50% Western and 50% non-Western, defining it as "*the first exhibition really to take a global overview [...] believing that the time has come to look again at the*

[14] In particular, André Magnin, after curating Jean Pigozzi's Contemporary African Art Collection for 20 years (CAAC, one of the most important collection in the world for contemporary African art with 15,000 works domiciled in Geneva), organised a number of decisive exhibitions that helped in the spreading of African art (including Out of Africa in London, African Art Now in Houston and 100% Africa at the Bilbao Guggenheim).

categories, as well as the geographical and cultural boundaries, which have divided and prejudiced opinions on the relations between different cultures in the world" (Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou 1989). Unlike previous attempts, this event distinguished itself by granting complete equality of treatment to Western and non-Western artists: the latter, just like their American and European colleagues, were recognized for their individuality and identified by their names rather than being grouped anonymously according to their geographical areas of origin as had previously been the case. The intention of the curators was to bring a new vision of art, going beyond Eurocentrism and eliminating the colonialist cultural superiority attitude with which the art world had previously regarded every form of expressive art from the outside (Hanru, 2014). Despite this approach being subsequently criticized for maintaining the Western/Non-Western dichotomy, its revolutionary significance far outweighs its shortcomings. As art critic Holland Cotter stated, "*up to the late 1980s, almost nobody in the West knew, or wanted to know, about modern and contemporary art from Africa, meaning art that wasn't 'tribal', that was maybe conversant with Western trends and styles. Then came an exhibition titled 'Magicians of the Earth', in Paris in 1989, which mixed young African artists with some of their hip Western and Asian counterparts*" (Cotter, 2002).

Following this exhibition, which constituted the first true break in the established Western art system, many other curatorial initiatives of considerable importance followed, aimed at breaking further barriers. Among these, the Venice Biennale was of particular relevance for African and Afro-descendant art. In 1993, after the end of Apartheid, South Africa was readmitted among its exhibitors. Other significant moments for artists originating from the African continent date back to that decade: 1990, for example, is the year when, for the first time, two African artists, Ousmane Sow and Mo Edoga, were selected to participate in Documenta, one of the world's most important international contemporary art events. At the same time, specialized magazines aimed at disseminating information about contemporary African art began to emerge, such as Third Text (1987), Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art (1994), and ArtThrob (1997). At a time when Africa, from a cultural perspective and not only, found itself on the margins, these magazines assumed an extremely important dissemination role. The first half of the 2000s was also characterized by important initiatives such as the 2003 exhibition

"*Looking Both Ways. Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora,*" organized by the Museum for African Art in New York and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon (Dias, 2005), the founding of the Museum of African Diaspora (MoAD) in San Francisco in 2005, and, in the same year, the organization of "*Africa remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*", an itinerant exhibition focused on the reinterpretation of *Magiciens de la terre* sixteen years later. This exhibition showcased works by prominent artists such as Yinka Shonibare, Ghada Amer, and Julie Mehretu, spanning Germany, Great Britain, France, and Japan. However, a significant surge in interest was observed from the 2010s onwards, partly due to support from prestigious institutions like the Venice Biennale. In 2013, Angola became the first African country to win a Golden Lion for the best national pavilion. Two years later, Okwui Enwezor assumed the artistic direction of the Biennale, and Ghanaian artist El Anatsui was awarded the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement. In 2017, Anatsui received the Praemium Imperiale, considered the equivalent of the Nobel Prize in the arts (Artprice, 2018).

The organization of international exhibitions, the establishment of dedicated fairs, as well as the founding of specialized magazines have ensured that the last two decades of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st were characterized by a significant change in the Western world's attitude towards contemporary African and Afro-descendant art. Since, as stated by Enzewor, the success of contemporary art is closely connected with the history of its exhibitions (Enzewor, 2003), this change has almost simultaneously found reflection in the art market. In the *creative economy*, there exists a direct relationship between cultural recognition and the market, or, in other words, between the economy of cultural value and the economy of financial value (Bourdieu, 1983). When a cultural object, such as contemporary African and Afro-diasporic art, receives cultural legitimacy and validation from industry experts such as gallerists, curators, publishers, and other stakeholders, it acquires cultural value and consequently economic value (Bourdieu, 1983). "*Through mechanisms such as developing a new critical discourse to assess contemporary African art; publishing it in exhibition catalogs, books, and journal articles; awarding it with newly established prizes; and, exhibiting it in museums, art fairs, and biennales, contemporary African art was increasingly legitimated*" (Banks, 2018), while the art market underwent a reorientation, witnessing a

growing interest in contemporary African and Afro-descendant art over the past three decades.

2.2 An analysis of the current market of African diaspora contemporary art

2.2.1 Difficulties and tools of the analysis

Before delving into current market trends and understanding the transition from recognizing the cultural value of African and Afro-diasporic art to the increasing market interest therein, it is crucial to clarify the focus of this analysis. While it would be of great interest to examine the burgeoning art market within the African continent itself, characterized by the emergence of numerous art fairs, biennials, auctions, and galleries, the focus here is on the recent engagement of the Western art market with African diasporic art and its implications. However, to address this topic effectively, certain considerations need to be highlighted.

Firstly, it is essential to acknowledge the challenge of distinguishing African art from diasporic art and their respective contexts in this analysis, given the interdependence between them. To do so, a clear distinction must be made in terms of both geographic and thematic relevance. Geographically, the distinction lies between the Western market, comprising North America and Europe, and the African continent. From a thematic perspective, it is imperative to separate, as much as possible, diasporic art from African art. Both markets, namely the African and Western markets, engage with both types of art. However, the focus of this study is on investigating the market for African contemporary diaspora art within the Western world. While the status of the African art market within the continent and its recent expansion is relatively clear, analyzing the African art market, let alone the diasporic art market, outside of Africa presents more challenges. In this regard, information pertaining to African-American artists is significantly more abundant compared to that concerning Afro-diasporic or Afro-descendant artists from other states or territories.

Secondly, it is essential to clarify that the label "African contemporary diaspora art," as mentioned earlier, encompasses multiple realms: on one hand, it includes Afro-descendant artists, i.e., those born in a country different from that of their

parents or ancestors in general, while on the other hand, it also refers to those born in Africa who have chosen to live, study, and produce their art outside the continent. It is evident, therefore, that the distinction between diasporic art and African art sometimes loses significance in substantive terms, as these two levels intertwine and overlap. However, such a distinction can be useful for further reflections on aspects such as the "brain drain" of artistic talents, and more, fleeing Africa due to the lack of necessary infrastructure and resources to pursue better working conditions and opportunities, subsequently being compelled to conform to the dynamics and demands of the Western market, often facing difficulties in maintaining connections with their homeland thereafter.

Lastly, it is important to highlight the challenges encountered in identifying data solely concerning African contemporary diaspora art. On one hand, Afro-descendant artists are often rightfully identified solely with the state in which they were born[15], while artists born in Africa but currently residing abroad are frequently categorized as Africans. Therefore, to obtain information regarding diasporic art for data collection and analysis purposes, it is necessary to conduct an investigation wherein, starting from the highest revenues generated by auction sales, it is determined which artists are of Afro-descendant origin and which, although born in Africa, reside abroad. This inquiry will be conducted considering official documents such as annual reports containing sales rankings published annually by Artprice and other statistics and data aggregates related to auctions. Despite art galleries being fundamental players in the primary market, information from galleries and other market actors, such as artists and art fairs, is often inconsistent and incomplete due to the non-uniformity of economic valuation methods for sold works, as well as the preference of these agents to keep their sales data confidential. For this reason, auction houses are the focus of this investigation, being the ideal medium to understand the state and evolution of this market, especially in numerical terms. This is made possible by the price transparency characterizing public sales in the secondary market, further facilitated by the digitization process spurred by the Covid-19 pandemic and the development of online auctions, which have allowed for greater dissemination of information.

[15] Only artists born or naturalized in the United States are sometimes identified as Afro-American artists or Black artists. Regarding Europe, however, it is rare to find specific designations such as Afro-European artists.

It is important to note, however, that due to the lack of official data on the specific niche market of diasporic art, the results of the analysis may be limited or incomplete.

2.2.2 The new attention of the Western art market

As previously discussed, as soon as African art received cultural legitimization from industry experts, the market began to develop an interest in it and consequently "*the increasing recognition and value of African art in the international market have further fueled the growth of the African Art Diaspora*" (Adeyemi, 2023). The first economic players to embrace non-Western art and represent African and Afro-descendant artists were undoubtedly galleries. Their general purpose is to identify emerging and established artists with the potential for future success in the market, as well as to nurture these artists and promote their works by organizing exhibitions, building a network of interested collectors, and fostering collaborations with museums and art institutions. A notable example in this regard is JAM – Just Above Midtown in New York, an art gallery and self-described laboratory led by Linda Goode Bryant, which showcased African American artists and artists of color from 1974 to 1986. The gallery provided early opportunities for artists who are now recognized as pivotal figures in late-20th-century art, including David Hammons, Senga Nengudi, Lorraine O'Grady, and Howardena Pindell (MoMA, 2022 – 2023). Across the Atlantic, in the same period, the October Gallery was founded in London, specializing from its inception in non-Western art and the exploration of "outsider" artists, particularly representing African and Indian art, with notable figures such as the Ghanaian El Anatsui. More recently, this trend has been observed, for example, with the David Zwirner gallery, which began collaborating with artists such as Kerry James Marshall (since 2013), Njideka Akunyili Crosby (2018), and Noah Davis (2020), as well as with the Hauser & Wirth gallery, which, on the occasion of the opening of its Hong Kong branch in 2018, entered into contracts with a dozen African diaspora artists including Amy Sherald, Lorna Simpson, and Mark Bradford, and since 2020, also with Henry Taylor and Simone Leigh (Moine & Minguet, 2020).

However, as previously mentioned, the agents capable of providing clear numerical contributions to the analysis at hand are those belonging to the secondary

market, particularly auction houses. Despite some cyclical downturns due to the 2008 financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-2021, the secondary market has generally maintained a positive trend. The major international auction houses experienced a readjustment in 2023, with Sotheby's down by -4% and Christie's by -35.7%, following an exponential and unexpected surge in sales during the pandemic years, also driven by online sales. Nevertheless, examining the snapshot of the past six years provided in the following graph (Fig. 4) contained in the *Intelligence Report, Year Ahead 2024 Edition* by Artnet (Artnet News, 2024), it is evident that, despite a market adjustment, these actors maintain a good state of health, as does the entire art market, which, despite the contraction, garnered almost $2.5 billion (USD) spent on fine art at auction (-12.7% compared to 2022), with a 71% sell-through rate for fine art at auction in 2023 higher than in any year in the past 10 years except 2021 and 2022 (Artnet News, 2024). Therefore, future prospects, especially regarding the sale of contemporary and ultra-contemporary art, are more than promising.

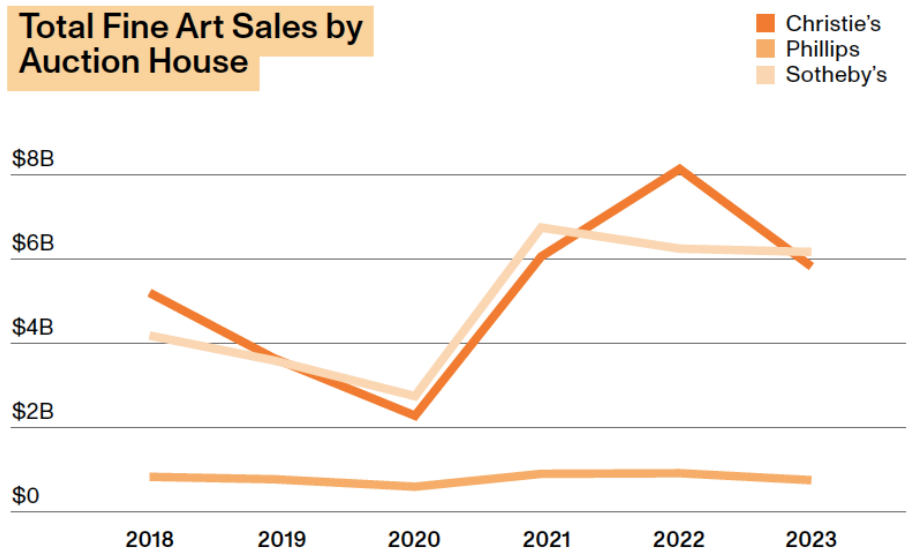

Fig. 4 Data on the total fine art sales by auction houses. Source: Intelligence Report, Year Ahead 2024 Edition

At this stage, it is pertinent to inquire into the positioning and contribution of the sales of works belonging to African diaspora contemporary art in this ongoing growth. This inquiry takes its starting point from the early 2000s when the secondary market also began to take interest in new scenes and artists on a global scale, consequently altering and diversifying the collector base: patrons of top-tier

auction houses, namely Christie's, Sotheby's, Phillips, and Bonhams, started to include individuals from countries previously excluded from Western art scenes, such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, the so-called BRIC countries, as well as the Middle East (Moine & Minguet, 2020). However, while initially the observed trend took the form of speculative "international zapping", characterized by an obsessive and rapid quest for talent outside common scenes to propel them into the limelight at major auction houses, subsequently, two phenomena occurred: a geographic expansion of these auction houses and a diversification of the works sold.

Regarding the first aspect, in the early 2000s, there were approximately 467 auction houses worldwide selling contemporary art; by 2020, this number had nearly doubled to 843 (Moine & Minguet, 2020). This figure includes both new branches of top-tier auction houses opened in other countries, such as Christie's and Sotheby's, as well as new auction houses emerging in various corners of the globe, demonstrating the market's internationalization and the ongoing growth of interest in contemporary art in general. Among these, several have arisen in the African continent, such as Arthouse, founded in 2007 in Lagos, Nigeria, ARTcapital established in 2009 in Accra, Ghana, and in the same year, Strauss & Co. in Cape Town, South Africa, all specializing in the sale of contemporary African art.

Moreover, since the late 2000s, and this brings us to the second point, several Western auction houses have begun to open departments and organize auctions dedicated to modern and contemporary African art and its diaspora, both in-person and online, specializing in and paying particular attention to this market segment. Among the first to recognize the potential of this art form was the French auction house Gaïa, which since 2007 has devoted itself to the contemporary African scene, as well as Bonhams, which in 2009 decided to open the African, Modern, and Contemporary Art department, regularly hosting *Africa Now*, a biannual sale of post-war and contemporary art from across the African continent. Nearly a decade later, Sotheby's followed suit, establishing the department dedicated to Modern and Contemporary African Art in 2017, which usually holds two sales per year in London (Artprice, 2018). On the other hand, Christie's features an even more niche department specializing in South African art, a result of its numerous relationships with South African artists and the three branches that the auction house owns in this country.

Regarding the understanding of the relevance of Afro-diasporic artists in the current market, a good starting point can be the analysis of some data based on birthplace. What emerges from the investigation based on geographical origin, as shown in the table below (Fig. 5), is undoubtedly that the market for North American-born and European-born artists' work is the largest and most stable, while the market for work by African-born artists still lags considerably behind the market reserved for those born in Western countries. The total sales of work by African-born artists in 2023 were, in fact, approximately 2.3% of the total sales of North American-born artists.

2023 Regional Performance at a Glance

Region	Lots Sold	Lots Offered	Low Estimate	Total Sale Value	Best-Performing Genre
North American-Born Artists	76,065	97,667	$2.5B	$3.3B	Postwar & Contemporary
European-Born Artists	165,220	242,562	$4.6B	$5.8B	Impressionist & Modern
Asia-Pacific-Born Artists	70,302	96,465	$2.5B	$3.7B	Impressionist & Modern
Africa-Born Artists	3,264	5,551	$71.1M	$73.8M	Postwar & Contemporary
Latin American- and Caribbean-Born Artists	5,699	8,400	$199.9M	$245.2M	Impressionist & Modern
Middle East-Born Artists	5,900	7,582	$68.8M	$99.3M	Postwar & Contemporary

Fig. 5 Data on the regional performance of the artists. Source: Intelligence Report, Year Ahead 2024 Edition

However, the market for African-born artists has experienced significant growth over the past decade (Fig. 6): between 2013, the year in which the Black Lives Matter movement emerged, whose importance also reverberated in the art market (Konish, 2023), and 2023, total sales increased by 46%, with 2021 standing out as the best year, witnessing $101.3 million worth of work by African-born artists sold (Artnet News, 2024). Despite the fact that, due to a general market downturn, there was a decrease in total sales in 2023, falling to $17.9 million from $52.1 million the year prior, with the amount boosted in 2023 by the record $10.7 million price achieved by Julie Mehretu's *Walkers With the Dawn and Morning* (2008), the ever-growing interest in artists from the African continent or of African descent is evident.

