

## 20 Artists on the Work They Made in 2020

For centuries, artists have responded to pain, grief, loss, and injustice through their art, at times to brilliant and cathartic ends. Even so, it would not be fair to assume that contemporary artists come out of the tumultuousness of 2020 with a masterful new body of work. Yet, in a testament to the deep resilience of the artists working today, many did.

The 20 artists here tell us about the work they made this year and how the COVID-19 pandemic and social upheaval of 2020 affected them personally. Some endured deep disappointment as their exhibitions were postponed or canceled; many buckled down to meet work deadlines despite the crumbling state of the world. Some found solace in new mediums or a slower approach; others navigated childcare and processed loss. While several did admit that their day-to-day lives didn't look so different this year, all of the artists we spoke to touched on the grief they each endured. And yet they all kept creating fresh, new work.



**Ajarb Bernard Ategwa**

B. 1988, Kumba, Cameroon. Lives and works in Douala, Cameroon.

### Can you tell us about the work you made in 2020?

This year, I returned to portraiture. At the beginning of my career, between 2009 and 2015, I painted mainly portraits, but shifted to painting scenes from daily life in Douala. This year, I started to revisit that format and to reflect on my earlier work. This time, the works are about the photography that we all do with our phones, the photos we take of ourselves, or the photos that our friends take of us. It is also a little nostalgic—the title of my show at Peres Projects is “Studio Ekwe’s,” which was the photography studio that was next to the house I grew up in, so it also reflects on the fact that studio photography is dying. People have more agency in their images, they take most of them themselves. The motivation for these works was to revisit my old paintings and wanting to paint them again but in this changed context.

### How did the events of 2020 impact you as an artist? Did your outlook change?

Of course, 2020 was a devastating year for many people in the world. In Africa, we experienced complete abandonment from our governments and had to become self-reliant through the crisis. For me personally, I live in Douala, but most of my art materials are imported from Europe and I'm not able to get most of the supplies I need in the city where I live. Painting is an important part of my everyday routine, and it was difficult for me when I wasn't able to go to the studio every day or when I ran out of supplies. It is not only my livelihood, but also part of my identity and what I love to do. I don't believe my outlook has changed too much from this experience other than that I have learned that no matter what situations arise, I am able to face them.