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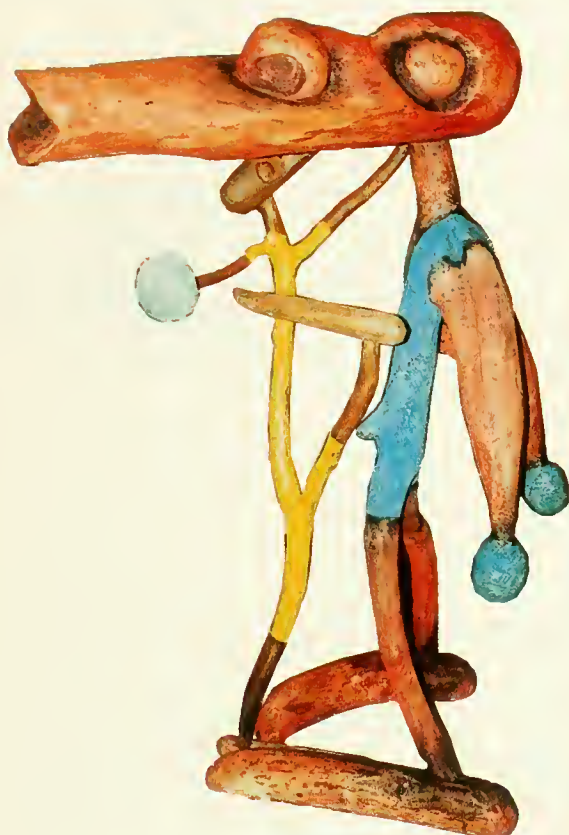
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Joerg Sorgenicht



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September 1999

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Thatha Camera

the pursuit for reality

Yvonne Vera, Regional Director of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo, writes about the recently held exhibition of 1900 - 1980 photographs from Bulawayo's townships and studios

The photographs gathered in 'Thatha Camera'* strike one as limitless, valuable and irreplaceable. Time makes each photograph nostalgic; each transcends our own immediate time and experience. A history gathers. Something elegiac accumulates around the yellowing, cracking surface of the photograph, its capture of a face, a time, and a gesture stirs curiosity, sadness and romance of a kind; and pathos, in that ceaseless capture of a moment that has ceased.

The language of photography finds different uses and adaptations in different communities. The current exhibition has focused on photographs taken in the townships and studios of Matabeleland from 1900 to 1980. At the turn of the century, settlers were recording not only their journeys through Africa and the various buildings and structures first produced but also images of Africans as they encountered European influences; the

camera gaze, however, went in one direction.

The photographs of Nehanda and Kaguvu moments before they were hanged form part of the earliest and most important archive of change and violence in the formation of Zimbabwe. They evoke the most puzzling and charged record of our identity. A century later, I wrote the novel *Nehanda* (Baobab: 1993) in order to pursue what I thought to be beyond the camera in this tragic encounter of 1897: Who was Nehanda behind this glossed representation?

Only three years following this record of a death, a vastly different photograph emerges, of a Matabele woman poised on a bicycle. It is dated 1900 and subtitled *Matabele New Woman*. She is balancing on a bicycle, and one leg is resting on a stone, confirming, clearly that she cannot cycle. Her naked breasts become erotic

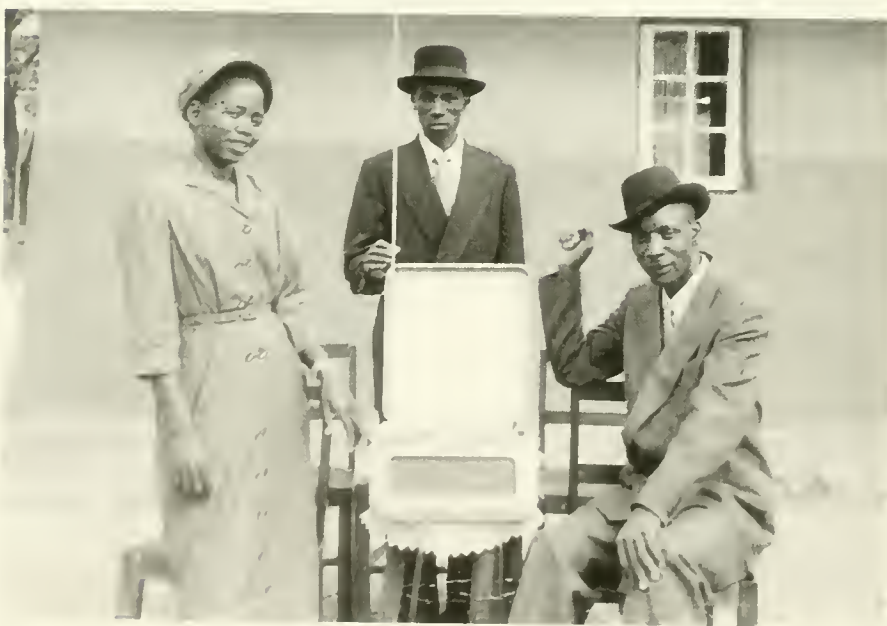


Matabele New Woman, 1900
Source: National Archives

appendages, poised unexpectedly above the metal handlebars. The instrument beneath her is alien to her cultural history and disposition yet she looks nonchalantly at the camera. Perhaps she is unaware of the incongruous juxtaposition; perhaps she is merely bemused. The photograph, with its ability to record, to mirror and to comment on the object captured is a powerful tool for exploring new identities.

The camera has often been a dire instrument. In Africa, as in most sections of the dispossessed world, the camera arrived as part of colonial paraphernalia together with the gun and the bible, diarising events, the exotic and profound, altering reality, introducing new impulses and confessions, cataloguing the converted and the hanged. That impulse, when indulged to record vanishing pristine cultures, presents a confusing complex of the camera in the guise of romantic protectiveness. The photograph has often brought forth the most loaded fraction of time, a calcification of the most unequal, brutal, and undemocratic moment of human encounter.

In the 1840s when the first cameras were made in England and France photography was the preserve of inventors and privileged experimenters. As popular mass technology, photography has become a twentieth-century art. Together with film, which presents the photograph as motion, it is among the most modern of artistic media.



Dad, Uncle and Mum, 1959
Source: Rodger Sibanda

Africa's encounter with the photographic image coincides well with the gradual exploration and maturity of this medium. We partake, via this coincidence, in uniquely formulating for our own circumstance and need what is photography, what is to be photographed and how. We have had an opportunity to decide which moment justifies being photographed, stilled, preserved, and circulated. These are some of the pressing questions evoked by 'Thatha Camera'. What makes a photograph a memory worthy to be placed behind glass, framed and duplicated? The terms of reference in judging style, expression, composition, principle and aesthetic are different in our own cultural environment from any other.

