

# 'It's the zeitgeist'

## Indigenous art lands in UK after success at Venice Biennale

**Lanre Bakare**  
Arts and culture correspondent

At last year's Venice Biennale, the pavilions were packed with indigenous art from around the world. Artists from the Tupinambá community in Brazil sat alongside work by the late Guatemalan artist Rosa Elena Curruchich, who made pieces about Indigenous women in her country. The Colombian Amazonian artist Aycoobo was celebrated, as were carvings by the Māori artist Fred Graham. The Golden Lion award - the event's highest accolade - went to an Indigenous Australian artist, Archie Moore.

The biennale's curator, Adriano Pedrosa, said the event's theme of Strangers Everywhere included "the Indigenous artist, frequently treated as a foreigner in their own land".

After the event, Tate launched a fund aimed at increasing the representation of Indigenous works in its collection. This year it will host a retrospective of the Indigenous Australian artist Emily Kam Kngwarray, while the Ames Yavuz gallery, a specialist in Indigenous Australian art, is also opening a London outpost this spring.

Curators and artists have said this recognition is overdue, but

**'It feels like it's pivoted quickly, but it's been a slow burn'**

**Nicola Stein**  
*This Is No Fantasy*

some fear it may be a short-lived trend. "It's definitely the zeitgeist at the moment," says Dianne Tanzer, who with Nicola Stein founded the Australian gallery This Is No Fantasy, which will exhibit the Indigenous artist Johnathon World Peace Bush at Frieze's gallery in Cork Street, London.

"At some stage who knows when it becomes unfashionable ... it's like everything in life, it's not going to be for ever but we hope we get the best of it while it lasts," she says.

But Pippy Houldsworth, whose gallery is putting on the Indigenous American artist Mario Martinez's first UK show, says "it's not a bubble".

"Look at the huge excitement about black artists over the last few years. That hasn't come and gone by any means, it's just brought greater recognition to a greater number of people who have been sidelined in the past."

But Venice also experienced a backlash. In December 2024, Harper's Magazine ran a cover feature where the critic Dean Kirsch said recent biennales had embraced "overlooked artists from the twentieth century and exhibited recycled junk, traditional craft, and folk art".

A fixation on all things "identity" had, in his opinion, replaced the "spectacle and innovation" of work from a decade ago.

Kelli Cole, a curator at the National Gallery of Australia, says the global political shift to the right could bring further criticism.

"Trump is in now and people are being accused of being too politically correct," she says. "Are we going to get questions at the Tate - has the gallery become politically correct because it's showing a black woman from Australia rather than a 'key' male artist?"

Far from being a flash in the pan



▲ *Ntang Dreaming* by Emily Kam Kngwarray and, left, *Structures* by Mario Martinez. Both artists have exhibitions in the UK this year

"moment", curators and artists say the recognition of Indigenous artists has been built up over the last two decades.

Tanzer and Stein say they first took artists, including Michael Cook in 2015, to satellite events at the Venice Biennale rather than the main event, slowly attracting audiences and buyers.

"It feels like it's pivoted quickly but it's actually been a very slow burn," says Stein.

*Johnathon World Peace Bush is at Frieze No. 9 Cork Street from 27 February to 15 March, Mario Martinez is at Pippy Houldsworth Gallery from 21 February to 22 March and Emily Kam Kngwarray is at Tate Modern from 10 July to 11 January 2026*

## Ministers accused of turning their backs on Briton held in Nigeria

**Geneva Abdul**

The brother of a British national being held in Nigeria after falling victim to extraordinary rendition yesterday accused the UK government of turning its back on the issue.

Kingsley Kanu, whose brother Nnamdi leads the Indigenous People of Biafra, a separatist movement



▲ *Nnamdi Kanu is the leader of a separatist movement in Nigeria*

proscribed in Nigeria, called on Keir Starmer to take action. "The previous government and today's government have not been able to take a stand and call the Nigerian government to say stop," Kingsley Kanu said in an interview from Germany. "They should wake up to defend British citizens. I find it very astonishing."

Nnamdi Kanu, a dual national, was targeted by Nigerian authorities in 2015 when he set up a digital station, Radio Biafra, at his London home after secessionist protests broke out.

He was arrested when he returned to Nigeria and was on bail in 2017 when at least 28 members of his movement were killed in a raid by

security forces. Kanu fled but was arrested by Nigerian officials in Kenya in 2021 and taken to Nigeria in an act of extraordinary rendition - an unlawful transfer according to family, lawyers, the UN and a Nigerian court.

He has since pleaded not guilty to charges of terrorism and treason and is being held largely in solitary confinement.

The UK government's handling of the case faced a legal challenge from Kingsley Kanu, which was ultimately dismissed. However, the judge found his brother had been subject to extraordinary rendition - a view rejected by a string of foreign secretaries. In 2023, the UK court of appeals said

the government's position "might well be different" if the Nigerian supreme court upheld a ruling by the country's court of appeal that Kanu had been the victim of rendition.

Kingsley Kanu said the supreme court had ruled in favour of the lower court in December 2023 - providing a clear reason for the UK to take action.

The Foreign Office said: "We are providing consular support to Mr Kanu and remain in contact with his family and legal representatives. We have raised his case with the Nigerian authorities." Nnamdi has monthly consular visits, according to his brother, who is able to communicate with him through lawyers and family.