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Two African Artists Show Their Works At Chelsea Galleries In New York City

The works on display are clay vessels by South African artist Andile Dyalvane and paintings on sanyan fabric by Nigerian artist Nengi Omuku, who is also slated to exhibit at next month's Frieze London

By Jane Levere
September 30, 2024

Two African artists are currently showing their work at galleries in New York's Chelsea neighborhood.

South African artist, healer and spiritual leader Andile Dyalvane is showing a series of monumental clay vessels that his gallery, Friedman Benda, said, "embody a history of trauma and grief while offering a perspective of harmony and rejuvenation."



Clay vessels by South African artist Andile Dyalvane on display at Friedman Benda in Chelsea. Friedman Benda

Jane Levere, "Two African Artists Show Their Works at Chelsea Galleries in New York City," *Forbes*, September 30, 2024.

And Nigerian artist Nengi Omuku is [showing eight oil paintings](#) at her gallery, Kasmin, which it said are “uniquely realized on the traditional Nigerian textile sanyan,” a woven Yoruban cloth.

Dyalvane’s works are made from clay drawn from the rivers in and around his birthplace, the village of Ngobozana in the Eastern Cape, a material his gallery said evokes “immediate and visceral communication with the land and the whispers” of the artist’s ancestors.

Each of his vessels is torn, lacerated and decorated with marks and grooves, which the gallery calls “reminders of the Xhosa practice of scarification.”

They are decorated with vibrant colors that the gallery believes are “indicative of wildflowers and torched earth.”

The vessels are presented in a circle, at the center of which is a totem surrounded by small drinking and cooking pots.



South African artist Andile Dyalvane. Friedman Benda

Dyalvane was born in 1978 in Ngobozana and grew up farming and tending his father’s cattle herd, developing, his gallery said, “a deep connection to the land and his Xhosa culture that resonates powerfully through his work today. His medium of clay, or umhlaba (mother earth), is at its most fundamental a life-affirming connection to the soil.”

According to Kasmin, Omuku’s landscapes and colors “provide enveloping spaces for the artist’s loosely rendered individual and group portraits. Blending interior and exterior, figure and ground, Omuku explores themes of refuge and stillness interwoven with personal narratives drawn from her recent experiences in Lagos, London, New York” and Italy.

Suspended from the gallery’s ceiling, her works feature plants, flowers, figures from her community and what Kasmin describes as “spectacular skies.” They

were created during a period of upheaval in the artist's life, when she faced studio fires, flooding and political unrest in her native country.

The works are painted both on vintage sanyan, as well as on new fabrics the artist commissioned to keep the weaving tradition alive.



Nigerian artist Nengi Omuku in front of one of her paintings on sanyan textile. Anny Robert

“Exploring the historical significance of sanyan, Omuku increasingly perceives her practice as a conversation between her materials, touching on themes of gender and domesticity, national and ceremonial dress, and the endurance of indigenous culture against contemporary legacies of colonialism,” Kasmin said.

Omuku, who lives and works between Lagos and London, was recently nominated by artist Yinka Shonibare to present a solo project at the upcoming [Artist-to Artist section of Frieze London](#), which will take place October 9 to 13 in the Regent's Park. She will show three new paintings made on sanyan, displayed suspended so visitors can view the works in the round.

[Shonibare](#), who was born in London in 1962 and moved to Lagos, Nigeria at the age of three, later studied art in London. He is a Commander of the British Empire and has been a Royal Academician since 2013.