What are the terms of unity for each image, and when do we move from pure record to a more deliberate aesthetic process? The documentary photo, like the documentary film, has today been so perfected by its proponents that it vastly expands any assumed criteria of artistic merit. The plethora of photographs now present and the manner in which the camera has been adapted to meet the demands of the least efficient user, becoming as small and disposable as a tampon, tend to dilute artistic notions, to confuse set conventions for excellence in photography. Perhaps indeed, this overproduction makes nonsense of comparison between results, inspiring some fundamental and controversial questions in this field.

Once adapted to its particular cultural context the photograph begins to have a transforming authority on the image of the self, no matter how brief this personal reflection. Past that now clichéd moment of disbelief when the camera is viewed suspiciously by locals as 'stealing' the soul of the individual, private moments become public. In this, something intrinsic is sought through the camera by the photographed. Each image conjured is a memory, a pursuit for reality. The township and studio photographs provide a variety of ways by which the photographic image is engaged to pursue or confirm a separate reality.

The evocation of desire, the invention of the desirable object, is at the basis of some of the most compelling photographs in 'Thatha Camera': a couple touching intimately while looking straight at the

camera; a single woman sitting with legs clad in high heels, a mini skirt, an alluring look, fingers curling delicately over a raised knee, the shoulder turned provocatively toward the viewer, a hat held on the edge of the forehead, a wig split invitingly in the middle, high cheek bones translucent, polished with skin-lightening creams. Each of these gestures celebrates a new found urban sensibility, a reach toward a fearless field of personhood, a transparency where timidity, should it be pronounced, is only another element of desire. After all, the camera beautifies. This is one of its functions in its manufacture of desire.



(Untitled) c. 1959. Source: Eveline Chanza

Desire is the tone of self-expression in the late 60s and 70s in the townships. The photographed individual is firmly convinced of the desirability of a modern lifestyle, the fulfilling absorption of modern styles. The photograph produced is entrancing and transfiguring: the body is fashionable, in vogue. It is a thing by itself, an entity presented as complete, as separate from the traditional context of kinship where the body exists because it has been acknowledged in an extended network of relations. Instead, each figure is a trend, an evocation. It is a freed climate: "This is Bulawayo. This is the city. This is me." The photograph confirms this identity. Every camera not only inverts but invents the object which it encapsulates.

Each photograph epitomises the desirable. Pocket-size, portable, reproducible, it is proof of ambition, of a sensual finality. Perhaps the studio photograph is only an expression of desire for desire, but everything in it is far from obsolete, far from stultified. The photograph proclaims that something did exist, something similar to what the camera has preserved – perhaps only in the mind of the subject – for now it is there, in this way, for the camera. For now we believe it as much as the subject photographed does. Perhaps the sunglasses have been borrowed from a friend to enhance the photographic moment, perhaps the shoes too and the handbag gracing the arm stretched towards the camera. The pose is real, the pose draws us into the entire symmetry. We are seduced.

The moment is whole – from head to toe. The cropped image, the head and shoulders, the portrait, the close-up, are less common in the pictures submitted for 'Thatha Camera'. They are something best left to bureaucracies, to the surveillance of police files and colonial administrators. It is a while before the African studios attempt this abbreviation, this focus on the face alone, and even then the hand is often brought in to support the chin – the face, like the body, can't just be.

For the city couples, the togetherness engendered by a city love is



Deliwe and Gladys, 1967. Source: Josephat Chinyama

all too evident. The open closeness of bodies, linked, touching, fingers interlocking, the faces close and closer, the arm thrown over the shoulder of the loved one claiming the bodies as one, and the intimacy truer than daylight: the couple is thoroughly united through the camera's eye. The open pronouncement of love is a city thing, a camera thing, a sensual and portable intercourse, a city confession. The lovers are practising a love very different from their traditional expressions and rituals of tenderness. In the studio, the private room with only the eye of the camera, they are able to frame their love.

The city has its limits. In some cases, the photograph is a desire for permanency where love often transfers into passion then is quickly abandoned; where the boundaries, introduced when a couple is only that because the extended family has approved the union or participated in the paying of a bride price for example, no longer form an integral part of the union. These pictures declare an independence. A traditional union might follow later but, in the meantime, another reality is already being confirmed through the camera's eye.

that colonial regime where desire between black and white was taboo, the camera's curiosity challenged every barrier and the image of a black woman swinging, light-footed and free, in the arms of a white man, is captured and displayed in the family album. The reality is also the fantasy. Indeed, Stanley Dance Hall in Makokoba was one of the places where Europeans gathered Africans to introduce them to different styles of dance: the waltz, the foxtrot. The Africans loved it – they have always had dances of their own. They formed dancing clubs and held competitions in modern dance, bathed in tantalising charisma, dressed in the prescribed dress code which made them different, light, free, expert, and desirable. They were in Makokoba, in Bulawayo. They could respond to the slide and pace of the city. They could match desire with performance. They took possession of the moment, they took flight, they were photographed.

The picture of two women at the Railway Station captures so much about Bulawayo. Headquarters for the railways, the trains set a rhythm and a tone to the city, pronouncing growth and progress and technology as railways have done the world over – rolling over

the landscape, instilling fear, then excitement, then freedom and the possibility for escape.

In the then emerging black elite the most enviable male workers were employed by the railways and in the 70s the black shunters were the better paid and most charismatic of this urban class. They were men pulsating with the entire spirit of the railways, and the black women, clean to the bone, professional, dressed in fashionable styles and most of them nurses at Mpilo Hospital, found partners among the railway employees. This too was a new signature and women made trips to the railways to have their pictures taken, to celebrate their bonds of friendship, their embrace of the city and its new found possibilities – the chum and charm of the railways. The photograph captures this experience: the raised arm, gay, carefree; the trains zooming dangerously past. This is an incontrovertible expression of freedom.

Mrs Lina Zondo, an early resident of Makokoba, interviewed for *Masiye Pambile*, (10:77) recalls that on her wedding day her bridal party had to walk a long distance from St Columbus Church after the ceremony to reach the only photographer in those days, an Indian man called "Pondoki" who had a shop near the

The dance. The feet moving freely. In



Source: F.J. Msimanga



Me, 1976. Source: Rodger Sibanda



Source: Rita Chitiyo



Source: Ngano Gobah

Drill Hall. Even with their first exercise of choice over the photographed image, the ritual of marriage had to find completion in the photograph. Distance and fatigue become minor obstacles to fulfilling this desire. Photographs certify experience and make it true. The photograph outlives the event photographed; it can reawaken history. The event, therefore, becomes a moment for the photograph.

The emergence of the street photographer in the African townships further enhanced the ready presence of the camera and therefore the easy recording of daily events. The street photographer became a predator, moving together with the tomato-seller from door to door, offering an opportunity to immortalise the moment, to transform the moment into something total, into something as believable as experience.

