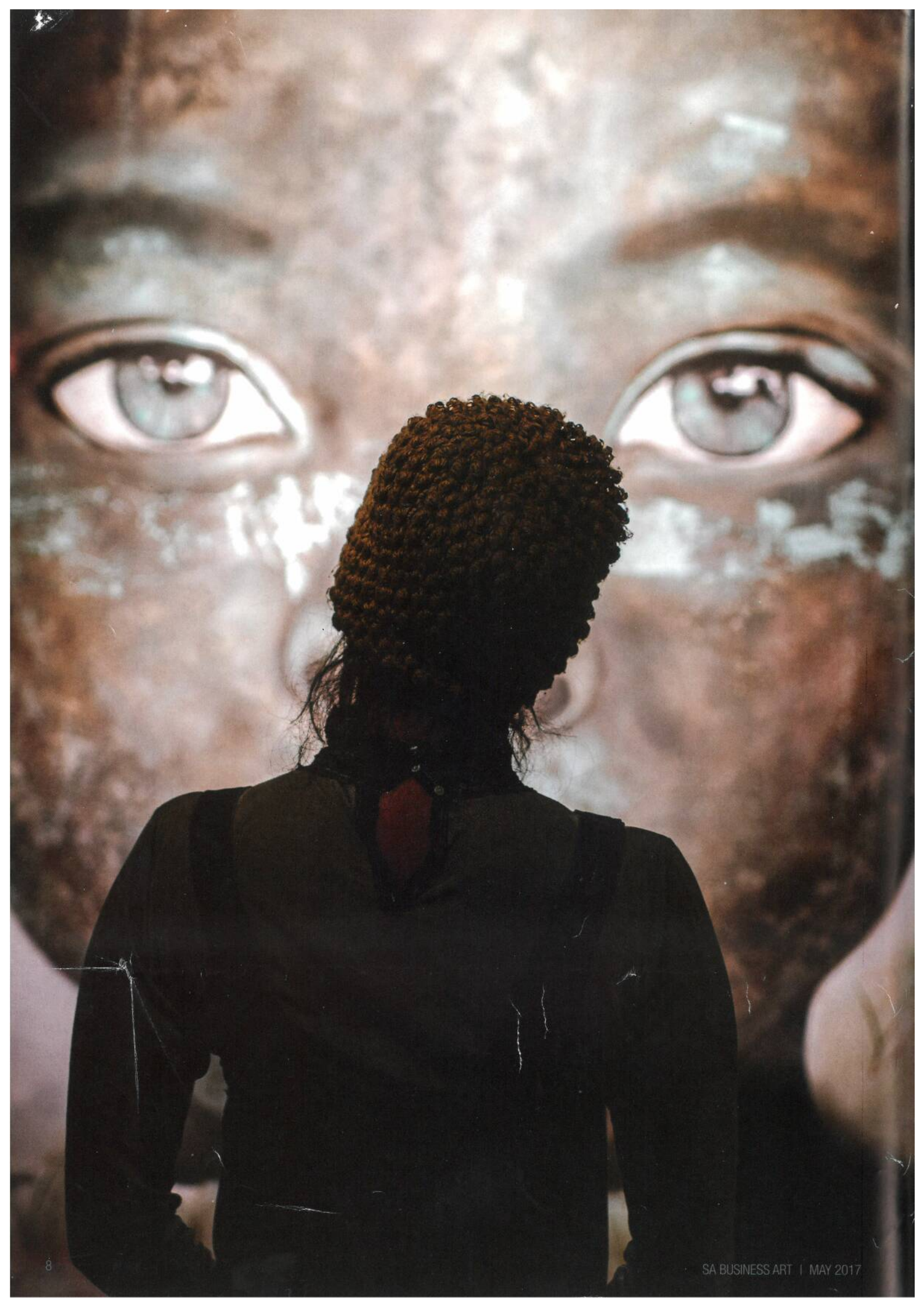


ART TIMES



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Previous winner of the National Portrait Award, Heather Courtenay Cunningham. Moving across 75 x 90 cm, 100% canvas, edition of 100.



Booshra

From 29 June to 13 July 2017, Booshra will enjoy her second solo exhibition at Candice Berman Fine Art Gallery, entitled Muse. Her work will then be shown at the FNB Joburg Art Fair under the curation of Candice Berman Fine Art Gallery. In fact, this year, Booshra is painting her presence all over the global art arena, with work on art fairs in London, Dubai and Singapore. Born in Morocco, living in Belgium, the Art Times asked Booshra about how her art has been received on South African soil, and how the global market is actively taking notice.

Thank you for making the time to speak to us, Booshra. Firstly, how did you originally gain a footing in the art market outside of Belgium, and then find yourself in front of the South Africa art audience with Candice Berman Fine Art Gallery?