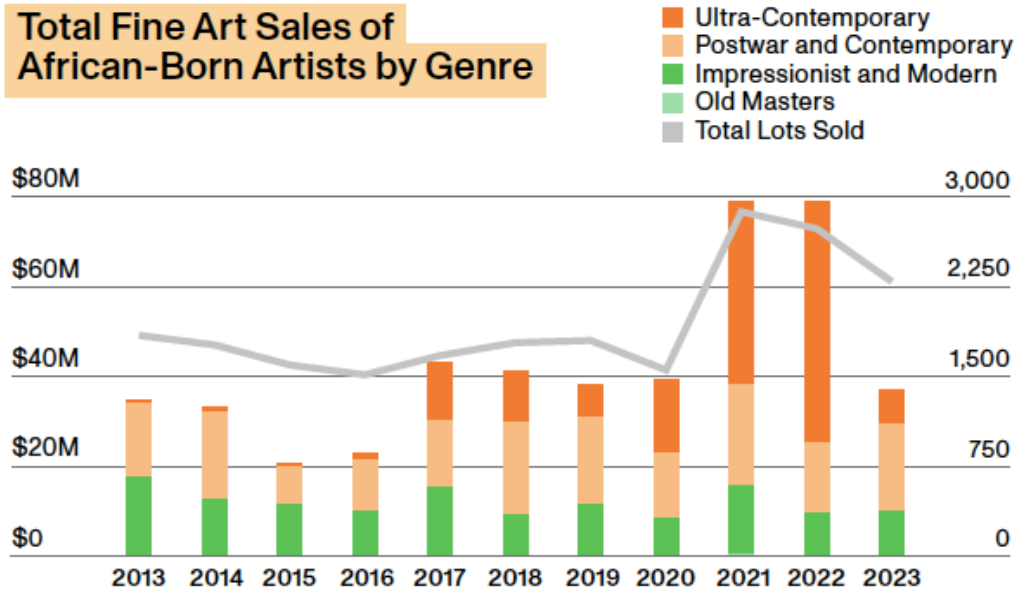

Fig. 6 Data on the total fine art sales of African – born artists. Source: Intelligence Report, Year Ahead 2024 Edition

However, looking at the ranking of the top ten artists by sales value in this decade (Fig. 7), it is interesting to note that these data exclusively consider the birthplace of the artists and their nationality, without taking into account where they currently reside or their ancestry. Thus, it can be observed that among the eight contemporary African-born artists, Irma Stern and Jacob Hendrik Pierneef cannot be considered as such, four of them do not live in the African continent: specifically, Marlene Dumas resides in Amsterdam, Aboudia in New York, Amoako Boafo in Vienna, and Njideka Akunyili Crosby in Los Angeles. Among the other four, two were born in South Africa where they continued to live, namely William Kentridge and Alexis Preller, and the other two, El Anatsui and Ben Enwonwu, were born between Ghana and Nigeria where they stayed; states, these latter mentioned, which are among the wealthiest in the African continent also due to Western interests that bring money and investments. At the same time, it can be observed that even the ranking related to North American-born artists concerning the same decade contains interesting data for this study: the second name appearing in the list of the best-selling artists with $2.5 billion is indeed that of Jean Michel Basquiat, an Afro-descendant artist with multiple records, whose impact on the market influences, as will be discussed shortly, every type of assessment. Furthermore, it is worth noting that if this analysis were to consider only African-American artists, an even greater

growth of interest would be observed: the market for work by Black American artists, in fact, grew by nearly 400% between 2008 and 2021 (Konish, 2023), thanks to names such as Barkley L. Hendricks, Kerry James Marshall, Kehinde Wiley, Amy Sherald, and, of course, Basquiat himself.

Top African-Born Artists by Total Fine Art Sales From 2013-23

#	Artist	Life	Nationality	Lots Sold	Lots Offered	Total Sales Value	2023 Total Sales Value
1	Marlene Dumas	b. 1953	South African	410	545	$80M	$14.3M
2	Irma Stern	1894–1966	South African	501	683	$59.2M	$5.6M
3	El Anatsui	b. 1944	Ghanaian	133	175	$43.8M	$8.7M
4	William Kentridge	b. 1955	South African	1,273	1,704	$42M	$3.9M
5	Aboudia	b. 1983	Ivorian/American	429	482	$32.9M	$4.1M
6	Amoako Boafo	b. 1984	Ghanaian	86	91	$32.7M	$2.7M
7	Jacob Hendrik Pierneef	1886–1957	South African	854	1,098	$30.3M	$2.6M
8	Ben Enwonwu	1921–1994	Nigerian	323	417	$26.5M	$2.1M
9	Njideka Akunyili Crosby	b. 1983	Nigerian	21	21	$25.6M	$1.4M
10	Alexis Preller	1911–1975	South African	245	347	$19.9M	$701.2K

Fig. 7 Top African – born artists by total fine art sales from 2013 – 23. Source: Intelligence Report, Year Ahead 2024 Edition

Yet, none of the aforementioned information seems sufficient to provide a comprehensive overview of Afro-descendant and Afro-diasporic artists. Consequently, it becomes imperative to incorporate additional data to gain a deeper understanding of the market for African diaspora contemporary art. One viable approach is to utilize the sales rankings compiled by Artprice, which aggregate the primary outcomes of public auctions annually. The analysis conducted will focus on the results pertaining to modern and contemporary artists in the years 2004, 2014, and 2023, with the objective of monitoring market fluctuations roughly every decade. For each year, the examination will encompass: (i) the top one hundred auction outcomes (or top 100 sales) and (ii) the top one hundred records for turnover, indicating the total revenue generated by an artist from their sales during that year.

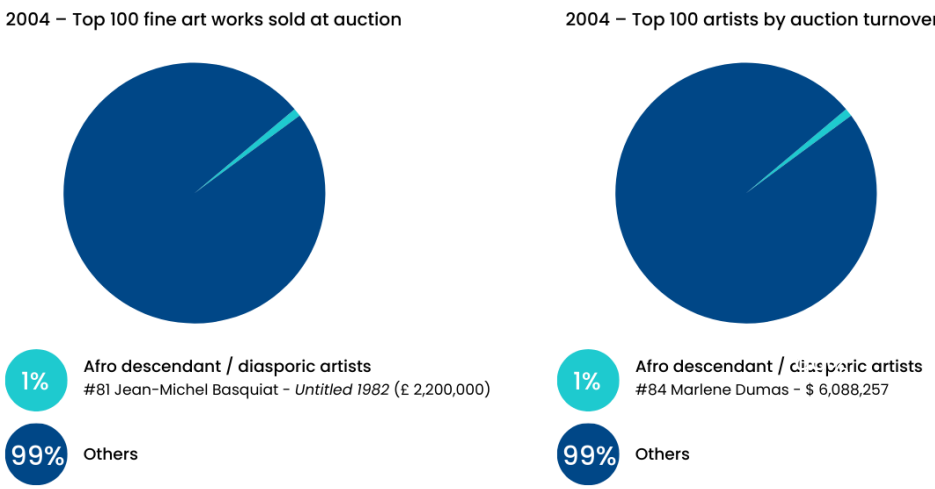

Fig. 8 Data of aggregate sales modern and contemporary art 2004.

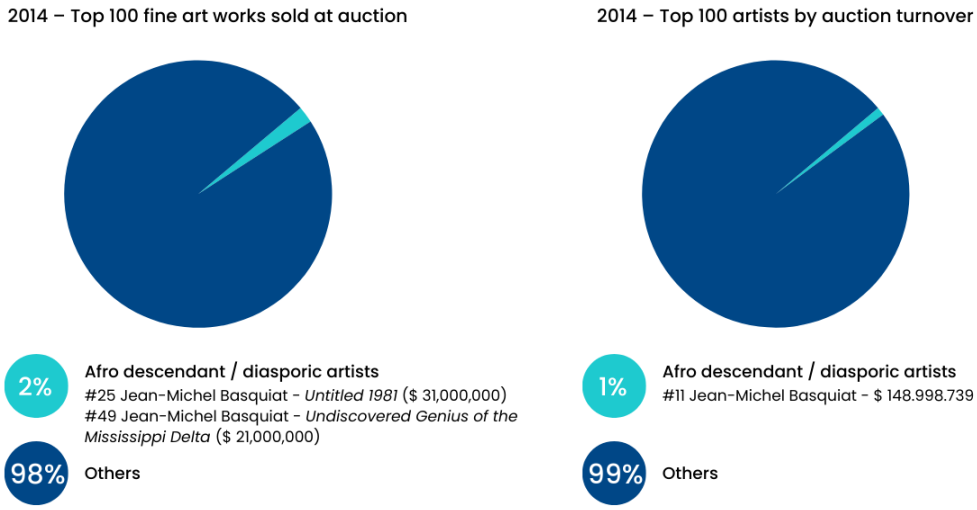

Fig. 9 Data of aggregate sales modern and contemporary art 2014.

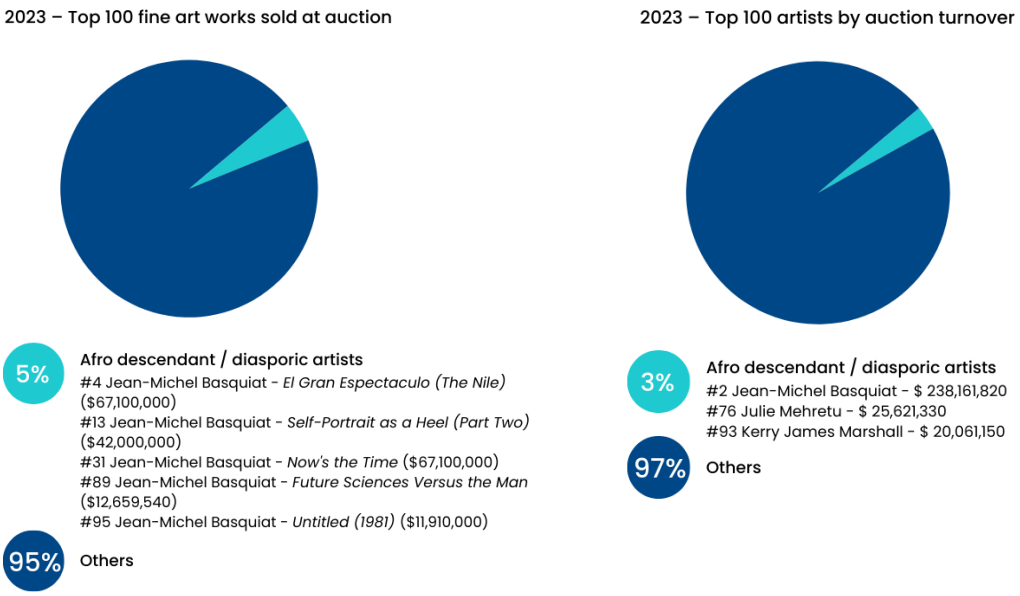

Fig. 10 Data of aggregate sales modern and contemporary art 2023.

Examining these graphs prompts various reflections. For both categories, it is evident that there has been an increase, albeit minimal, in the recognition accorded to Afro-diasporic and Afro-descendant artists. Regarding the top auction outcomes, the presence of such artists in the rankings has risen from 1% in 2004 to 5% in 2023, while concerning the top records for turnover, the increment has been from 1% to 3% (Artprice, 2004; Moine & Ehrmann, 2014; Moine & Minguet, 2023). However, it cannot be overlooked that the majority of these records feature a single name, or nearly so, namely that of the aforementioned Basquiat. To grasp the significance of this artist, consider that in 1988, Basquiat first reached the $100,000 mark at Sotheby's with the work *Red Rabbit* (1982); ten years later, he achieved his first million-plus result, and in 2017, he became the most expensive American artist ever sold at auction with *Untitled* (1982), fetching $110.5 million. Although this title is no longer his, the sale of this artwork still ranks among the ten most expensive contemporary works ever auctioned. It is evident, therefore, how Basquiat represents an exception not only in the realm of Afro-descendant and Afro-diasporic artists but also in the contemporary art world at large: in 2020, alongside Jeff Koons, he accounted for 12% of the global auction turnover in the contemporary art segment, ranking first in the list of contemporary artists by auction turnover with almost $2,2 billions in sales from 2000 to 2020 (Moine & Minguet, 2020).

Once again, the data under consideration appears to be only partially exhaustive regarding the issue of the weight and influence exerted by contemporary Afro-diasporic art in today's art market. However, if instead of considering the segment of the market encompassing modern and contemporary art jointly, the focus would be exclusively on that of contemporary and ultra-contemporary art, the answer would undoubtedly be more satisfying. As also evidenced in Figure 6, these are precisely the sectors in which African-born artists have stood out most in recent years, attracting increasingly keen interest from the market. Considering the top three hundred records for turnover reported by Artprice's reports dedicated solely to the contemporary art market and spanning the years 2006-2007, 2014, and 2023, one can observe the trends depicted in the following graphs (Artprice, 2006 / 2007; Moine, 2014; Moine & Minguet, 2023).

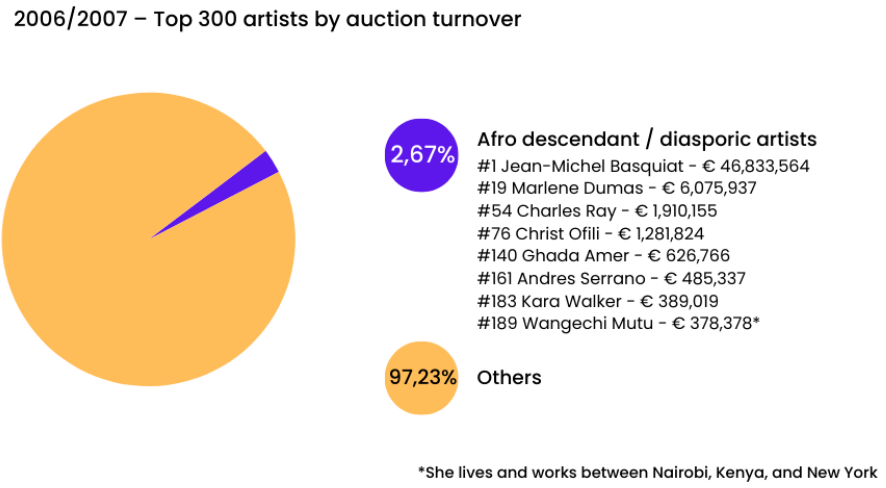

Fig. 11 Auction turnover of contemporary art 2006 / 2007.

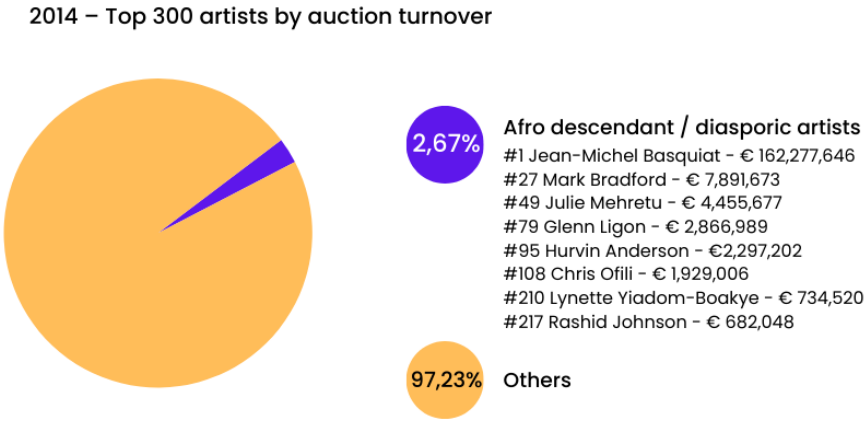

Fig. 12 Auction turnover of contemporary art 2014.

