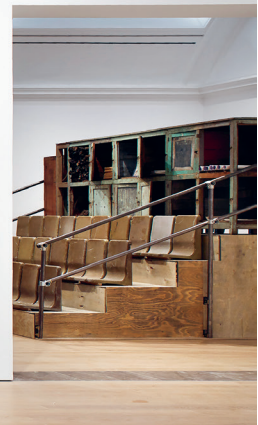
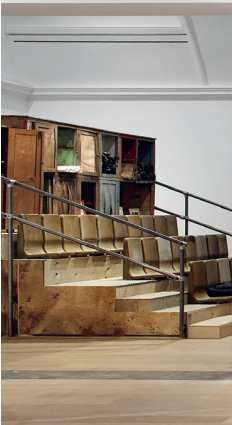


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Material Matters

Design Indaba celebrates its 25th year as a festival of creativity, and Ghanaian artist and author Ibrahim Mahama is one of the speakers set to take the stage.



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ased between Accra, Kumasi and Tamale in Ghana, Ibrahim Mahama is an artist whose work focuses on the history of architecture and materials, and how this relates to labour conditions in modern society. Here, he chats to *VISI* about favourite projects, his 2019 installation in Cape Town, and how his home country inspires him.

YOUR WORK WAS FEATURED AT NORVAL FOUNDATION IN CAPE TOWN IN 2019 IN THE FORM OF A MONUMENTAL NINE-METRE-HIGH INSTALLATION OF JUTE SACKS, A MATERIAL YOU OFTEN USE. WHAT INFLUENCES YOUR CHOICE OF MATERIALS? These materials have been collected over the years from various market spaces in Ghana. They've covered buildings across the world and been touched by many hands through the commodities they have transported. I've always been interested in the aesthetics of objects and the meaning that comes with them. It was important for me to bring this to the Norval Foundation to establish a dialogue with the South African community and also open the work up.

HOW DOES ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY INFORM YOUR WORK AND HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO YOUR PRACTICE OF ENVELOPING BUILDINGS IN JUTE SACKS? The basis of my work starts with architecture. I allow the physicality of spaces to inspire the form each piece takes, regardless of the objects involved in the production of the artwork. Meaning is as important as the visual aspect.



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TO INSPIRE THE FORM EACH PIECE TAKES.

WHICH OF YOUR PROJECTS STAND OUT FOR YOU? The first project that really spoke to me was *Exchange Exchanger* (1957-2057), a series of modernist buildings that I worked with between 2015 and 2016. The second was *Parliament of Ghosts*, my 2019 solo show at Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, in the UK. Both of these have had a real impact on my thinking.

HOW HAS GHANA INFLUENCED YOUR ARTISTIC JOURNEY? Ghana has had a great impact on my work, particularly the art school in Kumasi. The Department of Painting and Sculpture at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), where I trained, has been incredible in inspiring students and professionals alike to think about continuous ways of expanding their practice.

ANY EXCITING UPCOMING PROJECTS YOU'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO? There are a couple of projects coming up in 2020, but I'm mostly looking forward to opening up my studio to the public, as well as my next exhibition at the Savannah Centre for Contemporary Art (SCCA) in Tamale, Ghana, curated by Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh. [@ibrahimmahama](#)

The Design Indaba Festival runs from 26-28 February 2020. [designindaba.com](#)

OPPOSITE Ibrahim Mahama in front of his *Parliament of Ghosts* installation at Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester. The centrepiece is a parliament-like arrangement of worn seats from abandoned railway carriages. In another room large-scale works use textiles and wood traces, gathered from Ghana's urban environment. **ABOVE** *Exchange Exchanger* features buildings shrouded in jute sacks, procured from traders in exchange for new ones.