Street photographers brought a new challenge to the photographed subject – the question of how to present oneself before the camera becomes an urgent measure of personal worth. A drama is enacted. Objects from life become props. An umbrella is opened. A change of clothing called for, a telephone, a newly purchased possession like a radio or gramophone is taken outdoors. The radio has had a major role in communication patterns in Zimbabwe and is one of the most persuasive symbols of city life, with programmes ranging from greetings, to

songs, to dramas like “Sakhelene Zinini” in the 70s, to news broadcasts so important in the war years before 1980. The portable radio was crucial to bachelorhood and could enhance a lovers’ tryst. Not surprisingly, when the standard for beauty for Africans became the slim figure – the woman you could carry in your arms – the women too were referred to as “portables”. The hire-purchase scheme made it possible for Africans to purchase radios, lounge chairs, bedroom suites, stoves, and other such symbols of upward social mobility. In all this, the camera is coerced to record not only the possession but also the ability to possess.

A recent exhibition in Germany ‘Snap me One!’ shows how in Ghana large backdrops are painted in photographic studios and a clear attempt made to merge with this backdrop. For example: a backdrop consisting of a living-room with VCR and refrigerators; a door opens; the person to be photographed stands with a bottle of Coca Cola and pretends to place it in the refrigerator – the illusion of being part of the living-room, is captured by the camera as it merges the figure with the backdrop.

In Bulawayo, such an attempt to merge with backdrops has not been predominant, though many romantic backdrops were made such as that in the photograph with sailing ships. The most common was a

static, mesh-fence background, with no images on it, or a simple black cloth.

In these photographs the attempt or effort to merge takes place most often with vegetation. The subject selects a portion of vegetation considered beautiful or “plenty”. There is a clear effort at oneness; the grass held tightly towards the body as though to claim it, presenting it as an aspect of the body being photographed or, more remarkably, the man holding his back tightly against the trunk of a tree.

In the case of ‘Thatha Camera’, can we determine retrospectively the motives and impulses of each photograph recovered? Are we justified in this activity? Can the elements in each image be isolated, brought to scrutiny, and made to speak? Can the motive that prompts the photographic image be a criterion in judging its worth? In selecting work for this exhibition, our criteria did not seek to specify absolute artistic merit but to combine photographs that together offer a range in representation, which capture that moment of refashioning when the photographic image builds a distinct narrative of becoming.

The National Gallery in Bulawayo offers this exhibition as a community outreach; the request for photographs brought the greatest number of participants from the townships, who responded with enthusiasm to our search. They came physically to the



(Untitled), 1967. Source: Dennis Wesa



(Untitled), 1972. Source: Olipah Mubviri

gallery, some never having visited before. They brought photographs wrapped in milk bags and torn handkerchiefs, and presented them with cautious confidence. The contributors offered narratives to accompany each image, shared secrets with us, sought assurances that the photographs would be kept safely. We have been humbled by their trust and thrilled by their understanding of this exhibition, their excitement to be included, to have their own experience and personal histories somehow made legitimate. Their willingness to become active participants in our process of selection kept this project afloat. The Bulawayo Gallery is grateful to Hivos whose support has made this project possible. We are committed to making the gallery accessible to many, and to assisting that constant search for affirmation.

The photographs in 'Thatha Camera' attempt a social history – not a newspaper report but images by street photographers and studio holders operating in the midst of new realities. Each photograph marks a way of being, a way of seeing and being seen, an attitude of triumph: a signature, an identity, a metamorphosis.

* thatha is Shona for take.



Source: Josephat Chinyama

The contradictions of 'contemporary'



Photography Barbara Murray

The sculptures of Gilbert Clain, a French artist from Reunion Island, were exhibited in May 1999 at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe. Elsa Guigo, arts database co-ordinator with the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, considers his work.

Gilbert Clain is a paradox and his practice is at first glance 'raw', readable and complex. His biography is hardly ordinary. Born in 1941, in an unfavourable environment, he left school without acquiring the essential skills of reading and writing. In order to provide for his family's needs, the thankless jobs of farm boy and shop assistant followed one another. It was not so much a 'revelation' as a moment of creative distraction that started Gilbert Clain on his artistic career. The first head was sculpted and quickly sold.

Beyond the marketing aspect of this artistic engagement, which he recognises, it was a privileged means of expression which revealed itself to him. One of the keys of his work is his absolute confidence in sculpture as a means of expressing his

thoughts and his being. The pieces say what he cannot express by any other means. Since 1974 he has built his own conception of the 'Artistic Being' by asserting himself as such and by distinguishing himself from the less noble label of craftsman that many Reunion people, still reticent about contemporary art, attribute to him.

"The sculptures defend you," he says. They legitimate him, they confirm his identity as an artist.

Bringing together more than 25 pieces, this exhibition gives a rich illustration of his work without being exhaustive. A hybrid people, voluptuous women, graceful children, mythic creatures occupy the space. Using different materials, the artist shows us the fruits of his "controlled madness". His erotic and eerie imagination is written into stone, coral and wood, materials indigenous to Reunion. The three women on the large tamarind wood panels represent his feminine ideals: full forms, abundant hair, coaxing look. He imprints his icons in the wood: supple and raw models, the monumentality of these figures takes us back to the woods of Gauguin, tinted with archaism.

The Dust Storm, a high column of baroque cherubs, traces a positive line in space. Although rough, the technique is precise in the details of the hair. The alternation of frizzy and straight hair is intended to signify the artist's idyllic vision of a multi-cultural Reunion. The eye of the cyclone is calm and from the turbulence of the angelic dust is born the future of humanity.

The poetry of Gilbert Clain is expressed with rawness in his work and in his language. His technique is innate, innocent of all the history of art. The roughness of the model and the incomplete aspects reflect references to world heritage. But Indian



(Opposite above) Gilbert Clain, *Smoke*, 1998, 198 x 43 x 40cm, tamarind wood

(Opposite below) Gilbert Clain, *The Twins*, 1999, 39 x 102 x 44cm, tamarind wood

(Below) Gilbert Clain, *Dust Storm*, 1997-98, 136 x 60 x 49cm, tamarind wood (two views)

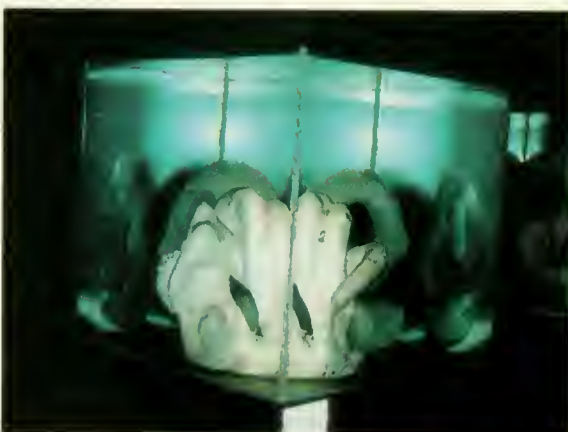


Gupta sculptures or Roman art have no echo in the work of this self-taught man who refuses to scrutinise the history of world sculpture for fear of 'copying' and of betraying his imagination.