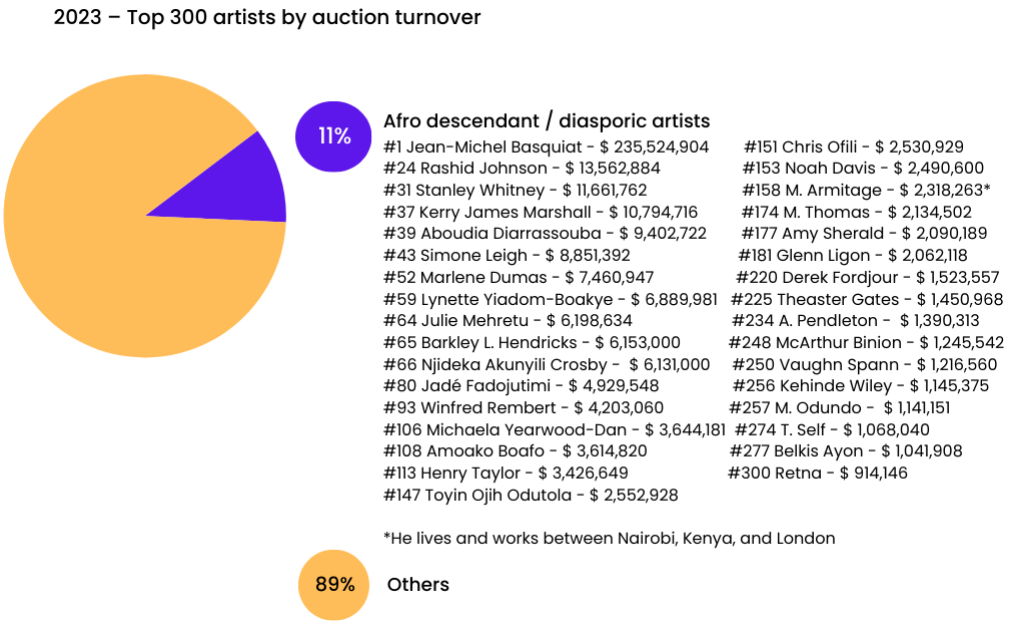

Fig. 13 Auction turnover of contemporary art 2023.

Between the years 2006/2007 and 2014, there is no percentage difference - Afro-descendant and Afro-diasporic artists indeed represent 2.67% of the total considered in both cases. However, the increase in interest recorded in 2023, where the percentage rises to 11%, is undoubtedly a significant signal. This data attests to the fact that in recent years, the number of Afro-diasporic artists on the international scene, particularly in the West, has considerably increased, along with their value. This is evident when considering Chris Ofili, a British artist of Nigerian origin present in all the years considered. His turnover nearly doubled from $1.3 million in 2006/2007 to $2.5 million in 2023. A similar observation can be made for Basquiat, the top-ranking artist in all years, whose achievement was even more remarkable, with sales totaling $51 million in 2006/2007 soaring to $235.5 million in 2023. Setting aside these specific cases for the sake of completeness, it is worth highlighting that it is not uncommon for the starting prices of works by African, Afro-descendant, and diasporic artists to be relatively low, and that exceptional auction results merely align with their actual value. Collector Kenny Schachter addressed this issue in an interview with Artnet, stating, "*Black lives have only seemingly begun to matter in the world, but not in the auction business, and far from enough in the art market... But don't be fooled: studies have unequivocally shown that art by women and artists of color costs less... I've never seen an auctioneer of color or specialist manning (or woman-ing) the phones at a sale... even the first auction house exclusively devoted to Black art is white-owned (by Thom Pegg)*" (Schachter, 2020).

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that there has been a significant increase in representation among the top 300 artists by auction turnover, reaching 8.33% over the past nine years, from 2014 to 2023. Additionally, there has been a 400% growth in the market for works by Black American artists between 2008 and 2021. This is a clear indication that market interest is genuinely shifting towards different geographies and ideas. Although the situation remains imbalanced, the growing representation of Afro-descendant and diasporic artists is a reality that is consolidating rapidly, especially among those considered the crème de la crème of the art sector.

Another telling indicator in the art sector that further confirms this premise is the *Power 100, the annual ranking of the most influential people in art* by ArtReview, which includes artists, collectors, curators, gallerists, and directors of

fairs and museums. Examining the names occupying the top ten positions in 2023, it is evident that they are exclusively artists and, more notably, that five out of these ten artists are African or Afro-descendant, including the African-American artists Simone Leigh and Theaster Gates, Ghanaian visual artist Ibrahim Mahama, and, finally, London-born filmmaker Isaac Julien and Film and TV director Steve McQueen, both of Afro-Caribbean descent (ArtReview, 2023). In contrast, looking at this same ranking in 2014, the first African-born individual appears only in the 24th position, represented by curator and critic Okwui Enwezor (ArtReview, 2014). It was not until 2017 that at least one Black artist, director, or thinker consistently appeared in the top ten of this list. Once again, these data demonstrate that, while the overall situation remains unequal, there is a trend towards greater equilibrium. The increased representation of Afro-descendant and diasporic artists is a reality, as is the fact that the work and thought of an ever-growing number of Black artists are considered influential.

For any imbalance or disparity to truly be levelled and for the progress made to not dissipate as a mere trend, continuous observation and critique of the reality are fundamental. Critically examining certain aspects of the art system is not intended to be anything other than a spotlight on areas that still do not function properly, but from which it is crucial not to divert attention if they are to genuinely progress and ultimately stabilize. For this reason, when assessing the increased interest in African, Afro-descendant, and diasporic artists, it is essential to concurrently highlight another crucial issue: often, African and Afro-diasporic artists hold no positions other than producers, having little or no representation in institutions with purchasing power and thus little say in selecting such works, whether galleries, museums, or collections. As discussed in the following chapter, the percentage of Africans or Afro-descendants who own or hold high-level positions in such contexts is still minimal, especially when compared to the ever-increasing weight given to artists of the same origin. Therefore, it is not enough, and one should not settle for numbers alone. It is true to say that African art and that of its diaspora are finally finding deserved success, but one must not run the risk of being simplistic and superficial. It is essential to question how much of this represents genuine openness, acceptance, and change, and how much work needs to be done so that is not a mere fashion of possessing something exotic, earning oneself a status quo.

Chapter 2

An impact with reality: the difficulties of inclusion in the Western art market for Afro descendent artists

1. Racism and discrimination in the art industry

The world of art, understood in the broadest sense of the term, is an ecosystem unto itself, access to which is reserved for a select few, whether they be artists or experts in the field, almost as if it were built on the principles of exclusion and ownership (Carrigan, 2020). Every role in this industry presents barriers to entry, constructed and staunchly maintained primarily by those already working in the sector who wish to defend their privileges and positions at all costs, controlling who attempts to access it and how this occurs. The elitism of this industry, however, is more acutely felt by some than by others. Despite the growing interest the market has shown in recent years towards contemporary African and Afro-diasporic art, the art world is far from completing the process of opening and welcoming that began in the late 1980s. It still faces significant imbalances and inequalities today, being heavily influenced by White predominance systemic racism, and other power struggles.

In reality, the paradox lies precisely in the opposition of these two aspects: on one hand, there is a trend whereby the main actors in the art world are interested in collecting, selling, and buying works by African or Afro-diasporic artists, whose themes frequently relate to social issues such as racism, xenophobia, class and opportunity disparities, as well as identity, colonialism, slavery, etc. On the other hand, however, those who decide whether to grant cultural and economic relevance to such artists, allowing them to be exhibited in museums, be part of private collections, or be contracted by galleries, are predominantly White individuals.

Considering once again the previously mentioned *Power 100* ranking compiled by ArtReview, and excluding artists from this classification, it is noteworthy that, for example, among the hundred most influential people in the art world in 2023, 17 are curators, and of these, three are Black individuals: Aaron Cezar, Azu Nwagbogu, and Legacy Russell. The same observation can be made with regard to

dealers: out of the 17 gallerists listed, only Somali-French Mariane Ibrahim represents the African diaspora; whereas, among the collectors, there are no relevant names in this regard (ArtReview, 2023). It is clear that if we look at the same data referring to the market ten years ago, the information is quite different. No Afro-descendant or Afro-diasporic individual appears among the seven curators identified as influential, nor among the 21 gallerists or nine collectors listed (ArtReview, 2014).

While it is true, as will be further discussed below, that Black representation among the professional figures working within the art field is also increasing, it is essential to highlight that this absence, although less pronounced, still persists today. Understanding that the art market is not solely made up of artists and, at the same time, acknowledging that all the professional figures surrounding them have a significant impact on their careers, is a necessary step to consolidate the progress made so far and avoid reverting to previous situations. Those working in this field – whether they be dealers, collectors, curators, or museum directors – have the power to decide whether to finance these artists, thus enabling them to progress in their careers and advance their causes. As gallery owner Jenkins-Johnson stated, "*It is one thing to hire a person of color; it's another thing to put a person of color in a leadership role; it's another thing to give that person room to participate in steering the gallery*" (Carrigan, 2020). Exhibition spaces, their curators, financiers, and observers are, in fact, examples of the aforementioned concept of whiteness, which in this case serves as a synonym for the West and its mechanisms, being places where opportunities for contemporary African and Afro-diasporic art are "*often presented from a Western perspective, with Western curators shaping the narrative of the artists*" (Aldridge, 2016).

A significant risk of this mechanism, that is the clear predominance of White individuals in the entire art system, is that artists might focus on certain social themes more for commercial reasons than out of genuine interest. What seems to be happening, in fact, especially after the birth of the Black Lives Matter movement, is that the "*artists have made systemic racism look sexy; galleries have made it desirable for collectors. It has, in other words, gone mainstream*" (Aldridge, 2016). The transformation of a social theme into an asset for the wealthy is certainly not a new phenomenon, as highlighted by Black art curator and dealer J.K. Freeman, who

compared this interest in contemporary African and diasporic art to the same attention the art world gave in the 1960s-1970s to the Vietnam War and in the subsequent decade, the 1980s, to the AIDS crisis, stating that "*that's just capitalism. When you can control the value of that moment in history, it's a form of power*" (Carrigan, 2020). However, despite not being a new dynamic, this recent consideration of such artists and the political nature of their works is endangering this very essence, risking transforming it into a "*mere spectacle, a provocation marketed for consumption, rather than a catalyst for social change*" (Aldridge, 2016).

At the same time, the data listed below seem to show a positive, albeit still slow, trend. It is known that every change is slow and gradual, and it would be pessimistic to exclude a priori that the phase in which the art market currently finds itself is just one of many steps in an already initiated process aimed at its improvement and greater inclusion. To understand whether this new attention to contemporary Afro-diasporic art is just a passing trend exploited by an established system or if a real transformative process is underway, one must objectively ask: who is actually benefiting off this success?

2. An analysis of the main figures of the Western world of art

To answer this question, an analysis of the main figures that constitute the art system will be conducted, in order to understand the representation of African or Afro-descendant people within it, excluding the category of artists, which was analyzed in the previous chapter. Specifically, four main figures in this sector will be investigated: (i) curators, as by observing the exhibition choices made by museums in recent years, one can understand which art is presented to the public and from what perspective this occurs; (ii) archivists, in order to understand who collects and, more importantly, choose the information that needs to be preserved; (iii) dealers, to capture who selects the artists to present to the market; and finally (iv) collectors, because understanding who has the purchasing power and consequently the power of financing is crucial to understanding on whom, besides the dealers, an artist's success depends.

For clarity, it is appropriate to reiterate that many of the data considered here focus on the United States, as well as on the percentage of Afro-descendant/African

American individuals in each mentioned category. It is much more difficult, however, to identify homogeneous information regarding European states. In any case, the specific territory will be defined each time.

2.1 Curators and museum's staff

To understand who the curators in the contemporary Western art world are and where they come from, and to grasp the impact this has on museum policies and choices, it is useful to start by observing some data. A seminal research in this field is *The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Art Museums Staff Demographic Survey* compiled for the first time in 2015 (Westermann & Schonfel, 2015) and updated in 2018 (Westermann, Sweeney & Schonfel, 2019) and then in 2022 (Dressel, Harkins & Sweeney, 2022) by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, in partnership with the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD). The surveys consider the ethnic and gender diversity of the staffs of art museums across the United States, but the results are slightly different.

The 2015 survey analyzed the data of 181 institutions showing that 73% of AAMD staff is non-Hispanic White, and 27% belongs to ethnic minorities. However, there is a significant difference in demographic diversity across the types of museum jobs. Non-Hispanic White people dominate the jobs associated with the intellectual, educational, and curatorial mission of museums. As a matter of fact, in this employment category they occupy 84% of the total, while 6% are Asian, 4% are Black, 3% are Hispanic, and 3% are of different races. The 2015 survey seemed discouraging, because it "*found that the museum staff was about ten percentage points more racially and ethnically homogenous than the U.S. population*" (Westermann & Schonfel, 2015).

On the other hand, the 2018 research, conducted on 332 art museums, demonstrated that museum staff have become more racially and ethnically diverse compared to 2015. In 2018, 68% of museum staff was non-Hispanic White while 32% was of different ethnicity. However, it also showed that "*while the U.S. population is growing increasingly diverse, the positions that are most directly responsible for presenting, interpreting, and caring for art objects from all the world's cultures over time are not yet reflecting that diversity*" (Westermann, Sweeney & Schonfel, 2019).

Finally, the last update realized in 2022 and conducted on 328 art museums showed results different from expectations after the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, after the revenue losses the museums had struggled with and in some cases laid off large numbers of staff, many in the field have expressed "*concern that museums would grow less diverse, shifting into an emergency posture that would deprioritize considerations like the representational diversity of staff*" (Dressel, Harkins & Sweeney, 2022). However, this circumstance did not occur. The 2022 survey showed that 64% of museum staff was non-Hispanic White while 36% was of different ethnicity. Specifically, 12% are Black people, a percentage that did not change from 2018, while in 2015 it stood at 11%.

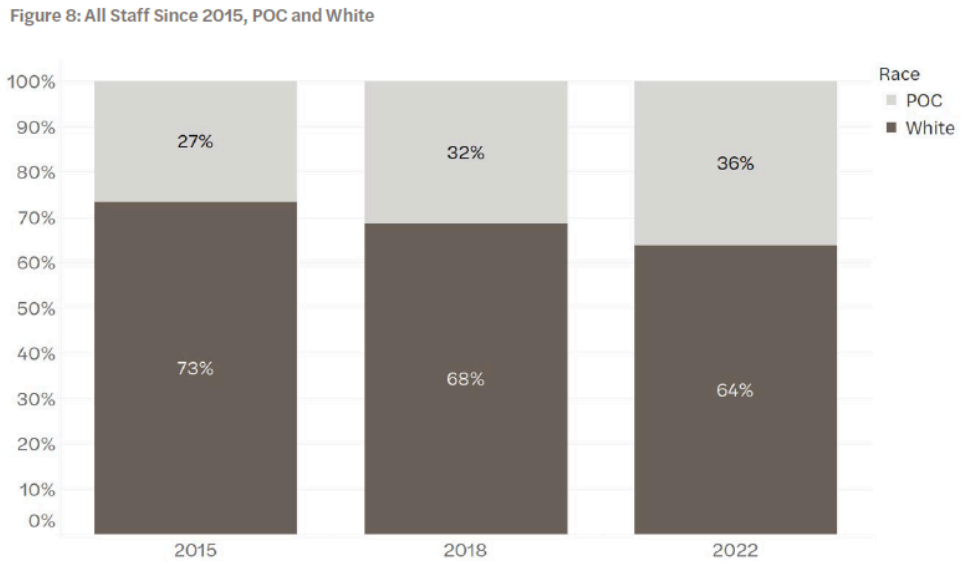

Fig. 18: All Art Museum Staff since 2015, POC and White. Source: The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Art Museums Staff Demographic Survey 2022

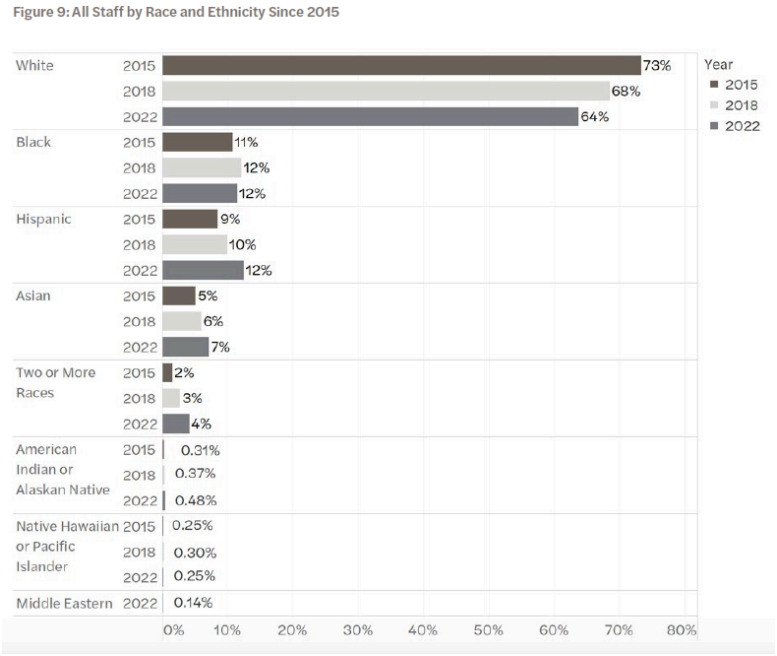

Fig. 19: All Art Museum Staff by Race and Ethnicity since 2015. Source: The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Art Museums Staff Demographic Survey 2022

The growth in the number of employees for each ethnicity category from 2015 to 2022 can also be observed in the so called intellectual leadership positions, namely conservation, curatorial, education and museum managerial positions. As a matter of fact, employees in these positions are nine percentage point more diverse in 2022 as compared to 2015. As to regard the Black staff in the aggregate, between 2015 and 2022, the number of Black staff in museum leadership has more than doubled, while tripling in information technology and quadrupling in curatorial positions (Sweeney, Harkins & Dressel, 2022). Although the journey is still long, the change in direction is evident. The art system is beginning to bridge the systemic disparities that characterized it until a few years ago, and this shift is also occurring in Europe.)

