

FORM



A Space for Ideas, Culture, and Aesthetics



Reclamation

Caroline Rettig: What led you to pursue art professionally? And, more specifically, what inspired your artistic medium of consumer residue?

Moffat Takadiwa: I grew up in a small town called Tengwe, which is almost 350 km from Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe and art was never a likely option. Subconsciously, I grew up with an appreciation for and memories of being surrounded by various shops with merchandise-lined shelves. From this memory, my work has always been informed by my love for the specific designs of packaging containers and a zeal to accumulate and collect. At some point, the shop merchandise appeared in the streets of Harare and became part of the urban landscape with vendors occupying every unusual place; vending noise became the new street noise and culminated in building the new Harare street language and sounds. All of which were translated into my work.

CR: After scrounging through household and industrial waste, how do you develop the intricate designs and shapes of your installations with found materials?

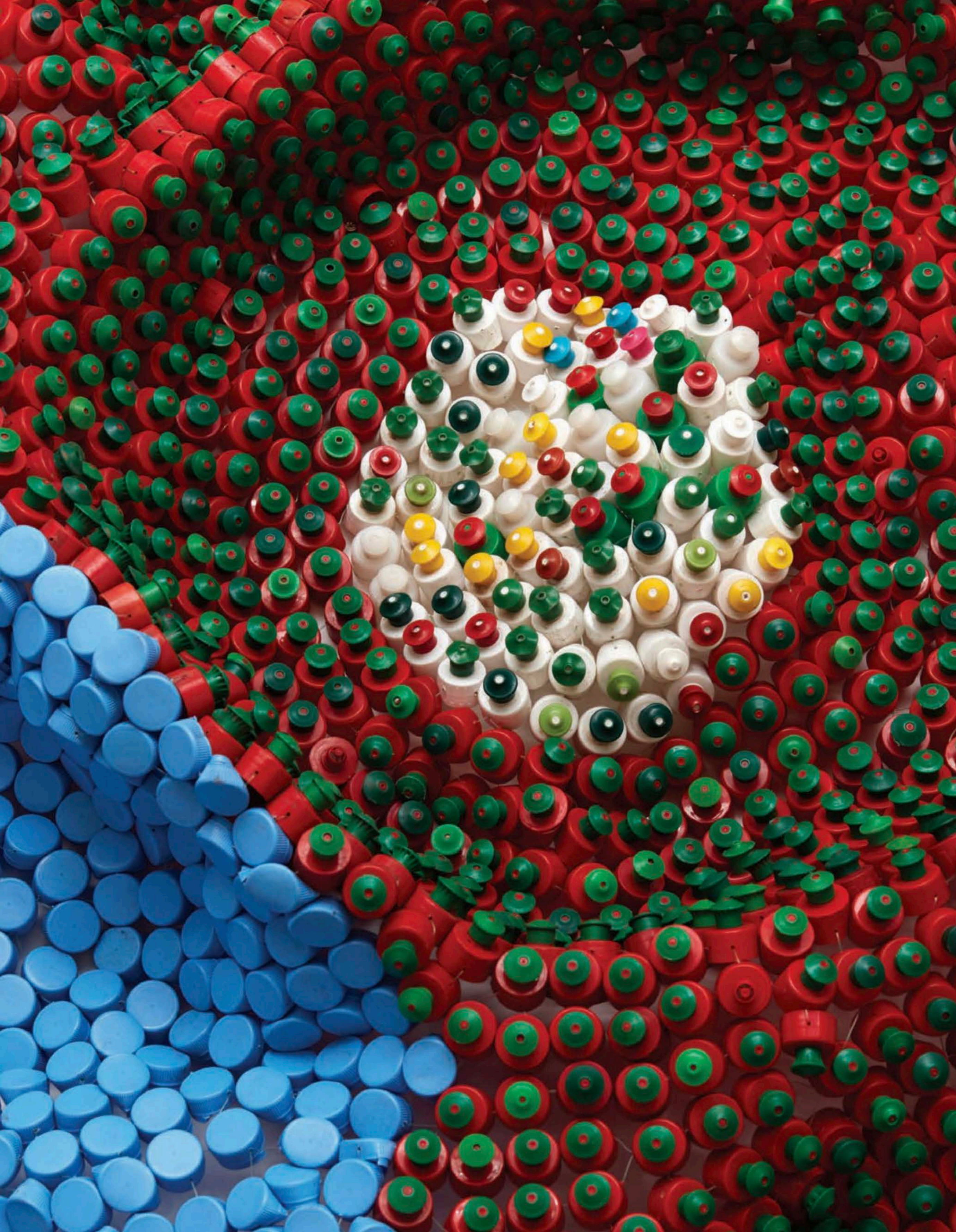
"AMERICA SHIPS TONS OF ITS WASTE TO POOR COUNTRIES AND SOMETIMES THEY DON'T GET TO SEE HOW OTHER COUNTRIES STRUGGLE WITH THEIR RESIDUE."