The paradox of his position in contemporary creation is highlighted through his collaboration with Marcel Tavé, the curator of the exhibition. To present is to express the place of this original work in contemporaneous plastic arts. Marcel Tavé, former director of the FRAC (Regional Contemporary Art Fund) in Reunion, works on the very perception of Clain's sculptures. He conceives installations which define new relations with our perceptions.

Tavé set up a darkened room within the immense exhibition hall of the National Gallery in Harare. In it three aquariums present small sculptures in sandstone and basalt – a turbulent bestiary of rough, interlaced and tortured women in a cold and diffused light. With the diffraction effect of the water, the sculptures are multiplied, transformed, the binocular perception of the spectator is menaced, a fit of dizziness ensues. The pieces speak. Their presentation adds a critical sense to the classic principles of presenting sculptures. It is paradoxical that the works of this quite passionate, self-taught man are intimately linked, through their presentation, to the theoretical debates inherent in today's art; linked to the radicalism of the plastic comparisons which associate for example the chubby twins with a children's swing – an industrial product with garish colours.

Without reducing the power of Gilbert Clain's sculptures, Marcel Tavé's intervention tints the work with more intellectual or even conceptual elements, forming links between different artistic and critical discussions. By the dynamic association of an artist gifted in his means of communication with the world through a radicalism of presentation that one would wish to be more extreme, a new visual language is defined. Similar attempts with the works of other artists on the fringe of current plastic and critical inquiry are merited.



Various figures by Gilbert Clain carved in sandstone and basalt placed in aquariums by Marcel Tavé, 1999, National Gallery of Zimbabwe

Start your own rural gallery

An exhibition space in each rural village? A micro gallery for every small community?

“... exhibitions proposed by postmen, and housewives, and farmers, and blacksmiths, and artists, and designers, and musicians, and architects, and video artists, and antiques dealers, and restaurateurs, and bakers, and...”

The Rural Libraries and Resources Development Programme (RLRDP) has set up and is running well-used, successful one-roomed libraries in numerous far-flung villages in Zimbabwe. Why not one-roomed galleries for rural communities in Zimbabwe?

Cornelia Lauf PhD, art historian and critic, writes about her small space concept which could provide a model for healthy local cultural action.

I will explain briefly how I came to live in Rome, and how I find it in that fine, ancient, and very polluted town, the ‘mother of all cities’. An anecdote will suffice. Italy has the good sense to have a social health care system, which is a sign of a civilised country. Once you enter that blessed system, however, you will see that it is primarily good humour and good wine that see to it that Italians are among the healthiest people on the planet.

The first two months we lived in Rome, I erred around trying to adjust to a system where everything is in a language that I, until then, had blithely skipped over learning in written form. And as even the marvelously designed phone books do not inform the foreigner how to get medical care, I was stuck with interviewing other *stranieri* (strangers) in the hopes of finding out. Luckily, one pleasant Belgian chap let me in on the know. And directed me to the offices of the head of the entire system, located in a dismal building in an even sadder part of town. Which I had hitched a ride to, as there was a strike that day, and neither buses nor taxis were running. Anyway, in the alley, in the door, up the stairs, and past several newspaper-reading functionaries, I found what looked like a World War Two-era chemical laboratory with toxic substance warnings abounding, and through this lab, and out the other side, was a dingy office, with a small bald man sitting in it, behind a pile of papers, and at a desk that was minted in 1954. This was the head of the Roman health system. He in turn, directed me

downstairs, to a very kind gentleman who was sitting mostly in a small dark room, as the electricity was not working very well. And this man, who had been the head of the foreigners’ division, somewhere important, proceeded to tell me — in the dark, and with great gallantry and wit — all about the five different governmental offices I would subsequently have to visit.

Suffice it to say that I did get the medical coverage. And that the process was maddening. But now we live in a town where the togas still seem to swish through the streets, and where process and bureaucracy make life oddly interesting. And we live here not merely because of the city and its great humanity, but because of its proximity to other great places, even villages — small clusters of civic life that haven’t changed substantially since the time of Tarquinius Superbus. In one of these villages, my husband had the good fortune to buy a piece of land and a house some thirty years ago, on the advice of a wise Italian baron, who wanted to steer his young American artist friend to invest the sale of some work in what was then an abandoned agricultural zone, Tuscany. So, my husband did, and thus began a relationship with San Casciano dei Bagni, a small hamlet of some 400 people that has an identity as pronounced as that of Dayton or Dakar. Several years ago, after we finished laboriously fixing the house, there was a request, on the part of the town council, for for-

eigners to assist in the economic future of the village. San Casciano, like many hill towns, had experienced steady depopulation over the last thirty years. This is where I come in. On the central piazza, overlooking a lovely valley, there was a small space, where women used to card wool, and where wine was once served, way back, a hundred years ago. I rented this space, as its proprietor did not see fit to donate it, and began an exhibition centre for San Casciano — Camera Obscura.

The principle of Camera Oscura, the not-for-profit association I started up in 1996, is that “everyone is a curator”. To paraphrase Joseph Beuys. We (my small committee and I) basically accept exhibition proposals from anyone, both local and international, if they touch our funny bone, meet high aesthetic standards, represent good honest labour, and manifest that grain of truth and beauty that makes life worth living for. And thus we have had exhibitions proposed by postmen, and housewives, and farmers, and blacksmiths, and artists, and designers, and musicians, and architects, and video artists, and antiques dealers, and restaurateurs, and bakers, and so forth. And the exhibitions have included lace, antiques, textiles, sculpture, video, music, ironwork, chocolate, industrial design, plants — in short, a full spectrum of material culture.

For the first two years, I had the marvelous good luck to find sponsors, enlightened mavericks with funds, who recognised a similar ‘pioneer’, at least in curatorial terms. Camera Oscura is not technically perfect, there is no collection, no administration, and not much overhead. The name derived from the lack of electricity, as much as the beginnings of photography. Which we have also exhibited. But the space functions, functions within the community, engenders dialogue, and visits, and participation, and more exhibitions, in a way that I have not witnessed elsewhere. There are disagreements about the shows, there are petty rivalries, there are those who pretend not to come and then peek in when unobserved, but the age range is between newborn and octogenarian, and the social range is rainbow: the full spectrum of the village, and its visiting tourists.

In January 1999, I requested a famed local patissier to mount a retrospective of his chocolate sculptures. He complied, with a New Year’s theme that was skillfully made as a bronze by Henry Moore. But the unthinkable happened. Vandalism. Part of the work was eaten. A huge hole in the front. So, my task as director that month, was to discover the culprit, which the baker believed to be a child armed with an infra-red laser gun. The crime was reported to the chief of police. A consensus formed in the village: it was the winter sun that had melted the chocolate. A small crisis passed.