I have long been an underground artist, it was a choice, a personal decision to work without art galleries. I had my studio and my private customers grew by word of mouth. I have been painting since childhood, but it is only very recently in February 2016, that I took the step to make my artwork public by representing it on social networks. I was immediately contacted by foreign galleries, mostly American. In April 2016, two months later, I was selected to exhibit at Aqua Art Miami, one of the official satellite fairs of Art Basel Miami. I got this news in an RV car, on the road between Cape Town and George on my first trip to South Africa, where I was visiting my brother who lives in Johannesburg. It was natural that we would visit galleries and experience the South African art scene. I had the chance to do an exhibition at SoMa Art + Space in Maboneng, Johannesburg, as part of the Jo'burg Art Week in September 2016. It was during my second stay in South Africa that I met Candice Berman. Candice saw my art and was immediately blown away. I knew instinctively that my brushes found solid walls for my artwork, so we arranged to show my works with her gallery, and it was a real success.

What response have you received from your work, both globally and specifically in South Africa?

For an artist who has long made the choice of discretely walking alone, I must admit that today I feel God's blessing when I see the reaction of people and customers to my artwork. This is even more so, since I have had a strong professional representation of my artworks.

I see this reaction in South Africa, but in all my other exhibitions too. I really work from my guts, each of my paintings is a true delivery, with all that it implies, beautiful and intense as it may be. It is this life force I try to instill into my art, into each of my

portraits. The responses I receive from the viewing audience, leave no doubt that my artwork touches, upsets, ignites something deep and powerful inside us all. This may of course seem very pretentious, but it is not. It is the simple return of what I myself feel in full creation. South Africa gave me a great welcome. I recently met one of our South African collectors from the Candice Berman Gallery. She came to meet me specially in my house in Belgium. She explained her love for the art that she collects, and revealed to me how much she never liked nor wished to acquire anything that resembled portraits. Despite this, she ended up acquiring one of the first paintings I exhibited at the gallery. I am very grateful for the hospitality and recognition of my artwork in South Africa.

Your work has taken you on journeys across the globe. How has your art developed as a result of this travel?

Today my artwork makes me travel around the world mainly for my exhibitions, but I started travelling intensely with my brushes much earlier, and for many years. From the age of 20, I needed to get away from everything I knew. I had this dream of living in a wider cultural realm, tasting their daily life, discovering what comes out of them and of course, painting them. No gallery was waiting for me at that time, it was just my life at that stage. It was a unique and formidable experience. I painted walls in the middle of nowhere, without referencing a picture, without even thinking about it. I travelled alone in search of different societies in the world. I worked with local materials. I am a self-taught artist, so obviously, I learnt on the one hand from my errors and on the other hand, my experiments. I only work in this way until I find the right formula. When I could not find any material to buy, I started to paint with other natural ingredients and pigments, sand, dried leaves etc. I also worked on other supports. I explored the potential of the material, actually. All this helped to develop my painting of course. Simultaneously, what nourished my painting was existing as a human being in simple nature. It is this little bit of nomadic life, living with nomads during my early years that impacted me as a young woman, alone away from her own 'codes'. It was the spirit that emanated from all these cultures and life that were the basic motives for my inspirations, which always accompanies me in my creations.

It's been said that you have a fascination with the human 'condition' and that this is a strong driving force behind your work. Is this true? If so, how does your work explore/reveal this fascination?

The theme of the human condition plunges its questions and observations into the essence of

human existence. These last three words alone are most fascinating to my heart. If I had not been a painter, I would in any case have been an "anthropologist-philosopher" in spirit.

As a child, I was bathed in two cultures, with a mother and a father as basic pillars who taught me the importance and the richness of being open to what is different. My childhood was spent navigating two vastly different cultures, that of the Catholic school run by nuns, and the life of the mosque. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, this systematic interchange between one culture and another, one religion and another, meant a lot to me. My background therefore facilitated a conducive attitude to questioning the theme of the essential in an existence. I liked to dive into the silent observation of human behaviour. I found my own answers, sometimes soothing, sometimes insane or terribly frustrating. Of course, one wonders 'why'? As a response to the question about the observations of the human condition. The years of traveling have given me an idea of the immensity of the teachings and wisdom in the world. Over the years, I have retained a teaching which, for me, overrides all the others: a belief in the simple authenticity of man. It reveals itself in the quiet, silent force of lively eyes.

It is precisely this authentic part in each of us that fascinates me, that which binds us instead of separating us. It is transmitted in the silence of the gaze. It says everything by saying nothing.

Painting is the medium that allows me to explore this silent gaze of the eyes. They are the inspiration for my artworks. They are the primary focus. The large scale of my portraits show fragility without idealising, they do not hide their scars or their beauty. They are just what they are.

Lastly, why do YOU think investors are interested in buying your work?

Well ... firstly, because they would be wrong not to (big laugh)! Well, more seriously: I admit that I am following the path of this beautiful ascension without asking myself too many questions. I create, it's my passion, it's my job. And that's what I've done all my life. However, I do think investors are interested for multiple reasons. Firstly, I see very clearly that my artwork challenges and upsets. There is no indifference. My paintings mark the spirits and are so fast that I am in a permanent situation of creation and in constant request of commissions. I am very fortunate to have galleries and collectors who have a real understanding for my artworks. It turns out too that all the value of these acquisitions have increased in tremendously in a short time. I think those are some of reasons that prompt investors to buy my artworks.

Images: Booshra and her work. Photo: Dorian Lhese.