MT: The process of my work usually begins with the mobilization of materials. This is done by my team of about thirty-five people from various dumping sites of Harare, and these people are mostly homeless people who stay in the dumping grounds with their families and have a livelihood around sorting through the dumps for recyclable wastes to sell. The collected items are brought to my studio for cleaning and preparations with my studio team of about ten art students who work on a part-time basis. Most of my materials are worked one item at a time and this is a very tiresome process that demands concentration. For example, some materials like computer keys need to have holes drilled with a two-millimeter drill on four sides of the key. After drilling, the computer keys are then threaded into lines and the lines get fabricated and weaved into shape according to my sketches and instruction to my assistants.

CR: What new meaning do your installations give to consumer residue? Does the meaning of your installations change with a Zimbabwean audience versus a Western audience?

MT: Meanings and narratives given to consumer residue by my various installations keep changing and revolving. Recently, my work has been focusing on the everyday residue in suburban Zimbabwe and expressing issues with cultural dominance propagated through trade. With some works, like 'The Land of Coca Cola and Colgate,' this works does not only speak on dominance but also brings ecology





and land ownership into question. Zimbabwe is the only country which has redistributed land to its people after independence from the British.

Besides being worlds apart, some everyday residues like that of famous brands e.g., Colgate, and Coca Cola, are used and consumed in everyday routines and speak to the common modern-day problems of how we consume so many chemicals and also the everyday struggle of fighting those chemicals.

At one point, I was very interested in the reflections from some of my American audience. America ships tons of its waste to poor countries and sometimes they don't get to see how other countries struggle with their residue. In my exhibition, I had to explain that Zimbabwe is landlocked, and we don't necessarily receive some of this waste dumped in Africa, but we rely on secondhand items from different countries around the world and this has paralyzed our industry. My show in Paris, France 'Vaforomani ndimi mawondonga purazi' was all about farmworkers and how the suburban residue only represents the objects of their dreams and desires. There is so much poverty in some communities of Zimbabwe and sometimes I speak about that labor which feeds the world and how they lack these everyday basics.

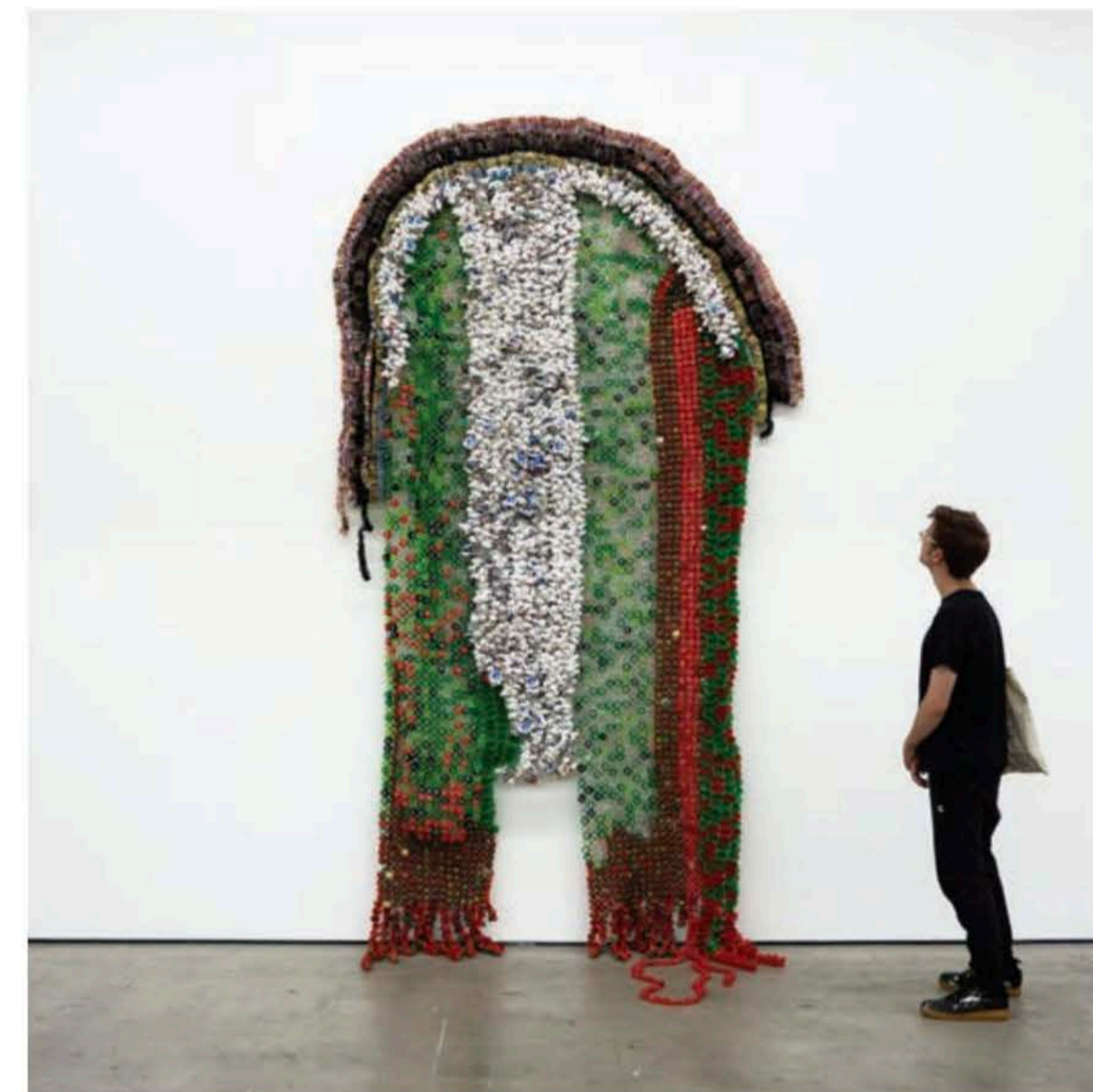
“BORROWING AND RESEARCHING ON AFRICAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS HAS ALWAYS BEEN CULTIVATING MORE CURIOSITY IN ME AND MY UNDERSTANDING OF SHAPES, UTILITARIAN OBJECTS, AND AFRICAN ARTIFACTS.”