In February, a young curator named Chiara Parisi invited a Milanese artist, Marco Papa, to exhibit another sculpture. A pile of licorice with sheep, dogs, and car, made out of some kind of stucco/bread mix on top. Papa is a kind of neo-arte Povera meets sci-fi artist. And the piece was sold, a

rare occurrence, to Giovanni Mereu, a sheep farmer in the region. That is, it was traded, for a live, four-legged, and very woolly specimen. The trade occurred directly between artist and farmer. I did not so much as receive a leg of lamb as a commission.

In March, I showed inscrutable neo-conceptual art, curated by a bright young curator from Paris, who organised her own funding, and arrived with the show in a small suitcase. This work elicited little overt response, except a furtive “stop the smut” scribble on one of the photos. Still the show documents a representative of a way of working, and had to be done.

April is a crowd pleaser. Four vases by Carla Accardi, the grande dame of Italian art. And May, May is for roses, nineteenth-century blooms that will be displayed on a Victorian table, by a great expert in their cultivation, Walter Branchi.

My biggest show was wild and ornamental grasses, curated by a very Texan and very ecological philanthropist named Beth Miller. This show had more people at the opening than lived in the village. Now every home in town sports dried grass arrangements on the mantelpiece. A new standard in beauty was set.

So you see, with humour, an open eye for the diversity of material things, and a passion for people, one can start up a community art centre that competes, in terms of its function within a context, with museums ranging from MoMA to the Louvre. Any cultural space that speaks to its audience, and creates a public need for something as fragile and superfluous as beauty or visual poetry, is valuable, no matter what size the hamlet.

I wonder, when I travel to Eastern Europe, or the one time I was in Africa, in Cairo, why people bother to talk in terms of first, second, or God forbid, ‘developing’ worlds. It is my experience that in precisely those places where we apparently see the least resources, that the most potential lies. Does it lie in Safety Harbor, Florida — a wall-to-wall mall with palm trees dotting the concrete? No, it lies along the muddy banks of the Nile, under the bare feet of playing children, in the beauty of a world still without Barbies and Range Rovers and Nintendo and Learning Disability Disorders. It lies in countries where families are the core of civic life, not shopping. It lies in countries where people take a nap after lunch. And, as long as my own modest little venture can continue in the kind of pure spirit it is barreling along with now, I’ll do it. In a little hitty place in the province of Siena. And apply the first dose of Italian medical insurance — *vino bianco* — as I sift through the proposals that seem to drift my way. A toast, “to the health of Italy.”

Barbara Murray takes a closer look at the work of Keston Beaton, one of Zimbabwe's most under-estimated artists

listening to sculpture

A rubbish heap is a good place to gain knowledge. Archaeologists, for example, use the layers of refuse left behind by inhabitants to provide scientifically acceptable evidence of lifestyles, values and systems. Using found objects as their source material, contemporary artists have become archaeologists, historians, sociologists and, in Zimbabwe, Keston Beaton is one such masterly gatherer of the evidence.

He seems to have taken to heart the advice of that great poet and playwright, Bertold Brecht: "*Use what you can.*" Ignoring commercial pressures, local expectations of 'art' materials and prejudice against 'rubbish', Beaton sifts through random, broken, discarded and displaced bits and pieces, combining them to make new and original wholes which have their own logic and beauty.

Keston Beaton is a connective artist, working in contemporary mode but along an old artistic line which stretches back to the bricolage of classic African artifacts. To conventional materials such as wood, metal and stone he adds modern ingredients such as plastic, rubber, glass and cardboard. Within each material he has moved away from handcrafting (carving, casting, moulding) the 'pure' material to using cast-off objects already fashioned for various purposes. However, handwork remains the basis of the process by which he connects and binds the very disparate elements. Curious juxtapositions and unexpected combinations result in dense complicated yet simple objects. The qualities of the materials – colours, dents, edges, textures, volumes and weights – are used directly and the structuring is fully visible. Awkwardness, irregularity, damage, are not concealed.

In a concentrated struggle with the chaotic mass he has to choose from, Beaton selects, adjusts, improvises to create an assemblage which develops a life of its own and which contains all the references and allusions that cling to the different parts, bringing them into a jangling harmony.

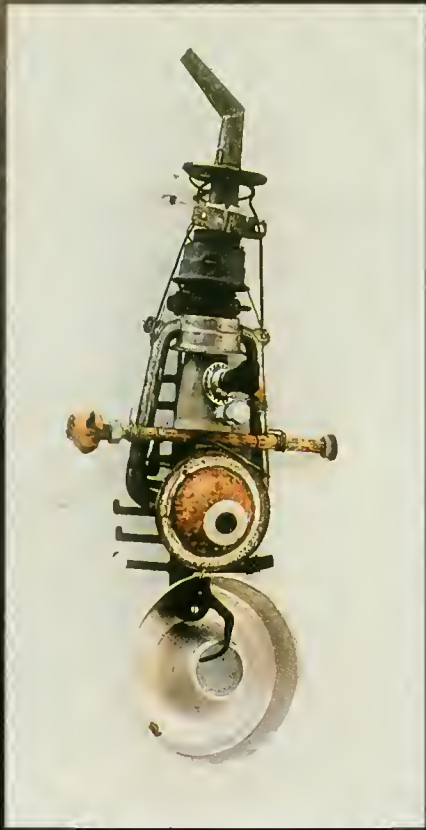
I want to look particularly at the ongoing series of musical instruments that Keston Beaton makes. They do not function in any literal sense but their forms allude to various types of musical instrument: harp, guitar, saxophone etc. Their shapes and structures play on this allusion while the various elements create visual correspondences with sounds. Whether it is a large brass 'horn' mouth, the taut twanging 'strings', the varied resonance boxes, or finger holes and keys, the items evoke individual imaginary noises. The colours too are visual references to sounds: often a single point of sharp red or flat blue, the glowing brass of *Midas, Golden and Bliss*, the glint of aluminium or the muted browns of *Psalms* (see cover). More direct aide-memoires are also incorporated such as bells, shells, animal horns, spoons and even a corkscrew, all of which bring sounds to mind. Intriguingly, once the viewer focuses on this 'audible' aspect, every bit and piece conjures a range of musical equivalents.

Unheard, fictional and therefore more flexible than real sounds, these mix



Keston Beaton, Instrument with Kettle and Corkscrew, 1999, 116 x 40 x 24cm, found objects

Photography: Barbara Murray



Keston Beaton, Wind Instrument,
1997, 84 x 30 x 35cm, found objects



(Top) Keston Beaton, Bugle, 1996,
approx. 80 x 25 x 15cm,
found objects

(Bottom) Keston Beaton, Saxophone,
1996, approx. 90 x 25 x 18cm, found
objects



Keston Beaton, Bicycle Saddle,
1999, 90 x 33 x 23cm,
found objects

in the imagination to suggest varying contemporary compositions and echoes of melodies: combinations of traditional, European, urban, folk, modern and African. These objects are new musical instruments, never seen before. They evoke a new and very contemporary music.