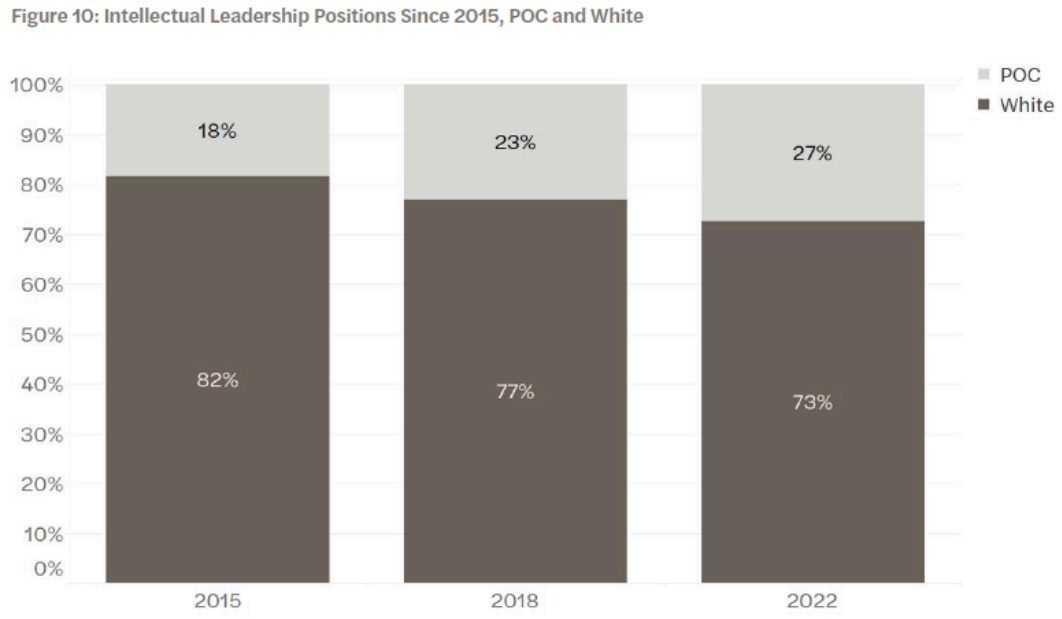

Fig. 20: Intellectual Leadership Positions since 2015, POC and White. Source: The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Art Museums Staff Demographic Survey 2022

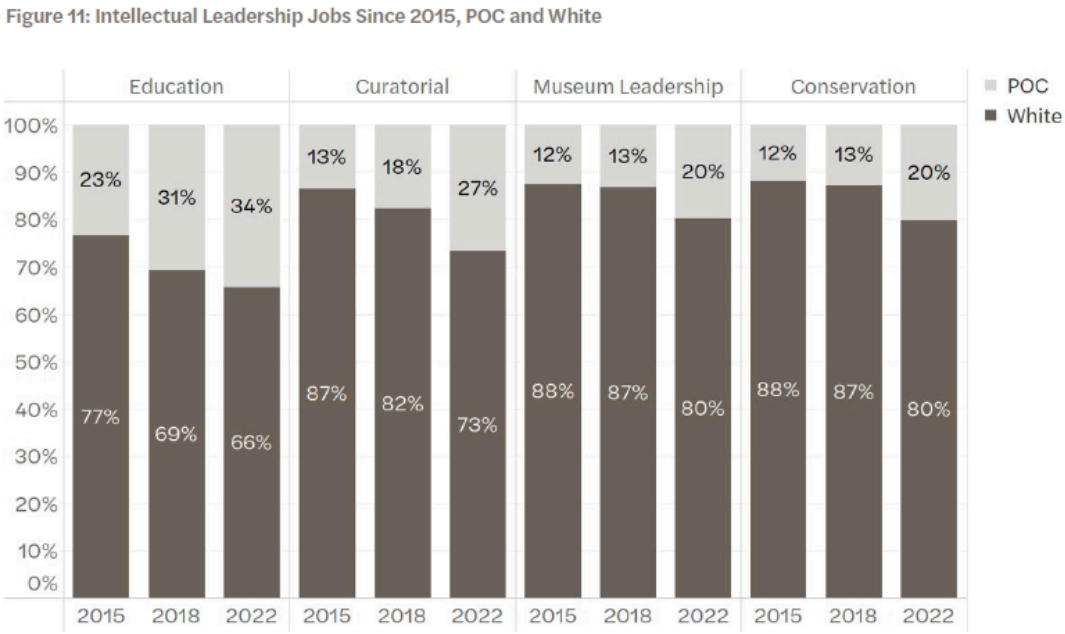

Fig. 21: Intellectual Leadership Jobs since 2015, POC and White. Source: The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Art Museums Staff Demographic Survey 2022

In fact, with regard to Europe, the data are more fragmented and there is no aggregated information for the entire continent exclusively related to museum institutions. However, an interesting starting point can be the *Equality, Diversity and Creative Case report* of 2019-2020 compiled by the Arts Council England in 2020 and focused on the National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) in the United

Kingdom, meaning UK-based culture and arts organization's receiving funds from the Council itself. The report analyses diversity in its broadest sense, focusing on ethnicity, disability, gender, and sexual orientation. Among all the report data, those that matter for the current analysis regard the NPOs workforce diversity considering the key leadership roles and the different job levels. The sample analyzed includes 737 organizations. According to the report, the total percentage of the NPOs Black, Asian, and ethnically diverse workforce is 13% in 2019/2020, showing an improvement from 11% in 2018/2019. However, museums' workforce had the lowest representation, with only 7%.

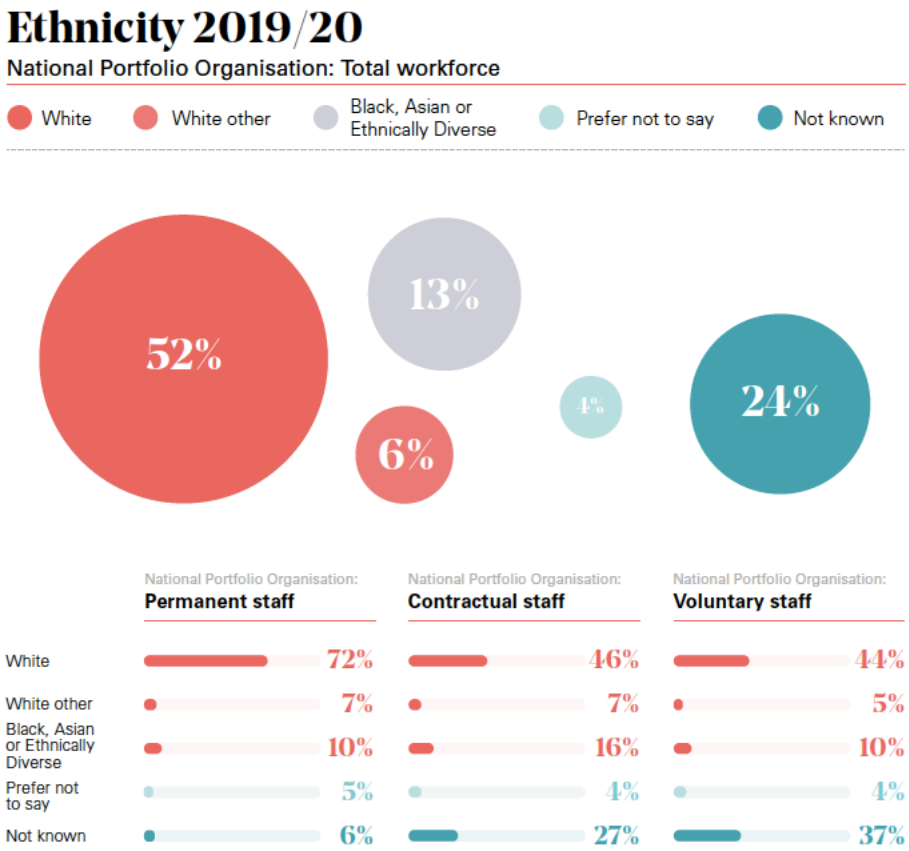

Fig. 22: Ethnicity of NPOs total workforce in 2019/2020. Source: Equality, Diversity and Creative Case report 2019-2020 by the Arts Council England.

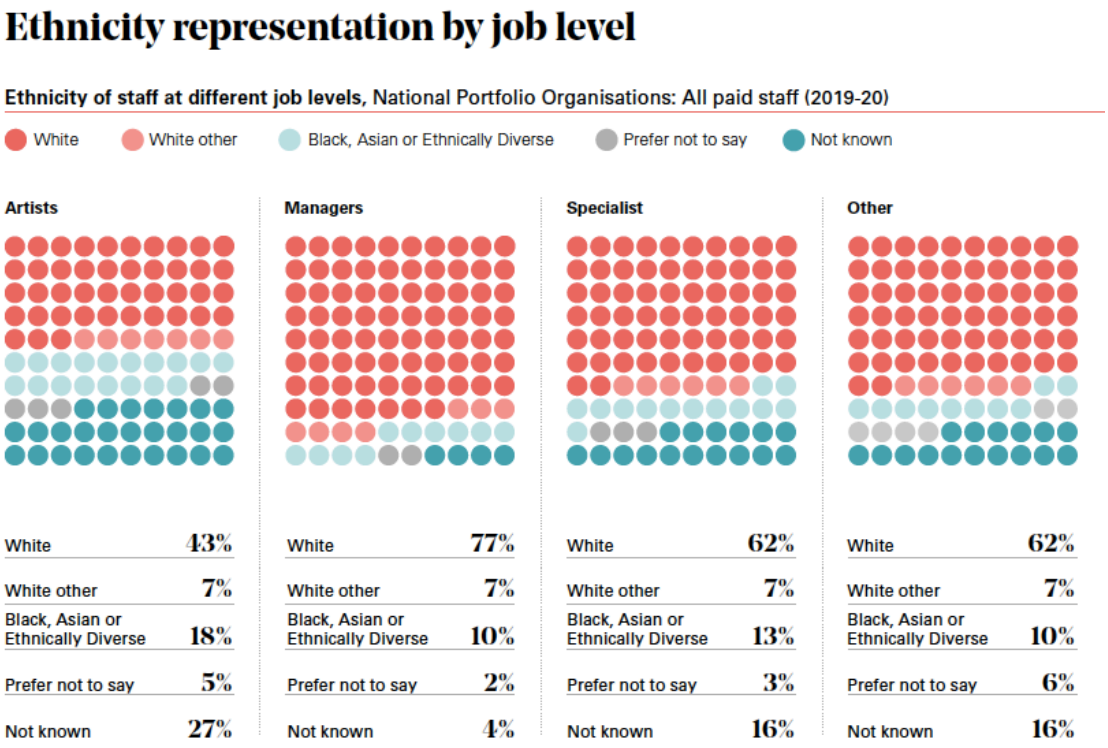

Fig. 23: Ethnicity representation by job level in NPOs paid staff in 2019/2020. Source: Equality, Diversity and Creative Case report 2019-2020 by the Arts Council England.

As to regard the NPOs' boards, it is possible to observe a slight increase in ethnicity category, where representation of Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse people increased to 17% from 15% of the previous report. Moreover, 11% of NPOs reported having a Chief Executive who was Black, Asian, or Ethnically Diverse, with 12% of Artistic Directors and 11% of Chairs.

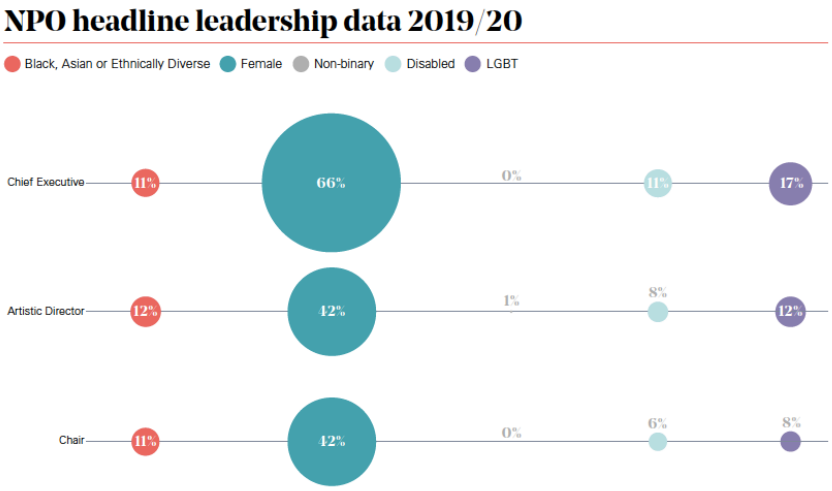

Fig. 24: NPO headline leadership data 2019/2020. Source: Equality, Diversity and Creative Case report 2019-2020 by the Arts Council England.

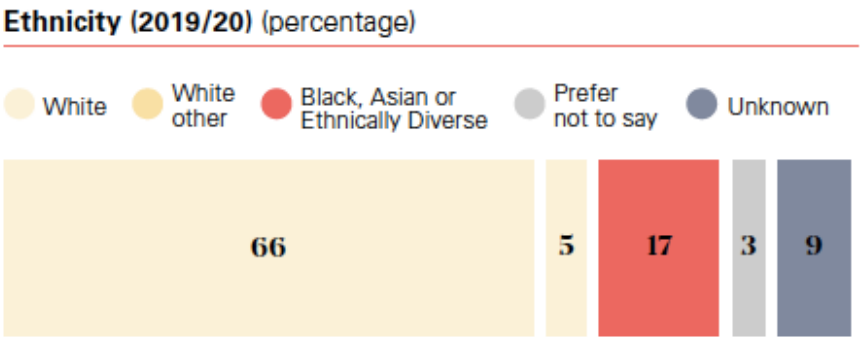

Fig. 25: NPOs boards ethnicity in 2019/2020. Source: Equality, Diversity and Creative Case report 2019-2020 by the Arts Council England.

Although these latest data relate generally to the workforce in UK culture and arts organizations, the trend observed in Europe is the same as that observed in the United States. The increase in the representation of Black, Asian, and Ethnically Diverse people occurred in parallel on both sides of the ocean as a result of the same process: after the protests for George Floyd's killing, indeed, the activism movement Black Lives Matter gained international attention, leading to a wave of protests even within cultural institutions and museums. The fact that the latter had begun to stage exhibitions and purchase works by African and Afro-descendant artists, organizing awareness-raising events, was not enough to quell the protests; on the contrary, "*these programming initiatives were surface-level, demonstrating only 'the visage of change and diversity, which is artifice,' while not being 'about the acquisition of the works, not about really changing the composition of the institution*" (Smith, 2021). What the people of color working in museums across the United States began to demand, issuing open letters reporting toxic and racist work environments, was a radical change in the internal structure of these institutions. Kelli Morgan, senior curator at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, stated in this regard:

> *We know very well that art museums are some of the strongest cultural bastions of western colonization. Through very deliberate racist and sexist practices of acquisition, deaccession, exhibition, and art-historical analysis, museums have decisively produced the very state of exclusion that publicly engaged art historians and curators are currently working hard to dismantle. What we do not speak honestly*

> *enough about are the very distinct ways in which racism and sexism are utilized to traumatize us and oftentimes undermine our work* (Joshi, 2020).

