

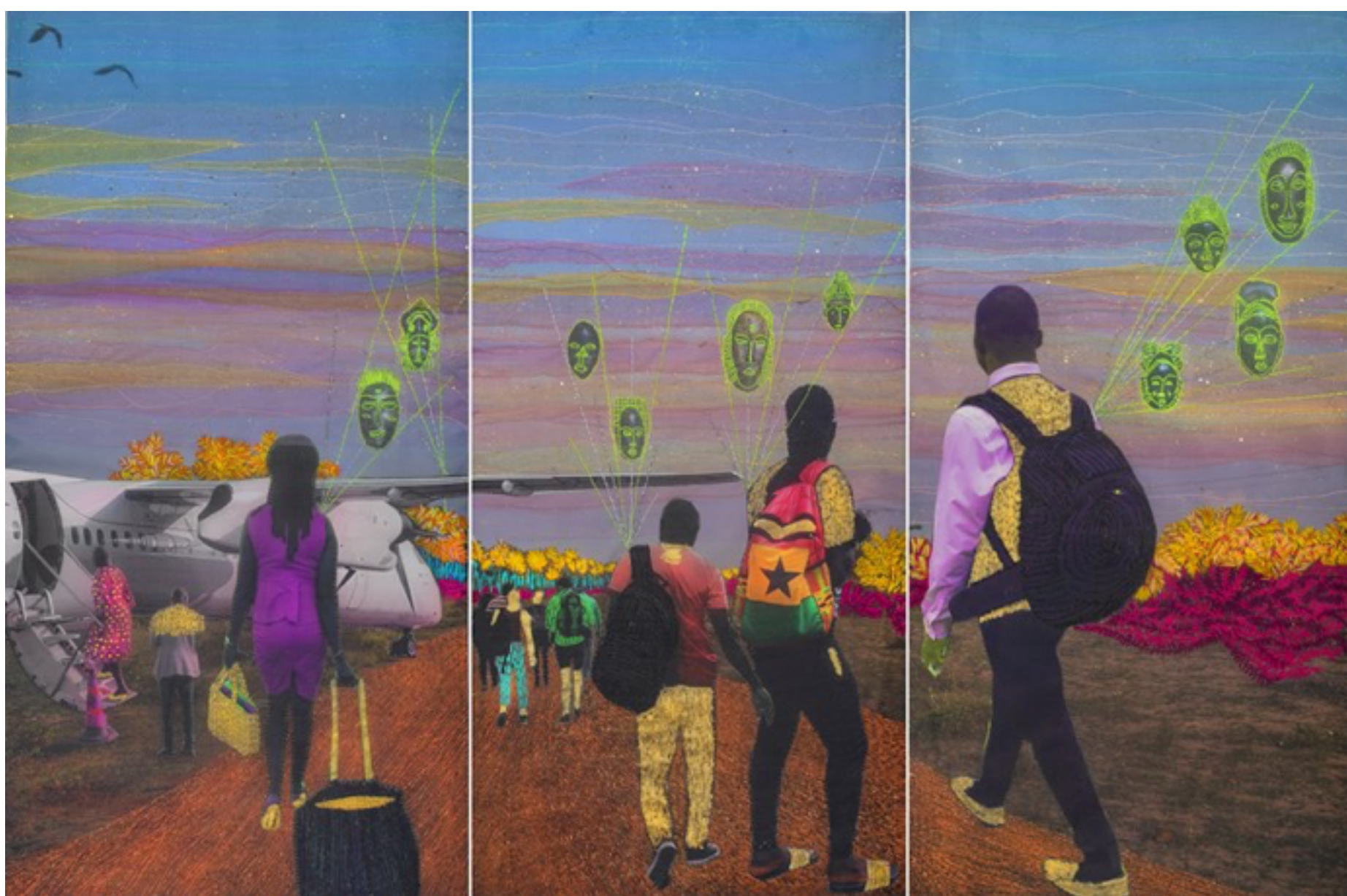
Champion of African image-makers honoured

Azu Nwagbogu, recipient of the RPS Award for Curatorship 2021, hails an artist with a unique perspective

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BY GRAEME GREEN

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'Sense of belonging' from the series Albahian, 2019, by Joana Choumali

The influential curator Azu Nwagbogu is founder and director of the [LagosPhoto Festival](#) and the [African Artists' Foundation](#) (AAF). Among the many photographers and artists he has championed over the years is Joana Choumali, the first African artist to win the Prix Pictet.