The human being is at the centre of their making. They are human in scale, much related in size to conventional instruments, intimate in detail and fragile in construction. They contain an uneasy tension caused partly by the insecure ties that hold them together and partly by the incongruity of their elements. They are contradictory, seem ready to fall/fly apart. Their components are connected but not fused, retaining their distinct features. The belonging of the parts to the whole remains tenuous and reminds us of their continuing transience. They can be read as metaphors for personal identity and, in this, the artist's own biography is a key.

Keston Beaton was born in 1963 in Zimbabwe but of immigrant parents from Malawi whose conversion to Anglicanism led them to name their son after a Scottish missionary. After school in one of colonial Harare's high-density suburbs, Beaton spent 18 months at the BAT Workshop where he was taught by Paul Wade, himself the son of Jamaican and English mixed parentage, who

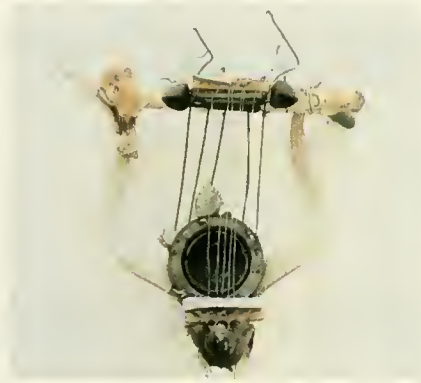
worked within the more open approach of British art education. Later he joined Tapfuma Gutsa's Utonga Workshop where he began "*scratching on stone ... but it was not as fluent as I thought and I left art.*" His experimental nature could not fit in with the established current of stone sculpture in Zimbabwe so he tried, for five years, to make ends meet through different trades which included watch making and repairing. During this time he continued to produce some pieces, to see exhibitions and was struck by the work of visiting British artist, Anne Carrington, whose use of scrap materials caught his attention and sent him back to art.

Similar multiple, cross-cultural strands are woven into almost all Zimbabweans'

identities and find expression in Beaton's work. The bits of each instrument bring with them not only musical correspondences but also social and historical references. Memories cling to the bits – their origins, making, place/use and significance in other contexts. These are open-ended. Each viewer brings his/her own recollections to each bit. The relationships between bits shift as the viewer contemplates them and alter their meanings in the process.

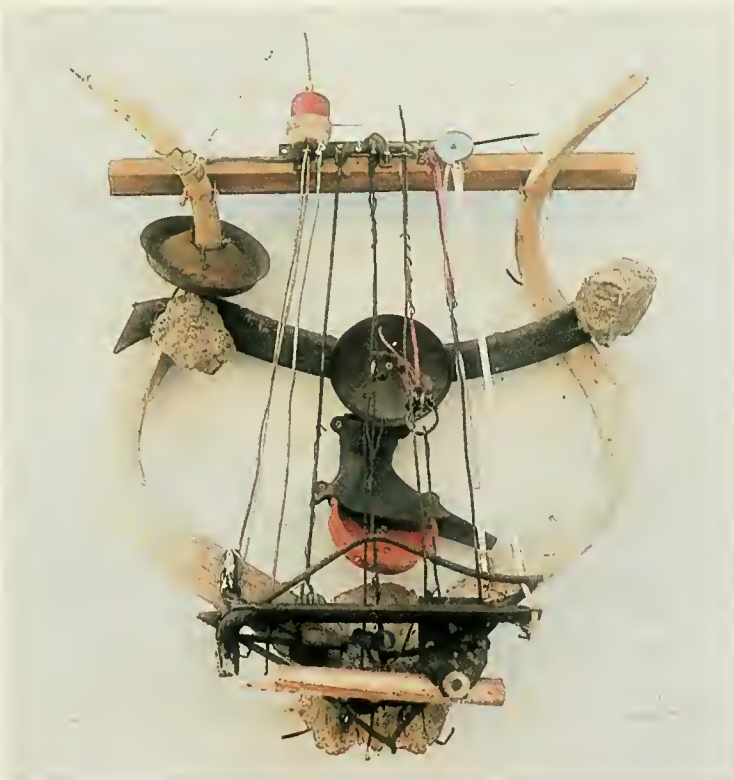
For example in the *Stone Harp* we are presented with a form reminiscent perhaps of a lyre, of David's harp from the Bible or of other folk instruments yet the form is constructed of curving kudu horns which are essentially African. The strings are combinations of wire, cotton and plastic, and the resonators/rattles and other elements are manufactured metals and plastics as well as wood. The ancient and natural, religious and secular, are connected to the modern and industrial.

In *Harp* (1998) a section of old carved furniture, European and probably 50s colonial, forms a sounding board for curiously constructed strings with a curving bow/handle of amalgamated strips of different materials. On this instrument there are bone, wood and silver rings which refer directly to different sections of societies and histories.



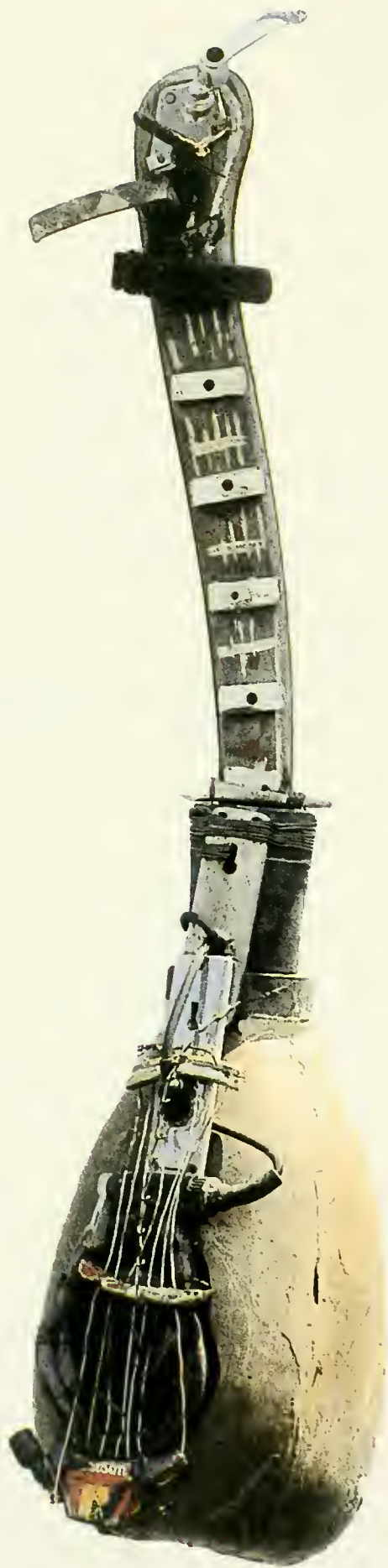
(Top) Keston Beaton, *King David's Harp*, 1997, approx. 90 x 70 x 15cm, found objects