Thus, museums began to adopt various initiatives such as inclusive hiring practices with the support of diversity officers, allocating funds to further diversify collections and exhibitions, creating specific fellowship positions, etc. The set of these policies led to an increase in the diversification of staff, and there was a slight increase in the hiring of Black curators, as evidenced by the data illustrated above. While it is certainly reassuring to observe these growing figures, it is equally important that this occurs for the right reasons and not merely to try to quell dissent. Looking at the exhibition choices of U.S. major museums, it has been demonstrated by the 2019 *Diversity of artists in major U.S. museums* report that 85.4% of artists exhibited are White, and 87.4% are men. More precisely, with respect to ethnicity, the pool is 85.4% White, 9.0% Asian, 2.8% Hispanic/Latinx, 1.2% Black/African American, and 1.5% other ethnicities, whereas the least represented group in U.S. museums are Black women (Topaz et al., 2019). According to Artnet, in 2018, the number of solo and thematic exhibitions focusing on the work of African American artists grew from thirty-eight in 2016 to sixty-three. However, Artnet examined thirty museums in the United States, and they dedicated only 7.7% of their exhibitions to the work of African American artists (Halperin & Burns, 2018). These data suggest that, despite the efforts made since the beginning of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013, artworks by artists belonging to ethnic minorities continue to have a marginal place inside United States museums. These data and the clear preference for exhibitions of White male artists are a clear consequence of the fact that in the years preceding the protests for George Floyd's killing, the percentage of White curators was very high, in 2018, specifically, it was 82%.

This demonstrates that the representation of Black people at all levels of museum institutions, and particularly in the curation of exhibitions and collections, is not only a "political" duty but also involves an assumption of responsibility regarding how culture is transmitted and the perspective from which this occurs. The presence of Black curators who give space to non-White artists is essential to providing a new and more open reading of Western art history and correcting a one-dimensional and unilateral narrative. The increase in the exhibitions and

acquisitions of under-represented artists "*seek to revise enduring white- and male-dominated art historical narratives*" (Smith, 2021). What is therefore necessary is a big shift in mindset for many museums so that this wave of change and new hires is consolidated at the infrastructural level for not just the moment but for moving forward. The short-term goal should be to expand collections by offering visitors new languages and perspectives, while in the long term, it would be desirable not to view the hiring of Black curators only for their ability to address race issues but merely for their curatorial skills handling programs that are not race-specific.

2.2 Archivists

Another key role in the art world that often works closely with curators is the archivist, as they are responsible for appraising, processing, cataloguing, and preserving historically valuable books, documents, and records, ensuring the historical, cultural, and artistic significance of files is documented and protected. The importance of this figure, although sometimes underestimated, is therefore evident: the archivist decides which stories to save and how to do so, and which to leave in silence and consequent oblivion, thus becoming responsible for a collective memory aimed not only at the past but also capable of shaping the future whose narrative they control. The awareness with which *such choices are made, therefore, often has a social and political connotation. Indeed, "The presences and absences embodied in sources (artifacts and bodies that turn an event into fact) or archives (facts collected, thematized, and processed as documents and monuments) are neither neutral or natural. They are created*." (Trouillot, 1995). It is significant, therefore, to observe how archives are organized and to see which facts history has decided to preserve and especially from what perspective it has decided to do so.

Regarding archives concerning Black history, the proportion of information about historical tragedies, in the context of slave trades, colonialism, and diasporas, is significantly higher than what we know about the history of Black life, whose stories are not only partial and incomplete but often neglected (Gabriel, 2022). This selective information, characterized by its own disparity, carries a violent connotation which "*determines, regulates and organizes the kinds of statements that can be made about slavery and as well it creates subjects and objects of power*" (Hartman, 2008). This unfortunately translates into the artistic field as well, where

archivists are those who have the power to manage the historical memory of museums and other cultural institutions, among others. Generally, the result of their work is summarized in copious catalogs in which as much information as possible about an artist or an art scene is collected through various means such as photographs, documents, sound recordings, etc., which report not only important historical information but also data such as auction records, sales information, and changes in ownership of individual works. The presence of Black representation in this sector is therefore essential to protect, enhance, make more accessible, and especially rethink overlooked parts of Black history and culture. However, as in other roles and in the archival field in general, there is a clear predominance of White individuals: based on data collected from a survey conducted by the Society of American Archivists on 5699 archivists in 2022, it emerged that although the percentage of White people in the United States is 71%, a full 84.4% of all Archivists Survey respondents are White. This means that all BIPOC (i.e., Black, indigenous, and people of color) categories are underrepresented: individuals who are Hispanic and Latino are the most underrepresented, with just 5.2% of respondents selecting this category compared with the national proportion of 18.7%. Of particular interest, respondents who are Black or African American are the second most underrepresented group, with only 4.5% of archivists selecting this category even though 14.2% of the U.S. population is Black or African American. This means that there are nearly six times more White individuals than BIPOC individuals in the archives profession. However, another important datum to consider is the employment level (Fig. 26): if BIPOC respondents are underrepresented at the individual contributor level, being one for every 5.06 White individuals, they are even more underrepresented at the manager or supervisor level (6.8) and are slightly underrepresented at the senior administrator or executive level (6.3) as well (Skinner, M. & Hulbert, I.G., 2022).

	Number of respondents who selected White or a BIPOC race/ethnicity category	BIPOC	White	Ratio of White to BIPOC
All Respondents	4,802	724	4,078	5.63
Individual contributor	2,759	455	2,304	5.06
Manager or supervisor	1,240	159	1,081	6.80
Senior administrator or executive	803	110	693	6.30

Fig. 26: Archivists' current position data. Source: A*CENSUS II All Archivists Survey Report

Tracing aggregated data related to the presence of Black archivists in Europe is much more complex. Certainly, the emergence of more associations exclusively composed of Black individuals engaged in archival work is a signal. Platforms such as Black Archives and Black Cultural Archives aim to collect and preserve the stories of African and Afro-diasporic people, inspiring conversations, substantive activities, and research on Black and other perspectives that are often underexposed elsewhere. The need to establish parallel entities dedicated to safeguarding Black memory and culture from the perspective of those who are witnesses and carriers is a positive signal, indicative of the necessity to view history not only in a new but also more just light, and to create spaces dedicated to this purpose, even if not yet integrated into the more institutional system.

2.3 Dealers

Certain issues, however, are not only found among those who have the power to disseminate and preserve culture but also among those who can influence the dynamics of the market where art constitutes the object of value, namely those who have the economic power to decide which works deserve to achieve both cultural value and financial value. The strength of gallerists lies in their ability to decide which artists to represent and consequently whose careers to promote, as galleries are "*the sole platform for an artist to make a living. And in many ways, galleries are where the hierarchy of power in the art world begins and ends*" (Zara, 2018). Even in this context, it is observed that most dealers are White, even where the core of the gallery comprises African or Afro-descendant artists. This statement does not imply that the sale of African art should be exclusively within the purview of Black individuals; however, it would be appropriate for the latter to find significant representation in this sector to bring greater expertise and belonging when addressing topics such as racism and identity, especially considering that often "*Black art is a representation of the Black experience*" (Adeagbo, 2022). After visiting the art fairs 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair in London and AKKA in Paris, British-Nigerian art manager and art consultant Morenike Adeagbo commented, "*While art from the African continent does not necessarily mean Black art, it does largely pertain to Black artists. Yet despite the vast majority of artists exhibited at both fairs being of Black African descent, this demographic was not*

reflected in the gallerists representing these artists, nor in the key staff working at the fairs, most of whom were white" (Adeagbo, 2022).

Unlike public museum institutions, however, information regarding white predominance in art galleries is quite limited, as, being private entities, data on the ethnic background of staff are often not disclosed and, if they are, they are likely incomplete. According to a survey conducted in 2024 by Zippia (Art Dealer Demographics and Statistics [2024]: Number of Art Dealers in the US, 2024) considering the period between 2010 and 2021, 61.8% of art dealers in the United States are White, 17.7% Hispanic or Latin, and only 8.4% Black or African American (Fig. 27). Moreover, while the percentage of White art dealers slightly decreased from 68.49% to 61.8% between 2010 and 2021, it is equally true that these percentage points did not increase the number of Black dealers but rather the percentage of Asian (from 5.99% to 6.90%) and Hispanic or Latino dealers (from 15.06% to 17.67%) (Fig. 28).

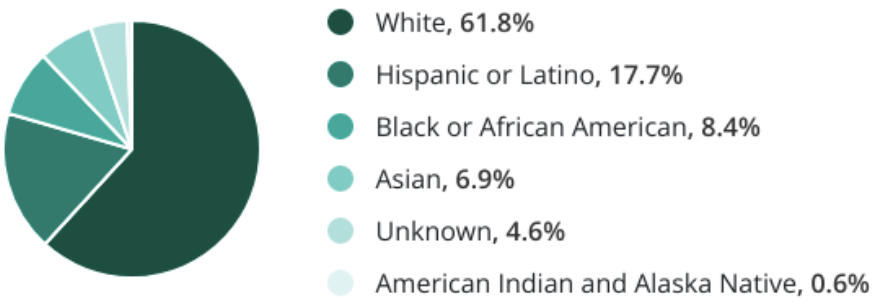

Fig. 27: Art dealers demographics by race. Source: https://www.zippia.com/art-dealer-jobs/demographics/#race-statistics.

Art Dealer Race And Ethnicity By Year

Year	White	Black or African American	Asian	Hispanic or Latino
2010	68.49%	8.37%	5.99%	15.06%
2011	68.30%	8.26%	6.16%	14.95%
2012	67.67%	8.40%	6.16%	15.12%
2013	67.27%	8.63%	6.32%	15.19%
2014	66.54%	8.78%	6.13%	16.16%
2015	66.48%	8.38%	6.42%	16.27%
2016	66.23%	8.45%	6.28%	16.44%
2017	65.23%	8.58%	6.42%	16.82%
2018	65.46%	8.38%	6.43%	16.84%
2019	65.51%	8.30%	6.53%	16.87%
2020	63.05%	8.07%	6.44%	17.34%
2021	61.76%	8.37%	6.90%	17.67%

Fig. 28: Art dealers race and ethnicity by year. Source: https://www.zippia.com/art-dealer-jobs/demographics/#race-statistics.

Another noteworthy fact is the wage gap by race, where Black or African American art dealers have the lowest average salary at $77,169, while the average salary for White dealers is $82,527, and for Hispanic or Latino dealers, it is $81,446 (Fig. 29).

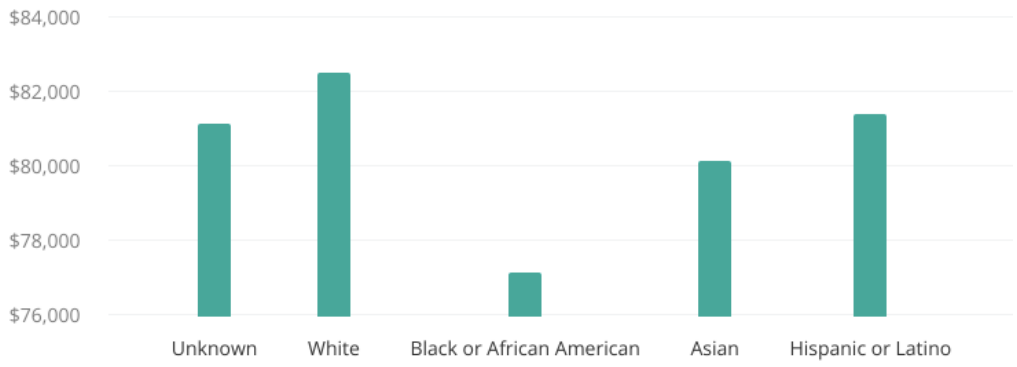

Fig. 29: Art dealers wage gap by race. Source: https://www.zippia.com/art-dealer-jobs/demographics/#race-statistics

Even in this case, finding unified data related to Europe is much more complex. However, it is not difficult to understand that the situation on the old continent is not very different; rather, it is quite similar to that in the United States but with a greater lack of information. It is sufficient to consider the fact that the opening of a Black-owned gallery in London, one of the main hubs of the global art market, is still considered a noteworthy event (Onuzo, 2021) or the rightful stir caused by the absence of Black-owned galleries at the 2020 edition of Art Basel, held online due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a significant absence given that the number of participating galleries was 281 (Pogrebin, 2020).

These numbers and considerations show how small the ecosystem of Black African gallery owners and dealers is, constituting the concerning data and not so much the representation of Black artists by non-Black gallerists. The reasons for this absence are varied: it certainly cannot be overlooked that opening and maintaining a business like an art gallery requires many resources, which, especially in the West, are not only more easily in the hands of White individuals, but in general, Black dealers often struggle to get bank loans, and they lack patron support. Participation in fairs, in fact, leads galleries to earn on average half of their annual income, but considering the funding difficulties faced by Black dealers, it would be appropriate for the Western art system, including White-owned galleries, to find a way to accommodate them, "*namely helping them qualify for art fairs like Art Basel, where the cost of running a booth can run as high as $100,000*" (Pogrebin, 2020). Additionally, unfortunately, *"the predominantly white art world can still be an uncomfortable space for a person of color to navigate, both in the making of art and the selling of it*" (Zara, 2018).

It is undeniable that the situation is changing and that, just as there is an increasing interest in African and Afro-descendant artists, dealers are also beginning to diversify. Indeed, the fact that change is starting from museums and biennials, which are increasingly acquiring and exhibiting this type of works, is an important incentive for galleries, as the public begins to recognize and appreciate such aesthetics and thus seeks it privately. Unfortunately, however, a radical change in perspective still seems to require a lot of time, as the problem still lies at the level where the White-run galleries do not even attempt to hire Black members of staff or create working environments that reflect the artists they wish to represent and support (Adeagbo, 2022). Selling contemporary African or Afro-diasporic art,

therefore, is not sufficient to counteract the White predominance of this market, as Ebony L. Haynes, the Black director of the White-owned Martos Gallery, said "*galleries need to do more than show Black artists. […] Do you try to make sure your artists of color are collected by collectors of color?"*.

2.4 Collectors

The question is not trivial. In fact, who buys Black art? Why do they buy Black art? And does it matter who owns these works? These are fundamental issues to understand the future of this growing interest in contemporary African and Afro-diasporic art, but especially whether it is just a passing trend or an interest destined to consolidate.

Looking at the list of the most important collectors of 2023 compiled by ARTNews, it is noted that out of 200 collectors, where the term does not necessarily refer to a single individual but also to multiple people sharing ownership of a collection, only eight are Afro-descendants. Among these, for example, are the African American couple Anita Blanchard and Martin Nesbitt; Shawn Carter, the rapper better known as Jay-Z, and the music power couple composed of rapper and record producer Kasseem Dean, better known as Swizz Beatz, and singer Alicia Keys; the mixed couples composed of Alfred J. Giuffrida and Pamela J. Joyner on one side, and George Lucas and Mellody Hobson on the other; and the African American couple Raymond G. McGuire and Crystal McCrary (ARTNews, 2023).

The mentioned names indicate who the most active Afro-descendant collectors in the market currently are, and it is important to note that while not all of them are focusing their collections on contemporary Afro-diasporic art and generally on Black art, most of them are. It is interesting to observe, in fact, that with the exception of the Devereux's collection, one of the largest collections of contemporary art connected to the African continent belonging to the Englishman Robert Devereux, founder of The African Arts Trust, which also served as chairman of the board of Frieze, the Tate Africa Acquisitions Committee and as an advisor to 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair Parenthetical (Contemporary Art From Africa and Its Diaspora Comes to Christie's During Frieze Week, 2022), the most notable collections of contemporary Afro-diasporic art tend to belong to Afro-descendant

collectors[16]. Among these, particularly significant are: (i) the Joyner-Giuffrida collection, whose nearly 400 pieces are expressions of African-American abstract art from the 40s, art of the African diaspora, and contemporary South African art, and whose owner, African American businesswoman Pamela Joyner, has been described as an "activist collector and philanthropist" with the intent of revising modern art history to include artists of African descent and supporting living African-American artists (ARTNews, 2023); (ii) the Kinsey African American Art & History Collection, composed of more than 700 rare historical objects and primary artifacts dating from 1595 to the present and artworks created by canonical African American artists from 1865 onwards, owned by the African American couple Bernard and Shirley Kinsey, who began acquiring and investing in Black art to understand and develop a deeper connection with their own African American history and culture; and (iii) the Dean Collection, owned by music producer and rapper Kasseem Dean, known as Swizz Beatz, and singer Alicia Keys, who have stated that their collection, comprising more than 1000 works, is a cultural duty as it focuses on African-American artists who have been ignored by official institutions for too long (Sargent, 2019). To promote and disseminate Black art as widely as possible, the couple is using social media and other digital platforms that allow for equal and broad access. For this reason, they created their own platform called *"No Commission*," which is an art fair that allows artists to retain 100% of the proceeds from their sales (Pavillon54, 2024). In 2018, the couple was also at the center of a heated controversy for suggesting and subsequently organizing the purchase of a work by Kerry James Marshall for their friend and music producer Sean "*Diddy"* Combs. The work, *Past Times* (1997), was sold for $21.1 million, the highest figure for a work by a living African-American artist at auction (Sargent, 2019). However, it was Swizz Beatz's motivation for convincing his colleague to purchase it that sparked discussion, as he reportedly stated, "*This Kerry James Marshall has to stay in the culture,"* meaning the African American culture.

