



NATIONAL GALLERY
OF ZIMBABWE

NICODIM

MOTTAT TAKADIWA

VESTIGES OF COLONIALISM

March 16 – June 30, 2023

National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare

20 Julius Nyerere Way, Park Ln, Harare, Zimbabwe



Moffat Takadiwa, *Bhiro ne Bepa* (pen and paper), 2023. National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare.

Courtesy of the artist, NGZ and Nicodim

National Gallery of Zimbabwe is pleased to present Vestiges of Colonialism – first solo exhibition with Zimbabwean artist Moffat Takadiwa. Takadiwa transforms post-consumer waste – such as used toothbrushes, bottle tops, and computer keyboards – into lush, densely layered sculptures and tapestry-like wall works that embody the complexities of contemporary Zimbabwean politics, culture, and reference his Korekore heritage.

Moffat Takadiwa in conversation with Fadzai Muchemwa, curator of National Gallery of Zimbabwe.

FM– Can you offer a brief description to Vestiges of Colonialism?

MT: The show is about the urgent need to eliminate the remnants of colonialism in Africa and cure the continent from its colonial hangover. It has never been so important as it is now. Current African democracies only survive through the leftovers of colonial dispensation and the crumbs of our ugly history. When our economies are patched together with remnants from those days, we often overlook the west's lasting overbearing influence over independent Africa. The recycled materials that make-up my artworks symbolize, in part, the transfer of power from Europe and how their detritus swallowed our landscape and handicapped our initial attempts at self-rule. My practice attempts to use this detritus and the ashes of our past to fertilize a brighter future. In one piece, I even burned the some furniture from the Rhodesian administration to grow a rose garden.

FM– Exhibition focuses on post colonialism, what importance do you find in taking this discussion to the public?

Current African power structures have an internalized inferiority complex to the West, ignoring our rich histories of knowledge and discovery native to the continent. My practice places our narratives at the center of the dialogue—we are worthy of telling our own stories, and they deserve a global audience.

FM– Given your references to Colonialism, I see your work as a tribute to labour, and often time is very taxing to make and takes collaborative effort. What does it take to make your kind of work?

I grew up surrounded by tobacco farms and farmers, one of the many colonial systems of farming and mining still present in the country. Powers from both East and West claimed our most rich and fertile lands, and took advantage of cheap local labour to export our commercial crops like tobacco, cotton, and maize for great profit while our communities suffered. While we technically have our independence, our leaders are facilitating the destruction of our communities with poor wages and living conditions, our farmland through unsustainable farming practices, and the environment through unregulated mining, all in-service of Western systems that view our part of the world as disposable. We have been at the mercy of corrupt African politicians who support and protect the Western economic and political structures that linger on the continent, trading self-determinism for personal gain for too long.

My practice, by contrast, is based on-the-ground in our Harare community. We focus on reconstructing culture from the detritus left by the previous parasitic structures. My piece Rugare Kwamuri, for example, upcycles colonial furniture, fills it with native soil, and gives it new life as a rose garden. We have assembled our own microeconomy around the assembly of my artwork: my network of people who live near the landfills help me source the materials from which my work is constructed; a team of apprentices in my studio help me construct the work. The process involves gathering and mobilization of the materials, bringing the debris to my studio for cleaning and preparation, sorting of colors and sizes of different objects, and drilling holes in them so that they can be connected together by fishing wire and patches.

FM– Your work focuses on materiality in space, what power does the object employed in each of your works have in conveying your insights?



Installation view of Moffat Takadiwa: Vestiges of Colonialism, 2023. National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare. Courtesy of the artist, NGZ and Nicodim

MT– The objects I use are small bits of human everyday debris that we use and forget about. When you see my work from afar, the compositions often resemble tapestries made of cotton or wool. On closer inspection, however, their materials reveal themselves, and I hope force the viewer to consider their role in these networks of products and power, and their relationships to each other.

FM– Is the specificity in the application of materials in your work and how do different audiences tend to respond to used icons in your body of work?

MT– My work stems from korekore basketry and weaving traditions. These traditions are often condemned by many modern Zimbabweans as witchcraft. I think accusations of witchcraft are a way to segregate and isolate our people from each other. Hopefully my work represents a vision of unity, without ignoring our past, current, and future hardships.

FM– Your studio reflects the colonial era, how are you working towards decolonizing the space?

MT– The story of a community like Mbare cannot be separate from its colonial past. Mbare has become mixing pot for cultures from all of Southern Africa, and loaded with so much artistic talent! Through my work, I hope to chip away our colonial facade and create new platforms for dialogue. Colonialists have violently and intentionally robbed our communities of their past and left us searching for an identity. My vision is to build a creative community which can engage with today's urgent global issues through a rediscovery of our past, and bring about opportunity for local artists to create local, self-sustaining marketplaces of ideas, culture, and the goods and services that support them.

FM– What is the history of Mbare Art Space?

MT– Mbare Art Space (MAS) is a unique project that aims to amplify the message of urban renewal of a historic township, raise the profile of Zimbabwean artists at home and abroad, and inspire young visual artists throughout Zimbabwe.

The vision of the project is to build a creative community to tackle today's global issues and bring about opportunities for creative thinking through artistic synergies. Under my guidance, young local artists are challenged to re-imagine recycling and up-cycling whilst creating open dialogue on realities of life in a community like Mbare.

MAS is located in a former beerhall in the poorest township in Zimbabwe. It has been a multi-year design-build collaboration between architecture students in Germany and partners in Zimbabwe. Part deconstruction, part construction, and part architecture, MAS will be Zimbabwe's first private museum and art residency.

As we proceed, original structures will be redesigned, with some parts retained to convert the beer hall into a functional space, paying tribute to its history and the roots of the area as a whole.