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Contemporary African Art // News

Afrobeats star Mr Eazi launches international exhibition of African art alongside new album

Thirteen artists have been commissioned by the musician to make works corresponding to singles on his new record

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Sesse Elangwe's *The Way I See It* (2023)

Courtesy of the artist

The Afropop star Oluwatosin Ajibade—better known by the stage name Mr. Eazi—will launch his latest album alongside an international exhibition of African art entirely commissioned by him.

Each song on the album has been turned into work by one of 13 artists representing a total of 8 countries on the continent. These include the Cotonou-based artist Dominique Zinkpe, Edozie Anedu from Lagos and the Texas-based Cameroonian artist Sesse Elangwe, who is one of two artists to make a work based on the album's first single *Chop Time, No Friend*.

Elangwe's *The Way I See It* (2023) is a mixed collage work pasting in headlines from Ajibade's non-music career and personal life, including his work with Hugo Boss and partnership with the Ghanaian betting company Bet Pawa.

The project is being funded by Choplife IP—Ajibade's company that was founded to invest in African culture; from music to film.

The idea for the exhibition—which will travel to Lagos, Accra, London and New York—was created at a time that Ajibade was feeling uninspired by his work; "I was tired of making music," he tells *The Art Newspaper*. He was recording for the album in Benin in 2021, staying at the capital's Hotel Maison Rouge, when he came across the work of Cotonou native Patricorel. Seeing the artist's irreverent, skeletal etchings in the exhibition being held at the hotel "was the first time I really realised that certain types of art caught me," Ajibade says.



Two works have been commissioned for the first single including Sinalo Ngcaba's *Chop Time, No Friend* (2023)

Courtesy the artist

From there, the musician realised he wanted to collaborate with artists on his upcoming album, *Patricorel* included. Later, however, with the help and guidance of Sotheby's head of Modern and contemporary African art Hannah O'Leary and the director of Ghana's Noldor Artist Residency, Joseph Awuah-Darko, the idea for a travelling exhibition was born.

Ajibade will also be collaborating with the founding director of the contemporary African art fair 1-54, Touria El Glaoui, as the fair hosts the London leg of the exhibition as part of its special projects section this October. "Mr Eazi is one of the biggest Afrobeats artists in the world right now... We were therefore thrilled when his team approached us about collaborating on the London iteration of his exhibition and listening experience," El Glaoui

says. “For me, it’s exciting to see an internationally acclaimed musician platforming the work of emerging African artists,” she adds.

Putting together the exhibition has also given Ajibade an opportunity to throw himself into the African art scene. Since beginning work on the project, he says that he has collected "over 50-something pieces". This year he travelled to Cape Town Art Fair, accompanied by O’Leary, and purchased works by artists including the Paris-based Elladj Lincy Deloumeaux. The fair is also where Ajibade met the Zimbabwean artist Kufa Makwavarara, who is now taking part in the album project.

The exhibition will also double up as a listening party. The Lagos and Accra iterations will be especially focused on introducing the work to people who may not ordinarily see it: “It’s more for my fans and the music industry and bringing them into this world,” Ajibade says.

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