Choumali, who is based in Côte d'Ivoire, layers her photographs of everyday life in Africa with embroidery, image cut-outs and fabric swatches. Here, Nwagbogu explains what is so unique about Choumali's work.

"Joana Choumali is an artist I greatly admire and have worked with since the beginning. I've championed her work from day one. I completely fell in love with the mind of this artist and her approach. She's such an empath – she's able to soak up the emotion of all the communities she works in. She has the most incredible instincts as an artist.

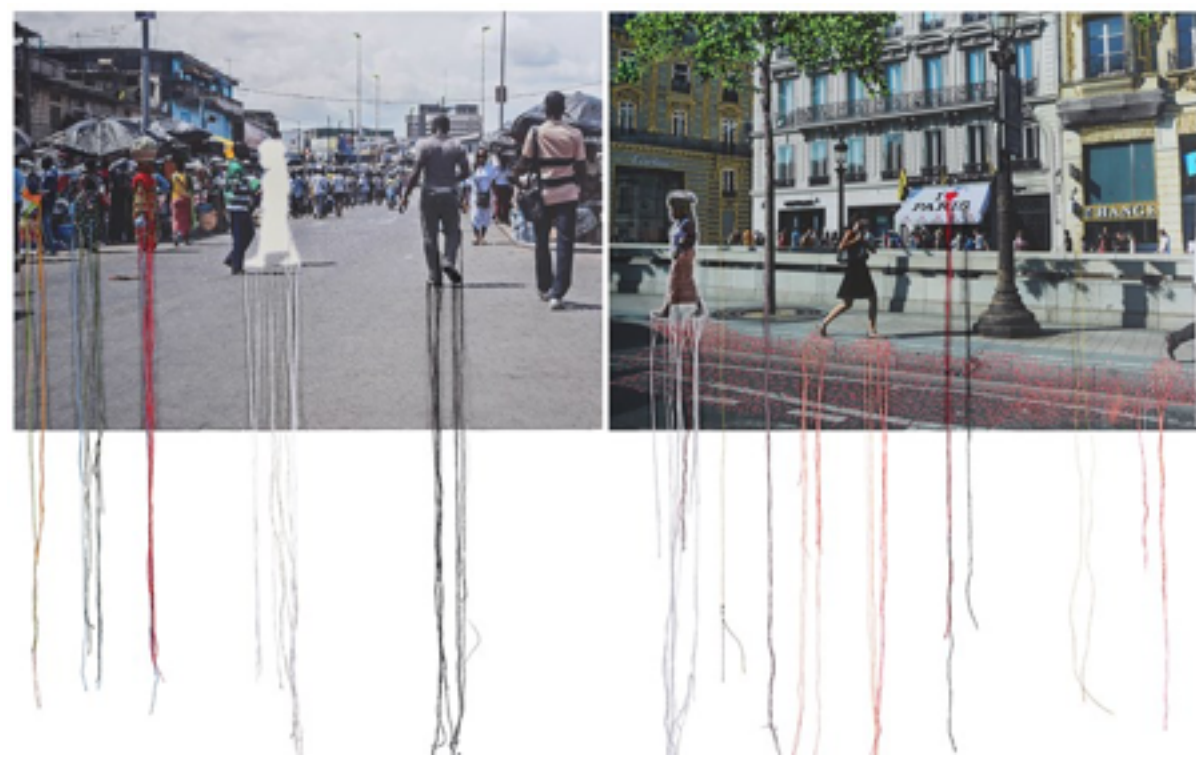
"I always say to photographers and artists, 'You've got to learn what's in the box before you can think outside of the box.' She knows the camera, knows her tools, knows how to work within structures like documentary work. But with her new work, it's about remediated properties.

"When she goes out to capture a community at a certain time of day, by embroidering on the printed material she's able to create a new meaning and artefact for that space. It's unique and very special. While it's cathartic for her and it feeds her, it also feeds the public and the audience who consume and are engaged with the work.

"She covers human stories. Her work is diverse. I don't want to call her a humanist photographer, but she uses facts as the basis for her work and creates interventions in places that have been traumatised. She goes back and documents her work to the people. I'm glad to see her get the recognition she deserves."



'Ouagadougou New York 2' from the series Translation, 2017



'Abidjan Paris' from the series Translation, 2017



'Banjul Tokyo 2' from the series Translation, 2017



'Bromelia' from the series Albahian, 2021

All images by [Joana Choumali](#)

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