(Bottom) Keston Beaton, *Harp*, 1998, approx. 70 x 45 x 10cm, found objects



Keston Beaton, *Stone Harp*, 1995, approx. 90 x 70 x 15cm, found objects

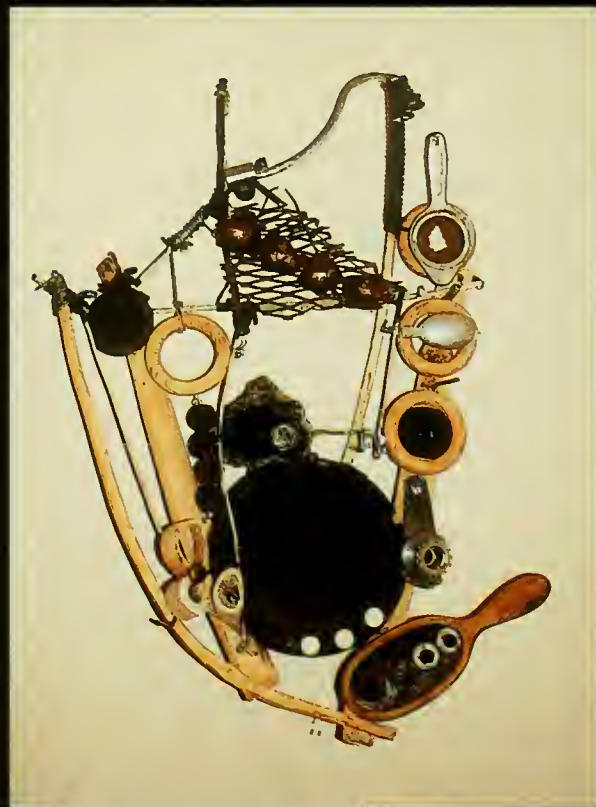




Keston Beaton, Calabash Guitar, 1995,
104 x 22 x 23cm, found objects



(Top) Keston Beaton, Guitar Picturesque, 1999,
87 x 46 x 17cm, found objects

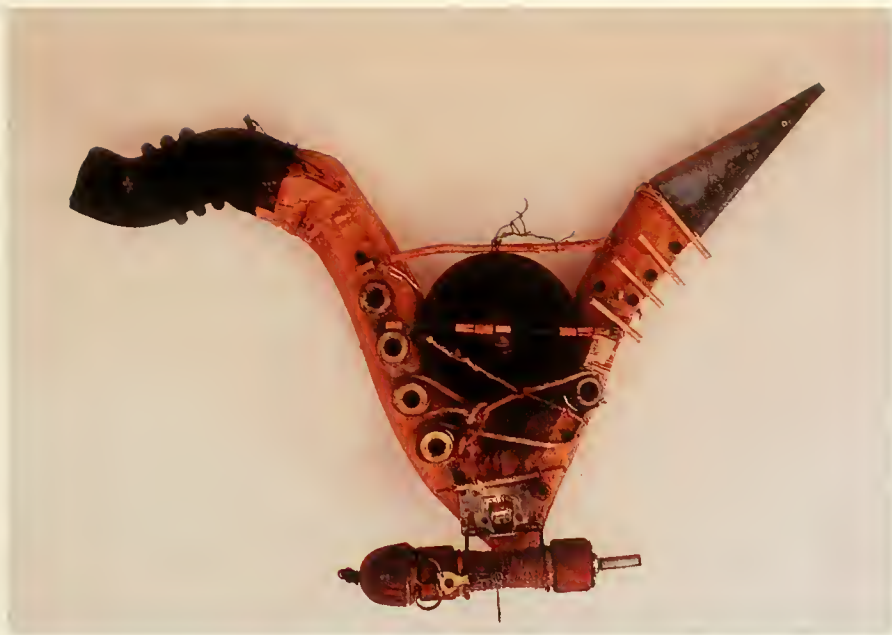


(Bottom) Keston Beaton, Comb Harp, 1996-7,
70 x 58 x 16cm, found objects



In *Midas, Golden and Bliss*, a rough hewn chunk of raw wood is connected to a slice of manufactured and stamped packing-case plywood. Elongated 'keys' protrude suggesting varying notes, a piece of plastic is fitted with old typewriter keys, a black rubber door stopper acts as a damper and the highly polished brass machine part delivers rich, round and mellow sounds and associations.

In *Instrument with Kettle and Corkscrew* a softly silver, old, dented tin kettle, perhaps colonial, perhaps township, is connected to an ornate faux brass element (I know I've seen one somewhere!), three teaspoons, typewriter keys, a wine-bottle corkscrew and several industrially shaped bits of wooden furniture. Around the neck of the resonator a fine string of tiny commercial beads culminates in a single hollowed bone ring, and frets wrapped in bright red wool offset a blue bead and clear plastic bar wrapped in silver. The composition is masterly – the interplay of shapes, forms and materials evocative of a myriad social and historical factors that hold specific references for every viewer. In this way Beaton's work becomes public, political and social as well as intensely personal and private. Each bit adds to the disjointed story, readily absorbing the viewer's feelings and thoughts, gaining meaning and significance



(Top left) Keston Beaton, *Scientific Guitar*, 1994, approx. 28 x 36 x 15cm, found objects