CR: How do your installations reflect the cultural narrative of Zimbabwe and its colonial history? How do your installations challenge Eurocentric and Westernized ideals?

MT: The way I compose most of my work is informed by the Korekore culture of Zimbabwe. Borrowing and researching on African knowledge systems has always been cultivating more curiosity in me and my understanding of shapes, utilitarian objects, and African artifacts. The work 'The Bull' is a good example of how I tear through the Eurocentric canons in art. The work was from several sketches I did, with Picasso's several works on the bull as the inspiration for my work. As much as Picasso was speaking of human brutality in his works like 'Guernica', I question Europeans' brutality on the African people through the suppression of vernacular languages and I highlight the human pureness and the plea hidden in vernacular languages.

CR: I noted you serve as a mentor to artists in Harare, Zimbabwe through your program, Mbare Art Space. What hopes or aspirations do you have for Zimbabwe's artist community?





MT: Mbare Art Space (MAS) is a project aimed to amplify the message of urban renewal of the historic township Mbare by fostering talents of Zimbabwean artists at home and internationally. The township of Mbare was founded in 1907 as the first community built for Africans in colonial Zimbabwe to provide labor for the Harare.

The project's aim is mostly for the brimming artistic talents of Mbare, Zimbabwe and Africans to build a creative community inside a former community beer garden and to incubate and showcase talent with this unlikely community becoming the first consumers.

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CR: Your installations often address social and ecological issues, what pressing issues do you think you will tackle next?

MT: I am currently working on a body of work in Harare at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe that opens March 16, 2023. In the exhibition, I plan to address the urgent need to eliminate the vestiges of colonialism and its aftermath in Africa - this is more important now more than ever. Zimbabwe has been at the center of land redistribution from the former colonial masters and white minority with many issues on repatriation and restitution gaining momentum throughout the continent. Africa has been struggling to find its footing in the global space. For my country, Zimbabwe, it has now been forty-plus years after gaining our independence from colonizers and we have definitely passed the independence honeymoon and are now faced with the realities of the colonial hangover and its aftertaste.

CR: FORM Magazine represents students with vested interests in arts and culture. What is your advice to emerging artists and other art professionals?

MT: Africa is quickly becoming on the art radar, and it is important for young and emerging professionals from western universities to also have a focus on Africa for its growing influence and beautiful, strong works. It's also important to understand the shift in knowledge production. Africa has a lot to offer!

PHOTOGRAPHY courtesy of Moffat Takadiwa
WRITING Caroline Rettig



