

NIGERIA

Fine art Creative explosion

A new book thrusts the dynamism of the Lagos art scene into the hands of collectors worldwide

It's a great time to be an artist in Nigeria according to photographer Numero Unoma, writing in a new encyclopaedia of contemporary Nigerian art. Published by a small independent US publisher founded by a Nigerian, *A Celebration of Modern Nigerian Art - 101 Nigerian Artists* (Ben Bosah Books, 2010) documents the emerging and dynamic art scene at home and in the diaspora. Bosah – writing under the name of Chukwuemeka rather than Ben – is the book's co-author with the artist George Edozie.

Nigerian artists already getting international recognition include

Lagos-based photographer Adolphus Opara, who is currently on show in 'Contested Terrains', a collaborative exhibition between London's Tate Modern and the Centre for Contemporary Art in Lagos. At the Tate Modern until 16 October 2011, the exhibition will move to Lagos between January and March of next year.

Babalola Dare Lawson is also featured in the book for his work *First Love*, an acrylic on canvas depicting a woman with her guitar. Alex Nwokolo, described as "one of Nigeria's most talented colourists", is represented by



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Adanma by Alex Nwokolo (above) and Worshippers by Okezie Okafor (left), from 101 Nigerian Artists

Adanma, a portrait of a young girl deep in thought, and the sculptor Okezie Okafor by his mystical wood and metal *Worshippers*.

Bosah, an engineer and art collector, says there is a sophisticated and vibrant art scene in Lagos and Abuja with a growing base of collectors. "There are not as many as you will find in western countries, but most of them are prodigious collectors, with 80-90% based in Lagos. A lot of work needs to be done to increase the appreciation of art and artists in others parts of Nigeria."

Many artists still find it difficult to make ends meet. "In Nigeria there are many gifted artists, but it's not easy to

promote your work and make a living," says the painter Rahmon Olugunna, whose exhibition, 'New Currents from Oshogbo', visited London in May. Numero says that gaining exposure in Nigeria "depends on the material and there's a lot of politics." She has struggled to find a gallery willing to display her photographs depicting domestic violence.

The book is the first in a series aiming to historicise contemporary art from Nigeria and other parts of Africa. Another collection, *The Art of Nigerian Women*, is due out in October, followed by an edition on Ghanaian artists in time for the country's independence day next year. Books on Beninese, South African and Ethiopian artists are also planned. ●

By **Belinda Otas**



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► FILM



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Skoonheid

Directed by **Oliver Hermanus**

Francois van Heerden is a middle-aged white Afrikaner who becomes obsessed with a friend's son, a young and handsome student named Christian. It is Christian who, on the surface, symbol-

ises the film's title, *skoonheid* meaning beauty in Afrikaans. For van Heerden, who has constructed a supposedly happy life around wealth, education, a nice house and family, sexual desire for men is not a reality that fits into his identity. As with van Heerden's controlled face, Oliver

Hermanus never lets us get too close to the character. *Skoonheid* is the first Afrikaans movie to be featured at the Cannes Film Festival, but to pigeonhole it as Afrikaans, 'gay', or an art movie is misleading: it transcends sexuality and culture, probing and unfolding human psychology.