[16] The situation is different when it comes to contemporary African art, produced by artists living on the continent. In this regard, it is curious to note that the major collections are owned by Western institutions and White individuals – consider, for example, the British Museum or the Jean Pigozzi collection, the world's largest private collection of African art, owned by the Italian-French entrepreneur after whom it is named.

Despite the clear intent of the co-founder of the Dean Collection to continue financing Black art through those who can culturally identify with it, this statement also contains some risks of perspective: what does it mean "*Is it still 'in the culture' if it lives on the walls of Diddy's mansion as opposed to being exhibited in a gallery available to the public? Is it still 'in the culture' if the artist, Marshall, received none of the money from the historic sale?"* (Sargent, 2019). To the question, therefore, of whether it is important who buys and owns Black art, the answer is affirmative, and it is crucial to note that those who collect contemporary Afro-diasporic art tend to be people belonging to that same culture. However, it is equally true that the words of Julie Crooks, curator in the department of Arts of Global Africa and the Diaspora at the Art Gallery of Ontario, should not be overlooked: "*everyone has the right to own art [...] However, if you're just collecting it to then put it back on the market, like in an auction, to kind of flip it, to make a profit — and a profit for which the artist doesn't benefit — I don't know if that's with good intention*" (Parris, 2022). The difference, therefore, fortunately, is not made by skin color, but by the way and the reason why someone decides to collect: indeed, there are those who collect because they are driven by a deep connection with an artist or a work, so much so that they feel the need to have it with them, and those who instead act as mere "*shoppers*" following market trends and with the desire to achieve a certain status through the possession of certain works.

Certainly, the latter method is always debatable, but when applied to the buying and selling of Black art, it can also be dangerous for the artists and raise moral issues. This is because when we talk about contemporary Afro-diasporic art, we often refer to emerging artists or those not yet fully established who risk being exploited by the market and then forgotten. Therefore, as emphasized by art advisor and gallerist Destinee Ross-Sutton, it is necessary for collectors to be educated not only in the creation of a collection but also in the sale of pieces from it, in order not to harm the involved artists and to be aware of the impact they have on their careers (Ross-Sutton, 2021). For example, regarding the purchase of works at auction houses, it is important to consider that if a high result drives the market up or creates inconsistencies, "*a work not reaching its reserve price or low estimate, or failing to sell entirely, will slow down the artist's market*" (Ross-Sutton, 2021). Additionally, "*work showing up at auction too early in an artist's career and going for a significantly higher price than primary-market works will likely tempt other*

collectors to sell in order to 'cash in'. This can result in the market being flooded with a young artist's work and its value can easily crash as a result" (Ross-Sutton, 2021). For this reason, it is also necessary to pay attention to how and to whom one resells, especially in the short term after the purchase, granting the artist on the one hand the right of first refusal and on the other trying to sell privately without involving auction houses to avoid what has already been illustrated. Equally important would be to buy more than one work from the same artist and perhaps donate a piece to foundations or museum institutions to promote their career not only from a financial point of view (Ross-Sutton, 2021).

Collecting, therefore, is also and perhaps above all an act of responsibility. To conclude, the "*emergence of black art collectors has initiated a paradigm shift, transforming the art world into a more inclusive and representative space. [since] these collectors […] are not merely accumulating artworks; they are preserving history, celebrating identity, and fostering a profound understanding of the black experience through visual narratives*" (Pavillon54, 2024). Additionally, the contribution that Black collectors can bring to the art world is decisive because it goes far beyond the purchase of works: their impact, in fact, extends to philanthropic activities of an educational and cultural nature aimed at informing and involving the community. The organization of events, talks, and educational programs on Black art, as well as the financing and lending of artworks to museums and other institutions, leads to a democratization of art collections that allows for the spread of a new vision where diversity and inclusion are the keywords. Not only that, Black art collectors can also have the power to bring about significant changes: on one hand, they can alter the dynamics of the art market as they are "*instrumental in challenging the traditional norms of art valuation and investment. By prioritizing works that resonate with cultural, historical, and emotional significance, they are redefining what is considered valuable in the art market*" (Pavillon54, 2024); while on the other hand, they have the potential to transform the narrative and image that the world has about Black people, they could "*challenge and redefine stereotypical representations, offering more nuanced, positive, and empowering images of black identity*" (Pavillon54, 2024), highlighting and disseminating the importance that Black culture has had from a historical, social, cultural, and economic perspective in the formation of today's West and beyond, as well as the impact it has had globally on every form of art, from music to fashion and naturally to the fine arts.

3. Unfair exploitation of Black artists by the Western world of art: the Amoako Boafo case

Unfortunately, despite the growing trend of including Black people in more roles, its consolidation still seems quite distant, and to the initial question of who is actually benefiting off Afro-descendant and diasporic artists' success, the answer is not the artist himself but the art system. This is because, when referring to this category of artists, most of the time we refer to emerging artists who may have left their countries of origin to try to succeed in the West, and for whom the dynamics of this world are still unknown, which is why it is easy for them to become victims.

A striking case in this regard is certainly that of the Ghanaian artist Amoako Boafo, who moved from Accra to Vienna to advance his career. He was noticed on Instagram by the African American artist Kehinde Wiley, who recommended him to his four galleries, namely Stephen Friedman, in London; Templon, in Paris; Sean Kelly, in New York; and Roberts Projects, in Los Angeles. The latter, after few a months, organized Boafo's first exhibition, selling his works for around $10,000 each, and the show was sold out by the second day. Only a few months later, before Boafo refused an offer of $1 million for the production of 50 pieces for collectors David Mugrabi and Jeremy Larner, the price of his works was quintupled by the Marianne Ibrahim Gallery on the occasion of Art Basel Miami in December 2019, where they were sold out in minutes. From that moment on, the prices of Boafo's works continued to rise rapidly, adding to the artist's enthusiasm a deep stress. Boafo indeed stated that with "*a much bigger audience came the stress—and [he] didn't know the stress until things started going to auction*" (Freeman, 2020). Auction-house specialists had begun at that time to insistently request the announcement of the sale of one of the artist's works in one of the future sales, "*asking for a dollar threshold that would pry the canvases off their walls*" (Freeman, 2020). Just two months later, during Phillips's February contemporary art evening sale in London, one of his works (*The Lemon Bathing Suit*) was auctioned for the first time, having belonged to three different collectors within a few months. The estimates, which were around $40,000 to $65,000, were exceeded by about thirteen times: the work was sold for $881,500, while it had been purchased for "only" $22,500 by the last collector.

This rapid rise attracted the attention of collectors not only to Boafo but also to many other Ghanaian and generally contemporary African artists, such as Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Henry Taylor, and Tschabalala Self. The rapid increase in the price of such an artist's works was seen as a great investment opportunity in other contemporary African artists whose works could be bought cheaply and then quickly resold for much higher prices. The phenomenon was so immediate and evident that this wave of interest in contemporary African and Afro-diasporic artists was called the "*Boafo effect*" (Durand-Ruel & Zarobell, 2023). However, this effect was characterized not only by a new attention to the works of such artists but also by a strong pressure to create more and satisfy the increasing demand. Thus, their works, but especially those of Boafo, "*became the subject of intense speculation among art world insiders, and various actors in this network, as early as 2020, found ways to profit from the fascination for his work*" (Durand-Ruel & Zarobell, 2023).

When a speculative phenomenon occurs, it is always interesting to understand if it happens as a result of a natural increase in the prices of a particular artist who consequently begins to attract interest from collectors or if the price increase is itself the result of speculative maneuvers, such as rapid buy-sell transactions. In the case of Boafo, the speculative bubble that enveloped him was a rather peculiar phenomenon. The sale of *The Lemon Bathing Suit* by Phillips intrigued the entire art world, unable to explain how his works could have reached such prices in a few months. Based on research, it emerged that the painting was purchased by a mysterious London-based collector named Ari Rothstein, a 29-year-old real-estate executive. This information was confirmed by Boafo, who stated that Rothstein was bidding on behalf of a client. And the client was Amoako Boafo himself.

At this point, the question arises: what drove the artist to act in this way, interfering with his own market?

> *It is possible to see that artists whose value rises so quickly are exploited by established actors in the art market, but they are also implicated in these mechanisms very quickly, and any effort by emerging artists to assert control over market mechanisms will likely be trumped by experienced players already in the art market infrastructure. This is not simply a story of another artist and a handful*

> *of gallerists giving Boafo an opportunity (though this is what happened); it is also about actors in the market recognizing an opportunity and playing it for maximum gain* (Durand-Ruel & Zarobell, 2023).

Knowing that the painting would be sold at much higher prices than the estimated amounts and not being able to afford it, the artist contacted the two market players Ari Rothstein and Raphael Held, who would use their own funds to buy *The Lemon Bathing Suit* on Boafo's behalf and in return Boafo would give them up to $480,000 worth of art. It is unclear if there was an agreement among the three on how to behave if the auction amount exceeded the agreed sum, but when this happened and the painting was sold for nearly $900,000, Boafo refused to deliver enough works to cover that value. He gave them one large and two medium-size paintings and a work on paper worth a combined $480,000, but with a condition: if the two resold the works and thus made a profit, 20% of the upside would belong to the artist himself. This indeed happened, but Boafo never received the promised money, nor was *The Lemon Bathing Suit* ever returned to him; instead, it was resold by the duo on the secondary market. Boafo was not only unable to regain possession of the work, he was not even able to take legal action against them (Freeman, 2020).

Rothstein and Held were not the only ones to take advantage of Boafo's rapid success. In 2018, Benjamin Ikwueme, a young collector of African art based in London, for example, after contacting the artist to express his admiration but specifying that he could not afford his works, received six small paintings from Boafo at the price of only €100 each. Boafo, a great supporter of artistic dissemination regardless of money and grateful for the support received, also sent Ikwueme *Lady With Lemon Top*, a larger work. Two years later, the collector made a return of almost 58,000% from the sale of the seven paintings (gaining $696,000) and, despite Boafo's public discontent, stated that the artist had agreed to such prices and that in any case, there were no restrictions attached to the works (Freeman, 2020).

It is unclear whether Boafo's actions were truly motivated, as some suggest, by an attempt to reclaim his works and, consequently, his market, or whether, as others believe, the artist implemented a strategy—certainly not new to the art market—aimed at increasing the value of his works and capitalizing on the resulting wave of

notoriety. The truth likely lies somewhere in between; what is certain is that this has been the most striking case in recent years to reveal how risky it can be to navigate such dynamics without the proper tools to master them. Naturally, a lack of understanding regarding how strategies within the complex art market function is common among artists entering it for the first time. One might, however, consider that an artist born and raised or at least trained in the Global North, unlike someone from the Global South, might have more advantages in this respect, being more accustomed to at least observing or studying certain mechanisms.

Boafo's case, in fact, is not the only instance where a Black artist has faced similar challenges. As journalist Nate Freeman, who covered the case in-depth, stated, "*The Lemon Bathing Suit incident was one of several that starkly illuminates how today's art market can leave young Black artists fighting to regain control over their work—and their future—at a moment when the art world claims to be reassessing the power dynamics among collectors, institutions, and artists of color*" (Freeman, 2020). Another emerging name reaching seven-figure prices is Njideka Akunyili Crosby, who in 2018 set the record price of $3.4 million at a very young age. According to Lisa Schiff, this can be a rather dangerous game because "W*hile they do have institutional support, the simple fact that they are even appearing at auction this early in the game indicates that something in the market is off. [...] at this stage in their careers, it is potentially harmful. First, the prices attained make it hard for other patrons to resist selling the work*" (Schiff, 2018), with all the consequences that, as seen, this can entail.

It is therefore evident that that artists approaching an industry as complex as the art world for the first time must exercise great caution not to fall prey to certain market dynamics without yet having the experience to recognize, avoid, or control them. While this is true, in general, for anyone new to such dynamics, it seems even more critical for Black artists to pay closer attention to professional choices and to whom they entrust their careers. This is due to two interconnected reasons: firstly because, as a result of the mainstream attention they are receiving, many of these artists are at risk of a rapid career due to market exploitation. This is due to two interconnected reasons: firstly, because, as a result of the mainstream attention they are currently receiving, many of these artists are at risk of a rapid career trajectory dictated by market exploitation. This risk, already problematic for any emerging artist placed under the intense scrutiny of such an industry, is further exacerbated

when it occurs within a system still partially lacking the tools to foster an equitable dialogue with Black artists. The art market, in fact, remains *"[...] a system not designated to fully understand – or accommodate – blackness*" (Smith, 2019), since, as observed, the majority of its constituents, aside from the artists themselves, are predominantly White.

As previously mentioned, the situation is changing, distances are narrowing, and Black individuals are beginning to be represented not only in art but also within the very structures that constitute the system itself. To further encourage and facilitate this process, it is necessary to create and promote a network of entities capable of protecting emerging artists, especially when coming from the Global South and generally from realities far from the dynamics of the Western art market.

Chapter 3

A magnifying glass to Portugal

1. The Portuguese colonial past and its current migration

In Portugal, historically the first nation to initiate the African diaspora to the New World, efforts are now underway to promote artists from the Global South, particularly those from former Portuguese colonies, through a series of targeted initiatives. This process, although not without contradictions as will be shown, is turning this country, located at the gateway to Europe, into a center of interest. Perhaps peripheral and marginal in relation to Western markets, Portugal is becoming increasingly central when viewed from a different perspective, that of the countries of the Global South.

The dualism of being both a center and a periphery at the same time stems from the country's peculiar positioning, which in turn was one of the main causes of its colonial past. Portugal, bordered only by Spain, could in no way expand its territories by land, which is why it began to expand in other directions, looking to the oceans as its allies. Thus, the Portuguese empire was not only the oldest of the modern colonial empires but, thanks to maritime expansion, it was also the first global empire in history, reaching territories from Japan to the Americas, as well as the longest-lived. The beginning of Portuguese maritime exploration is traced back to the 15th century, particularly to 1415, when the Kingdom of Portugal conquered the city of Ceuta in North Africa in search of minerals, especially gold, and of the possibility of extending their trade to the African continent by circumventing the taxation imposed by the Moors in those territories. Building on the success of this venture, Prince Henry I the Navigator started to organise sea expeditions to the Atlantic Ocean and along the coast of Mauritania, in order to open up new trade routes and expand the Portuguese market. This is how they run into the archipelago of Madeira, located in the Atlantic Ocean off the Portuguese coast. Although with reference to this event it is not possible to speak of actual colonization, the significance of this first conquest lies primarily in the methods by which it occurred: the success of using a system of parceling out the uninhabited land into *captaincies* and assigning them to noble feudal Portuguese lords moved to the islands in order

to maintain indirect control and simultaneously guarantee perpetual financial returns, as well as the introduction of sugarcane plantations, ensured that the settlement system adopted on the islands was replicated, serving as a model for the subsequent colonies. It was especially the spread of certain types of crops that necessitated an increase in the labor force and subsequently led to the importation of slaves mostly from Canary islands. As mentioned earlier, this slave-worked plantation system became an important part of the economy in the New World, resulting in one of the bloodiest slave trades ever, the Atlantic slave trade (Cartwright, 2021). Returning to Portuguese expansionism, after Madeira, the crown, still under the leadership of Prince Henry I the Navigator, decided to keep the islands as its focal point of interest and first conquered the Azores and later the Cape Verde archipelago. The latter where inhabited islands, later populated by Portuguese and, in a second moment, by Africans, brought by the former especially from Guinea Bissau. The crown, in fact, had landed in Guinea-Bissau in 1446-47 and, even if this continental territory did not become a colony until the 19th century, its importance for Portugal extends over the decades, laying mainly in the human resources that could be easily transported from the mainland to Cape Verde and from there across the Atlantic Ocean, to be employed on plantations. More contested, however, were the Canary Islands, which were of strong interest to the Spanish crown, with whom they were eventually divided, making clear the two main maritime powers of the 15th century. Spaniards and Portuguese were the ones who, since the sixteenth century, conceived their expansionism on a global scale. The interest in these territories in the middle of the ocean was naturally not coincidental: they served as intermediate bases of support for long maritime routes to the Americas and India. However, it was with the colonization in 1486 of the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe, located off the southern coast of West Africa, that the Kingdom of Portugal managed to establish its outposts along these coasts as well. Particularly important was the settlement in what is now Angola around 1570, which became the first European territorial colony in Africa, through which the Portuguese began to conduct trade between the continent's interior territories and the coast. Among the items traded were also thousands of enslaved Africans, unhappily essential for the development of the overseas colonies. By the late-16th century, nearly 10,000 slaves a year were being exported from Angola to be shipped directly from Luanda to Brazil and elsewhere in the Americas (Cartwright, 2021).

