

IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, SOMEWHERE



An hour outside Vienna, in a forgotten corner of forested countryside, sits an 18th-century estate undergoing extensive renovations. The property is home to centuries-old oaks, several dogs, and soon will host an artist residency, founded by collector and entrepreneur Bianca Stojka-Davis, called SOMEWHERE.

Bianca's immersion in the art world began at the age of five. "My grandfather was an artist, and I quite literally grew up in his studio. Watching him work was fascinating, and the way he manipulated colours and textures was almost magical." This early exposure to the arts instilled in her a deep appreciation for the creative process that now forms the guiding principle of this dream project.

To get here, Bianca has travelled an uncommon career path. While studying art history at university, she worked at the Albertina Museum, served as VIP Director for the Vienna Contemporary Art Fair, and later started a consultancy that hosted an international series of pop-up art salons. A move to the US marked a shift in her career, as she directed her passion for art into the emerging world of blockchain technology and digital transformation.

Today, she owns a boutique hospitality brand and sits on the corporate board of one of Europe's largest tourism and leisure groups, advising on future trends and strategy. This leaves her just enough time to "focus on my personal relationship with art, my collection, and building an innovative environment to support artists with our residency."

A turning point for Stojka-Davis came with a piece she acquired years ago on a visit to Amoako Bofo's tiny Vienna studio. "Until then, I had never met a Black artist creating works that represent Black culture," she recalls. "Having Amoako's portrait of a beautiful Black woman hanging in our home had a great effect on me and changed my perspective." A visit to 1-54 Contemporary Art Fair in Marrakech in 2018 was "a game changer" that opened her eyes to a great diversity of artists. For Bianca, 1-54 "plays a vital role in addressing representation, or lack thereof, for contemporary African art and its diaspora."



A bold new residency for artists from Africa and its diaspora is taking shape in Austria's countryside.



“Growing up in Austria as a mixed Austrian-African American woman, I didn’t see a lot of representation in museums, galleries, or private homes,” says Stojka-Davis. “There’s so much beauty and history in that part of my heritage and for so long I’d left it unexplored.” She made it her mission to foster the careers of artists and curators of colour here in Europe, so it was natural to make contemporary African art and its diaspora the focus of her collection and the residency program.

Bianca’s multifaceted background, deep roots in the arts and passion for technology have all served as inspiration for SOMEWHERE. It’s styled as a combination of a retreat and residency, providing personalised support in a nurturing environment. Uniquely, the residency will encourage exploration of the digital realm, and Bianca enthuses about “the possibilities from legacy protection to NFTs.” The hope is that this holistic, innovative approach will allow artists to thrive and gain a sense of belonging.

On a long-term basis, the estate will also function like a private art club. SOMEWHERE will host small, invitation-only events that bring together artists and curators with collectors and other art world professionals in an empowering environment. Rather than grasping at the largest possible audience, Bianca believes in the benefits of a knowledge-sharing approach in an exclusive setting.

The concept extends to plans for a SOMEWHERE brand that will create limited edition pieces in fashion and design through collaboration with brands and providing unique business opportunities for the artists.

The official opening is planned for the summer of 2024. Nonetheless, the real work is well underway as Bianca builds the program, connects with artists and curators, and forms partnerships with the people and institutions that share her vision.

“My hope is that we can challenge misconceptions and encourage people to learn about new technologies and history by contextualising the narrative surrounding African art and its diaspora.”



• Words by Jason Wrubell