Simultaneously, toward the end of the 15th century, the Kingdom of Portugal also expanded on the other coast of Africa, though with different interests. In 1498, explorer Vasco da Gama sailed around the Cape of Good Hope and into the Indian Ocean, opening new trade routes and attempting to develop a network with the populations of East Africa, India, and the Arabian Peninsula. However, this attempt was rather unsuccessful on the part of the Portuguese, who instead of adopting a peaceful approach, used their naval superiority to impose themselves on trade, often attacking other vessels and independent trading cities of the Swahili Coast. Violence, however, did not pay off, and the crown lost most of the trading partners on the East African coast, who allied themselves with the Arab populations.

The failure in East Africa resulted in the shift of interests toward the southern part of the continent. The Portuguese established a colony in Mozambique, a territory crucial for its human resources and ivory, as well as for its strategic location. Mozambique, in fact, proved to be an optimal region for Portuguese expansionist ambitions, being a key stop on one of the world's most important trade routes, the one to India, known as the *carreira da India*. From the end of the 15th century, Vasco da Gama attempted to open a trade route to Asia to gain direct access to the spice trade, which was particularly lucrative in the West. After an initial attempt to negotiate with the city of Calcutta, the Portuguese turned to rival Cochin (Kochi), where in 1503 they built a fortress and struck a trade deal with the local governor. However, the Indians were not particularly interested in the goods that the Europeans had to offer, and consequently, the Portuguese decided to adopt the same strategy they had used in East Africa. Superior ships and cannons were used to take over the Indian Ocean trade network by force and establish a monopoly on the spice trade. Many cities on the western coast of India were thus conquered, and in 1530, Goa became the capital of what would be called the *Estado da India* or *Portuguese State of India*, which would later include Mozambique itself (Cartwright, 2021).

However, the Portuguese did not limit themselves to the Indian coasts; they decided to reach the territories where spices, their main object of interest, were produced. Among these were the colonized city of Malacca in 1511 and Timor the following year, both part of Malay territory, Macao in 1557, the first and last European colony on Chinese soil, and Nagasaki in Japan, the most eastern Portuguese colony.

Finally, completing the globe and looking at the transatlantic colonies, we encounter Brazil, probably the most important of all Portuguese colonies. Navigators arrived in these territories in 1500, and once they discovered its numerous natural resources, especially minerals, they officially made it a colony in 1549. The colonization model based on the division of land into *captaincies* and plantations was introduced here on a much larger scale than anywhere else, making Brazil the world's leading producer of sugar and tobacco. This was possible, on the one hand, through the extermination of indigenous populations that inhabited the lands of interest to the colonists and, on the other, as already seen, through the labor force of 12.5 million people (Eltis & Richardson, 2023) who were transported from Africa to the New World in the so-called Middle Passage (Cartwright, 2021).

The Portuguese Empire, at its peak, encompassed regions stretching from the far east to the far west of the world. However, managing such an expansive and multicultural empire was not an easy task. Around the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, Portuguese dominance over the seas began to be challenged by other European powers, who took advantage of the isolation of certain Portuguese colonial cities to erode their hegemony. The most successful and widespread threat to Portuguese territories came from the Dutch, who attacked Mozambique in the first decade of the 17th century and Macao in 1622 and 1626. During the same period, the Dutch also occupied parts of northern Brazil. Subsequently, in 1641, they invaded Angola and that same year also captured Malacca. They then conquered Colombo in 1656 and Cochin in 1663. In the following century, the English were the most feared, as they occupied Goa from 1799 to 1815 and interfered with trade with Brazil, whose resources ceased to be the exclusive monopoly of the Portuguese. Furthermore, in 1822, Brazil ceased to be a colony by achieving independence. Therefore, over these centuries, due to the intervention of other colonial empires, Portugal lost control over many regions (Cartwright, 2021).

Despite this, the country was not only the first European state to acquire overseas colonies but also the last to lose them. At the beginning of the 20th century, Portugal still counted as colonies Goa, which was returned to India in 1962; the African colonies; and Macao. It was the loss of these latter two territories that marked the dissolution of Portugal's empire starting from the mid-1970s. Following the establishment of the Republic in 1910, the country experienced a profound period of political instability, culminating in the coup of 1926, when a military junta

put an end to the first republican period. After becoming president, General António Óscar de Fragoso Carmona appointed António de Oliveira Salazar as Minister of Finance, who restored the country's financial situation through a policy of strict expenditure control. This earned him significant prestige, which enabled him to assume the presidency of the Council in 1932 and to initiate, a year later, the dictatorship known as *Estado Novo*. A staunch colonialist, Salazar sought to preserve Portugal's vast colonial empire by beginning, in 1961, a long colonial war, never officially declared, against the independence movements that were emerging in the African colonies, particularly in Angola, at a time when the rest of Europe was progressively withdrawing from Africa. However, the growing costs of these operations and the constant demand for soldiers impoverished the country.

> *From 1961 onwards, Portugal found itself fighting a costly war with its African colonies, Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau, which by the 1970s had become unsustainable. Five families alone controlled the extraction industry in the colonies, and their economic activities were key to both Portugal's isolationist policies and the dictatorship's domestic survival. This situation pitted the regime against its increasingly disgruntled military, in a feud, which ultimately led to its downfall with the Carnation Revolution in 1974* (Pinto, 2018).

Following Salazar's death in 1970, the entire surrounding political structure weakened. Groups of military personnel with progressive ideas began to form, leading to the creation of the *Movimento das Forças Armadas* (MFA, Armed Forces Movement), an internal group within the national army composed of diverse viewpoints, but united by a minimal program of three points, known as the three Ds: *Democratize*, *Develop*, *Decolonize*. Open hostility towards the regime soon led to a radical power shift, and on April 25, 1974, a decisive and peaceful military action known as the *Revolução dos cravos* (Carnation Revolution) took place, which marked the end of Portugal's imperial and colonial rule, which had lasted for five centuries. After the regime's collapse, events moved quickly: a decolonization process began, and the colonial wars ended. In 1975, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Cape Verde, and the São Tomé and Príncipe archipelago achieved independence. In 1976, Macao gained the status of a special territory under

Portuguese administration, with its own executive and legislative bodies. This status definitively ended in 1999, when, following a Sino-Portuguese agreement of 1987, the territory was transferred to Chinese sovereignty.

The centuries-long relations between Portugal and its colonies naturally had multiple consequences for both sides. One of these, still evident today, was the significant migration to Portugal, particularly from Africa and Brazil. According to scholars, the origins of the main immigrant communities in Portugal date back to the period between 1966 and 1973 (Almeida & Corkill, 2015), when, due to the colonial wars, many Portuguese either migrated to Europe or were sent to Africa to fight. During these years, Salazar especially favored the arrival of labor from Cape Verde: according to the 12th General Census of the Portuguese Population, 30% of the population of Lusophone African origin residing in Portugal in 1981 had emigrated before 1973, and the vast majority of these individuals were of Cape Verdean origin. This was because the Atlantic archipelago, in colonial times, was considered an extension of Portugal, a status that gave its inhabitants a privileged position compared to other African colonies. Considered Portuguese nationals since 1914, Cape Verdean citizens were granted the right to move to the mainland. This right was extended to all the inhabitants of the empire in 1959, when Salazar granted Portuguese nationality to the overseas provinces of Angola, Guinea Bissau, and Mozambique (Moretti, 2024).

A second wave of migration from Africa was triggered by the Carnation Revolution in 1974, which marked the culmination of the decolonization process. In the aftermath of the revolution and subsequent political and military instability in the *Países africanos de língua oficial portuguesa* (PALOP states), Portugal welcomed up to approximately 800,000 people of Portuguese descent (*retornados*) between 1974 and 1976, mostly from the territories of Angola and Mozambique. According to the best indirect estimates, among them were at least 25,000-35,000 people of African descent (Moretti, 2024).

Another migration cycle occurred from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s following Portugal's entry into the European Union, a factor that made the country even more attractive for non-EU citizens. This historical event, combined with the growing demand for labor, led to a further increase in the number of foreign residents, dominated by Africans and, to a lesser extent, Brazilians and Western Europeans. Finally, according to the *Relatório de Imigração, Fronteiras e Asilo*

(Lopes Mota & Machado, 2022), a report aimed at analyzing migration dynamics in Portugal, 2022 saw, for the seventh consecutive year, an 11.9% increase in the foreign resident population compared to 2021, with 781,915 foreign citizens holding residency. These figures, of course, do not account for the percentage of unregularized or undocumented individuals, but it is still interesting to note that this figure consists of 30.7% of people from Brazil, followed by the United Kingdom (5.8%), Cape Verde (4.7%), India (4.5%), Italy (4.4%), and Angola (4.1%) (Lopes Mota & Machado, 2022).

The numbers reported here suggest the potential social, economic, and cultural impact of this modern diaspora. Particularly regarding the cultural aspect, the result of these population movements has inevitably been a cultural melting pot, where the practices and artistic currents of different countries influence one another. The art sector, especially contemporary art, naturally feels the effects of these migratory flows. Increasingly, artists from the PALOP states are moving to Portugal to find a gateway into the Western art market, while more and more spaces are being created specifically to welcome these artists and act as intermediaries with a Western reality, which is not always easy to access.

2. The Portuguese contemporary art market

2.1 Rise and growth of the Portuguese contemporary art scene

In his well-known chapter on Portugal in *The International Art Markets: The Essential Guide for Collectors and Investors* (2008), edited by James Goodwin, João Magalhães argues that the Portuguese art market is rather peripheral, though not distinctively so, and that its prevailing artistic taste remains traditional, conservative, and nationalist, still far removed from international trends (Duarte, 2020). Today, more than fifteen years later, the question arises: does this still hold true? While it may be accurate that, geographically and economically, Portugal continues to be on the periphery of Europe—being the westernmost country on the continent, bordered only by Spain, and with an economy deeply dependent on international economic cycles—it is equally true that its "*art scene has been gathering steam in recent years thanks to new art spaces, a growing number of expats, and a booming technology industry*" (Sansom, 2022). Although

contemporary art in Portugal is still largely concentrated in Lisbon and Porto, both cities have experienced notable expansion in recent years due to various factors.

Before analyzing the current situation, it is important to acknowledge that Portugal's entry into global markets, including the art sector, came rather late (Pinto, 2018). As for the private sector, particularly art galleries, the first efforts to place Portugal on the international stage date back to the 1960s. However, this period coincided with a significant economic downturn that culminated in the mid-1970s with the Carnation Revolution (1974), which ended the long-standing dictatorship and had major repercussions for the art market. During this period, there was an initial push for Portuguese galleries to be represented at international art fairs, which provided "*the opportunity to present their artists' works to museums, collectors, and international curators, opening their careers up to internationalization and allowing them to find attractive alternatives to the local market in Lisbon*" (Duarte, 2020). Given that participating in such fairs requires considerable financial investment, "*some galleries periodically requested financial support from the state (the Culture Secretariat, later the Institute of Arts) and foundations with a cultural profile based in Portugal, such as the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian and the Fundação Luso-Americana para o Desenvolvimento*" (Duarte, 2020). However, this strategy did not always yield the desired results, as the economic conditions in Portugal at the time meant that funding from these institutions was neither consistent nor guaranteed. Consequently, Portugal's representation at these events was irregular, undermining the goal of internationalization set by gallery owners.

In terms of museums and foundations, the most significant period spans from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, when two of Lisbon's largest contemporary art venues were established: the Centro Cultural de Belém (CCB), which, from 2007, began hosting the Berardo international modern and contemporary art collection thanks to an agreement between José Berardo and the Portuguese government, and the Fundação Caixa Geral de Depósitos - Culturgest (1993). In 1994, the Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea - Museu do Chiado was reopened, and at the end of the decade, the Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Fundação de Serralves in Porto was inaugurated.

However, the real onset of a continuous process of internationalizing the Portuguese art market did not occur until the early 2000s, when galleries began to

pursue this goal independently, without relying on state funding, but with the support of other allies. Foreign investments, facilitated by low property prices and a lenient tax regime, helped bring in foreign capital and assisted the country in recovering from the 2008 financial crisis (Choy, 2022). This increased influx of funds naturally fueled the growth of elite sectors, including the art market, which could not be sustained solely by the national economy. As curator and art dealer André Magnin pointed out, *"the issue of money affects Portugal's 'timid' relationship with the contemporary art scene"* (Almeida, 2024).

In this period, several galleries founded in the late 1990s began to extend their reach beyond the national market to operate on a global stage. Art historian and researcher Adelaide Duarte highlights galleries such as Pedro Cera (1998), Filomena Soares (1999), and Cristina Guerra (2001) for adopting strategies to diversify their represented artists, moving beyond Portuguese creators, participating in large-scale exhibitions and key museums, and engaging with international curators (Duarte, 2020).

This process of opening to the global market became even more evident in the 2020s when Lisbon transitioned from a city striving to gain attention within Europe to one that began attracting international focus thanks to the opening of new museums, art fairs, and spaces dedicated to supporting artists. One of the key drivers of this shift was the inauguration of the ARCO art fair in 2016, an offshoot of the Madrid event, which in its 2024 edition featured 84 galleries from 15 countries (Garcia, 2024). Since 2019, ARCOlisboa has included a program dedicated to the African continent, curated by Paula Nascimento and titled *Africa in Focus*. The arrival of this fair significantly boosted the globalization of Portugal's contemporary art market. The representation of international galleries at ARCOlisboa highlighted Lisbon's art scene and its key figures, prompting both Portuguese and non-Portuguese private actors to open new spaces, such as galleries and venues for temporary exhibitions. As artist Pedro Garcia noted, *"Few cities have undergone a development process as rapid and comprehensive as Lisbon in the last decade. [...] As Lisbon's popularity abroad rose, tourists changed the city's composition, and massive private investment transformed derelict buildings into brand-new homes. [...] This new market, composed of a mix of tech professionals, digital nomads, wealthy retirees, and foreign businesspeople, prompted the swift*

renewal of Lisbon's gallery scene" (Garcia, 2024). The number of such spaces in Portugal more than doubled between 2000 and 2018 (Fig. 30).

Art galleries and other venues for temporary exhibitions

Year	Number
2000	479
2001	556
2002	668
2003	717
2004	732
2005	773
2006	811
2007	804
2008	840
2009	885
2010	881
2011	887
2012	⊥ 803
2013	1 050
2014	1 058
2015	1 037
2016	1 038
2017	1 024
2018	1 023

Fig. 30: Art Galleries and Other Spaces of Temporary Exhibitions Survey in Portugal 2000-2018. Source: PORDATA.

While the Portuguese contemporary art market may still appear peripheral, *"it does not mean that artistic taste remains 'traditionally conservative and nationalistic,' or that trends are still belatedly absorbed, as usually is associated with the peripheral markets*" (Duarte, 2020). On the contrary, if Lisbon—and Portugal more broadly—remains geographically distant from the main Western art hubs, it has nevertheless become a central destination for many artists from the Global South, especially those from the PALOP states and other former Portuguese colonies. As Garcia explains, "*the country's strong cultural ties with Portuguese-speaking nations position Lisbon as the perfect gathering point for those operating in the Lusophone sphere*" (Garcia, 2024), transforming the Portuguese capital into a key cultural hub within the "Lusophone" Atlantic, albeit not without certain contradictions.

2.2 Black diasporic spaces in Portugal

The Portuguese colonial past continues to exert a significant influence on the country's contemporary history, from an economic, social, and cultural standpoint. As previously noted, the migration numbers from former colonies to Portugal are substantial. Therefore, it is crucial to examine, on the one hand, the representation of such artists in the national art market and, on the other, "*how African art has been displayed and consumed in Portugal, in relation with the process of production of the country's contradictory postcolonial image*" (Castellano Garrido, 2017).

Since the late 20th century, when the first efforts were made to internationalize Portugal's contemporary art market, the country became a frequent venue for African artists. In Lisbon, particularly, several large-scale exhibitions have been and continue to be organized, including major curatorial projects and solo exhibitions of both established and emerging African artists (Garrido Castellano, 2017). Notable exhibitions include *Um oceano inteiro para nadar* (2000), *Looking both Ways: Das esquinas do olhar* (2005); *Réplica e Rebeldia* (2006); *De Malangatana a Pedro Cabrita Reis* (2009); *Fronteiras* (2010); *Artistas Comprometidos? Talvez* (2014); *O Barco/The Boat* (2021); *Interferências* (2022); and *Black Ancient Futures* (2024). It is true that "*the presence of African art within Portuguese cultural and exhibitional landscape is connected with the process of redefinition of Portuguese postcolonial identity*" (Garrido Castellano, 2017), which aims to best recognize and represent the country's multiculturalism and multiraciality. However, cultural programs and events related to Afro-descendant and Afro-diasporic contemporary art often raise delicate issues.

Unfortunately, violent histories and memories of slavery, racism and colonialism are frequently denied in the country through the celebration of the Portuguese empire and the so-called "Age of Discoveries". This occurs not only in educational settings but also through the preservation of celebratory monuments, many of which were erected during the Salazar dictatorship, such as the *Padrão dos Descobrimentos* or Monument of Discoveries in Belém. Although one cannot generalize, this denialism and historical revisionism have severe consequences, including a misinterpretation of history and a structural racism within contemporary Portuguese society, which is often "*conveniently swept under the carpet of an anxiously maintained 'lusotropicalism', repackaged as 'lusofonia' and the idea of a benign Portuguese influence around the world*" (De Oliveira, 2019).

Nonetheless, there is a clear attempt to build a new narrative and provide a different perspective on the Portuguese colonial past. This effort frequently takes place through artistic and curatorial interventions that aim to critique the concept of *lusofonia*, which "*constitutes a post-colonial/contemporary Portuguese symbolic and geopolitical construction, in which the idea of empire is given continuity and glorification, through a privileged relationship between ex-colonies and ex-colonizer, on the basis of language, culture and history*" (Dias, 2009). Efforts to deconstruct this idea of a positive colonialism propagated by Portugal to justify its colonial interventions are increasingly prevalent in the Portuguese contemporary art scene. However, within this scenario emerges the other side of the coin. As already mentioned in relation to Afro-diasporic art and its recurring themes, there is a risk that this constant focus on cultural manifestations produced within Africa and those linked to African migration in Portugal could be exploited and sensationalized due to the current trends in the art market, reducing African production to a profitable trend. Additionally, there is the risk of "ghettoizing" artists due to their origin and the nature of their work. Furthermore, as curator and artistic director Graça Rodrigues emphasizes, the lack of investment in contemporary art in Portugal compounds these issues: "*African artists with the greatest market value are not from former Portuguese colonies and this is a result of the cultural and academic development of those countries. There is also a lack of investment in Portugal. Market dependency is also evident: if the museums, the art history institutes are short of funds, there's no investment, no research, and that has repercussions across the board*" (Almeida, 2024).

Despite these challenges, the attempt to foster a dialogue between the country's colonial past and a present that not only can no longer deny it, but also must take responsibility by bringing forth new narratives and perspectives, is evident. This endeavor is driven, on the one hand, by multiple artists from former colonies who work and exhibit in Portugal, and, on the other, by various cultural organizations that promote African and Afro-diasporic art. Regarding the first aspect, artists such as Kiluanji Kia Henda (Angola, 1979), Filipa César (Portugal, 1975), Olavo Amado (São Tomé and Príncipe, 1979), Ângela Ferreira (Mozambique, 1958), Eurídice Kala aka Zaituna Kala (Mozambique, 1987), Délio Jasse (Angola, 1980), Renè Tavares (São Tomé and Príncipe, 1983), Daniel Barroca (Portugal, 1976), Filipe Branquinho (Mozambique, 1977), and Mónica de Miranda (Portugal/Angola, 1976)

work "*critically with colonial archives […] in view of a decolonizing memorialization of Portuguese colonialism and an understanding of its profound and multifarious impact in contemporary societies – notably regarding structural and institutional racism in Portugal, and enduring patterns of coloniality and neo-colonialism in Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, and São Tomé and Príncipe*" (De Oliveira, 2019).

Regarding the organizations these artists interact with, which act as bridges between them and the public, one that merits mention is *THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE*[17], an international contemporary art gallery whose first headquarters was founded in 2016 in Luanda, the Angolan capital, and which today also has a second office located in the center of Lisbon. As the name suggests, contrasting with the traditional "white cube" gallery model characterized by its square or oblong shape, white walls, and a light source typically from the ceiling, *THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE* is an unconventional gallery. Its philosophy is to promote and support artists from the Global South, giving visibility to exponents of post-colonial art deeply connected not only to Africa and its diaspora but, more broadly, to artists engaged in exploring themes related to identity and origins. Among the artists exhibited and promoted by the gallery at important fairs such as the aforementioned 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair and ARCO Lisboa, or AKAA (Also Known As Africa) — the premier contemporary art fair focused on Africa in France — are Renè Tavares, Brazilian artist Cássio Markowski, Malian artist Kèbè, and Angolan Nelo Teixeira. Another gallery committed to promoting African art and its diaspora is *Insofar*, whose goal is to "*challenge stereotypes and inspire audiences worldwide, transmitting the strength and beauty of diversity*," [18] hosting exhibitions of artists like Angolan photographer Edson Chagas and Brazilian artist Marcela Cantuária. In addition to these private spaces, there are also projects and collectives such as *Afrontosas*, a cultural association aimed at promoting "*projects reflecting on the importance of queer Blackness in the diaspora in Portugal, in confluence with migratory exchanges from Latin America, Africa and other regions*," and *The Blacker the Berry*, a Black Queer-led multidisciplinary arts collective championing artists in the Diaspora, Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin and South America.

[17] https://thisisnotawhitecube.com/
[18] https://insofar.art/about/.

Among the aforementioned entities, one institution is notably missing, one in which I have personally had the opportunity to be involved and which allowed me to engage directly with contemporary African art and its diaspora: *HANGAR - Centro de Investigação Artística*.

3. HANGAR – the artistic research centre that is making the difference

HANGAR - Centro de Investigação Artística is an independent, non-profit arts organization located in Lisbon. Founded in 2015 by the Portuguese-Angolan artist, researcher, and producer Monica de Miranda, alongside curator Bruno Leitão, it evolved from the cultural association XEREM, which was established in 2010. XEREM was already engaged in the development of artist residencies and cultural exchanges within the Triangle Network, a project initiated in 1982 with the aim of connecting local and international artists. The network fosters a global community where artists can exchange ideas, share techniques, discuss their work, and collaborate without any hierarchical constraints. As described, the Triangle Network is "*an international network of artists and arts organizations that promotes dialogue, exchange of ideas and innovation within contemporary visual arts, stimulating dialogue and communication among artists, cultural organizations, and cultures*" (Triangle Network, n.d.).

Given this context, HANGAR, which was born from XEREM and from the philosophy of the Triangle Network, is a space managed by artists and curators. Its main focus is on exhibitions, artist residencies, and artistic research, but it also emphasizes education, talks, and discussions aimed at "*unifying geographic locations, cultures, and identities, while stimulating the development of artistic and theoretical practices*".[19] The center is described as a space for interaction, where curators, researchers, and artists engage with one another, fostering dialogue between these three different perspectives on art. The association's mission, pursued through both its residency and exhibition programs, is to encourage experimentation and cross-disciplinary practices as a means of personal and collective growth, creating a global platform for exchanging ideas and experiences,

[19] https://hangar.com.pt/en/about/.

and promoting "*artistic interaction and exploration of the urban environment, especially in the contexts of memory, space, and people*"[20].

The space seeks to achieve its objectives through two key means. First, its location in Lisbon, specifically in the Graça district, was deliberately chosen. This neighborhood is home to diasporic communities – especially from Africa, India, and Bangladesh – that coexist with the local Portuguese population. Addressing postcolonial issues, one of the association's key thematic focuses, is a natural outcome of this environment, shaped by the intersection of diverse cultures. The multicultural makeup of the audience for its projects and events ensures active and meaningful participation, creating organic dialogue between the various geographic and cultural identities that intersect in this space.

The second "instrument" employed is careful selectivity in collaborations. The center intentionally works with young and relatively unknown artists, placing a strong emphasis on the geographical origin of those selected. The artists featured in both the residency and exhibition programs are generally from the Global South. In fact, this center is "*the first artist-managed space in Portugal dealing with postcolonial issues and African art*" (Garrido Castellano, 2017). The center devotes special attention to emergent artists born in Africa and to the local Afro-descendant community. As co-founder Monica de Miranda has noted, HANGAR is "*very interested in concepts that can represent Africa in another place, such as the African diasporas in Lisbon, or in Europe. We're interested in those places, not a self-contained culture, but a culture that communicates, questions, and relates*" " (Almeida, 2024). The center's commitment to artists from the African continent and its diaspora is manifested in two ways: firstly, through "*the establishment of partnerships with and the counseling of already existing or emerging independent, artist-managed spaces in the continent*" (Garrido Castellano, 2017), and secondly, through its own residency and exhibition programs.

Regarding the latter, the center has developed a non-exhibition-based model aimed at fostering long-term collaborations with African and Afro-descendant artists. The center offers extended residencies (ranging from one to three months), during which artists not only interact with each other but also establish connections with local communities, fostering future projects and collaborations. Among the

[20] IDEM.

"Lusophone" artists who have participated in the residencies of the association since 2015 are Euridice Kala AKA Zaituna Kala, Mário Macilau, and Maimuna Adam from Mozambique; Edson Chagas, Délio Jasse, and Januario Jano from Angola; and Irineu Destourelles and Chullage from Cape Verde. Notably, however, the center's focus is not limited to Lusophone Africa nor exclusively to postcolonial themes. This center of research seeks to establish South-South connections, diversifying the discourse on Africa by opening to the entire continent, not just "Portuguese Africa", and giving artists the freedom to explore a wide range of topics. For this reason, artists such as Tanya Pixie Johnson from Kenya, Abraham Onoriode Oghobase and Ayọ̀ Akínwándé from Nigeria, Nathalie Mba Bikoro from Gabon, Sammy Baloji from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Charles Bhebe and Dana Whabira from Zimbabwe have also been in residence. Similarly, alongside exhibitions such as *Factory of Disposable Feelings* by Angolan artist Edson Chagas and *A Spontaneous Tour of Some Monuments of African Architecture* by Ângela Ferreira from Mozambique, the center has hosted projects like *A Sphere Of Water Orbiting A Star* by The Otolith Group, an English collective, and *ANTI-KY-THE/RA: Thought Waves and the Anti-Truth of Light* by the American collective Black Quantum Futurism.

This approach to contemporary African art and its diaspora, as noted by co-founder Bruno Leitão, "*is something new here in Portugal, [where] normally you will have either very well-known names or artists chosen for being native of the former colonies*" (Garrido Castellano, 2017). What makes this space a particularly interesting case study is that it "*represents a shift concerning the ways Portuguese creative projects and cultural institutions engage with contemporary African artistic practices. Those are integrated, without being 'ghettoized', into a broader program, escaping curatorial classification and thematization*" (idem, 2017).

Finally, the association approach to the art market is also noteworthy. As previously discussed, the exploitation of art from Africa, its diaspora, or its descendants for mere profit must be avoided. According to co-founder Monica de Miranda, it is crucial for the public to understand that contemporary African and diasporic art "*is not only an exotic product to be consumed in art fairs, or the political agenda of councils to study migration through the arts; it is a cultural manifestation with its own discourses*" (Castellano Garrido, 2017). However, as Monica de Miranda emphasizes, this responsibility lies with the artists themselves,

who, with the support of institutions like HANGAR, "*are responsible to lead the movement, refusing to be puppets in the hands of institutions or outmoded modernistic colonial approaches from art critics, curators or museums*" (Castellano Garrido, 2017).

HANGAR, therefore, represents a significant example not only within the Portuguese art scene but also on the international stage, as it is an entity whose purpose extends beyond merely promoting art, striving to do so with very specific methods and objectives. The center pays particular attention to addressing the gaps that need to be filled in the artistic landscape and to sustaining necessary conversations. It does not limit itself to selecting artists from the Global South but meticulously follows them through all stages of the production process during residency periods, providing resources and contexts for technical, logistical, and material development. Alongside its internal work, the association's commitment to the external context is equally noteworthy: by making its network available, the center fosters the development of opportunities for artists' internationalization, thereby becoming a secure bridge between these artists and other artistic realities. This type of work is not only essential but is precisely what this historical moment demands to support artists in emerging or consolidating themselves within the art world in a healthy manner, equipping them with both the appropriate knowledge and the critical tools needed to navigate such a complex environment as the Western art market.

Conclusions

This thesis has explored the intricate and often fraught relationship between contemporary Afro-diasporic artists and the Western art market, highlighting how systemic barriers rooted in racism, discrimination, and the legacy of colonialism continue to impede full integration despite increasing visibility. The analysis has underscored that much of this newfound attention remains constrained by a predominantly white, Western centric framework, however it does not ignore the significant progress that the art world and its institutions have made in the last decade.

Despite the increase in market interest, the fate of Afro-diasporic art is still in the hands of the Western art system, as evidenced by the stark underrepresentation of Black professionals in key roles such as curators, gallery owners, and museum directors. This lack of representation at decision-making levels perpetuates a cycle where the value of Afro-diasporic art is dictated not by those who are most intimately connected to its cultural significance, but by those who wield market power. This dynamic continues to frame Afro-diasporic art through a Western lens, reducing complex narratives to consumable aesthetics that often serve the tastes of predominantly white curators and institutions.

The case study of Portugal, and specifically initiatives like HANGAR, illustrates a potential path forward by offering a model of inclusion that resists the superficial multiculturalism seen elsewhere. HANGAR's approach of fostering genuine collaboration, mentorship, and artistic exchange without reinforcing hegemonic narratives demonstrates the impact that intentional, community-focused spaces can have in reshaping the landscape of contemporary art.

Through the reflection on these findings, it becomes clear that the journey towards true inclusivity in the art market is not merely about increasing the visibility of Afro-diasporic artists but requires a fundamental shift in how the art world operates and values different voices. To move beyond tokenism and performative gestures, the market must undergo several critical changes. First, continue to pursue the diversification of professional roles is paramount. Keep increasing the representation of Afro-diasporic individuals in curatorial, directorial, and other influential positions within galleries, museums, and auction houses is essential to dismantle the entrenched biases that shape which artists are promoted and how their

work is contextualized. Such diversification would help mitigate the pervasive cultural bias and create opportunities for Afro-diasporic art to be understood on its own terms, rather than through a Western-centric narrative.

Furthermore, empowering Afro-diasporic artists to have greater control over their work and its interpretation is crucial. Too often, these artists are positioned as mere producers within a system that commodifies their cultural identity. A shift towards granting artists more agency in the storytelling around their work would allow for a richer and more authentic engagement with their art, one that respects the complexity and autonomy of their narratives. This can be achieved through initiatives that prioritize artist-led exhibitions, direct collaborations with curators who share cultural affinities, and institutional support that extends beyond market demands.

Equally important is the need to rethink the dynamics of collecting and valuation in the art market. Collectors and institutions must transition from seeing Afro-diasporic art as an exotic trend to be capitalized on, to recognizing it as a significant cultural force that demands sustained engagement and respect. This involves not only buying art but investing in the communities from which these artists come, through scholarships, residencies, and long-term support networks that help build sustainable careers beyond market whims. Education plays a critical role in this transformation, both for art professionals and the broader public. By deepening the understanding of the historical, social, and cultural contexts of Afro-diasporic art, stakeholders can cultivate a more nuanced appreciation that moves beyond superficial readings.

Finally, building global alliances and creating networks that bridge Afro-diasporic artists, curators, and institutions across continents is vital. Such networks can challenge the dominance of Western art historical narratives and create a more balanced, multifaceted global art ecosystem. Collaborative projects between African, Caribbean, and Afro-diasporic institutions can foster new dialogues, reduce dependency on Western validation, and elevate voices that have long been marginalized.

In conclusion, the evolution towards a genuinely inclusive art market requires a concerted effort to dismantle deeply rooted structures of power and privilege. This endeavor is not solely about market success but about reshaping the very foundations of how art is valued and understood. The recognition of Afro-diasporic

art as a fundamental component of global art history – not as a peripheral or exotic element – demands an ongoing commitment to equity, respect, and active engagement from all sectors of the art world. Only through this sustained dedication can we hope to transform the art market into a truly open and diverse space that honors the multiplicity of artistic expressions and the rich, complex histories they embody.

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