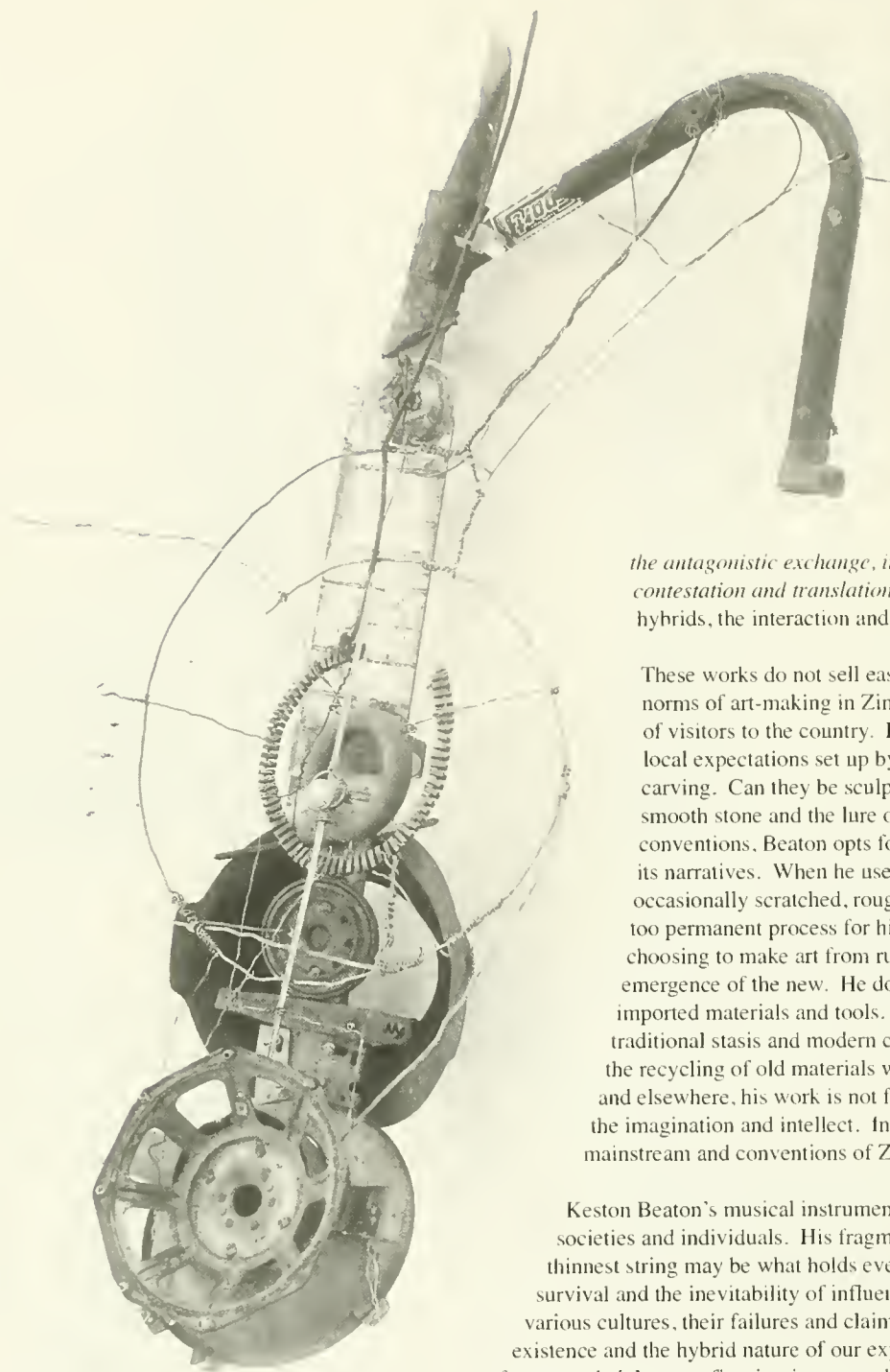
(Top right) Keston Beaton, *Untitled*, c.1994, approx. 40 x 30 x 15cm, found objects

(Bottom) Keston Beaton, *Wind Instrument*, 1996, approx. 40 x 60 x 10cm, found objects

in the process.

Though deeply rooted in the Zimbabwean context, these musical instruments share elements with every society – both in their details and in their reference to universal issues of music and identity. Music becomes a metaphor for life – one song consisting of many different voices. The influences are both Western and non Western. Seemingly incompatible items/systems of thought, incongruous ideas, are brought together. Beaton's works disturb our sense of order, the exclusions and divisions we construct to keep ourselves 'pure'. They are contingent objects in a contingent world. In recovering items from the junkheaps of history and contemporary society, the artist transforms them into a space for interrogating national and personal identity. There is no aggression, no condemnation, no judgement but rather an acceptance of the facts of our contemporary realities and a creative determination to reconcile oddities.

In his investigations into post-colonial developments Homi Bhabha writes: "*So my attempt has always been to see that interaction, to see that kind of displaced re-inscription of something, which I have called, at some point, hybridization, where different systems and codes are being constituted in the process of exchange – in*

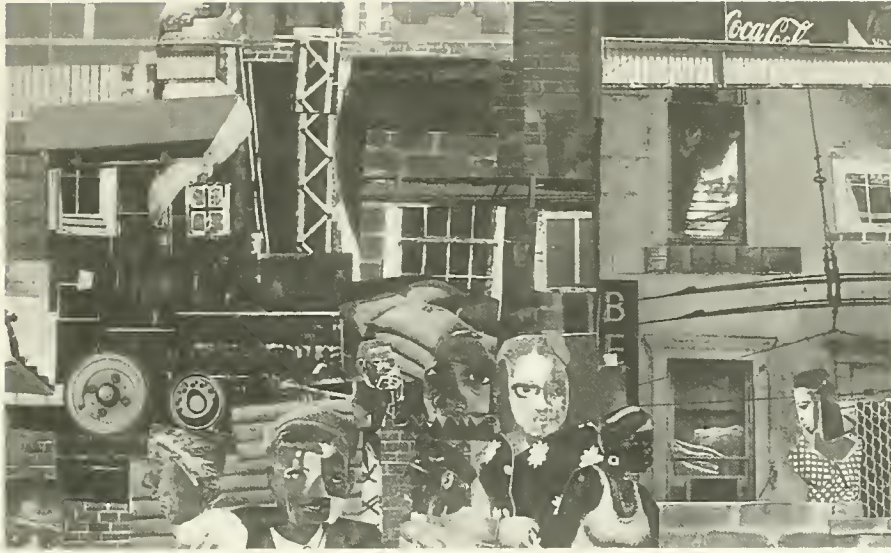


the antagonistic exchange, in the search for authority, in cultural contestation and translation.” Beaton’s objects are just such hybrids, the interaction and mutation made visible.

These works do not sell easily. They challenge the established norms of art-making in Zimbabwe as well as the presumptions of visitors to the country. His objects are wall-hung contrary to local expectations set up by the predominant and heavy stone carving. Can they be sculptures? Rejecting the seductively smooth stone and the lure of ‘exotic’ or ‘primitive’ story-telling conventions, Beaton opts for the reality of the rubbish heap and its narratives. When he uses stone it appears in its raw state, occasionally scratched, roughly shaped. He rejects welding as a too permanent process for his concepts and rarely uses glue. In choosing to make art from rubbish he foregrounds creativity – the emergence of the new. He does without expensive, pristine or imported materials and tools. His work speaks against both traditional stasis and modern consumerism. Although aligned with the recycling of old materials which is common throughout Africa and elsewhere, his work is not functional and is made to appeal to the imagination and intellect. In all these ways he works outside the mainstream and conventions of Zimbabwean art.

Keston Beaton’s musical instruments point to issues between and within societies and individuals. His fragments appear on equal terms – the thinnest string may be what holds everything together. They speak of loss, survival and the inevitability of influence and change. The histories of various cultures, their failures and claims to achievement, their transient existence and the hybrid nature of our experience in the 1990s are foregrounded. In reconfiguring jetsam and tatters Keston Beaton admits the vulnerability but accepts the challenge, encompassing a sense of the absurd, irony and wry humour. His works are puzzles of form and content which need unravelling. While offering visual intrigue and aesthetic pleasure, they also ask for an active memory and an analytical imagination in their investigation of our lives.

Keston Beaton, Spider’s Web, 1994, approx. 87 x 50 x 20cm, found objects



Sam Nhlengethwa, *Homage to Romaine Beardon, 1993*, 24.5 x 34.5cm, collage on paper

<< Rewind >> Fast Forward . ZA

The shock wave riders of society

“The title of this exhibition conjures up an image of someone sitting in front of a television, remote in hand, jumping backwards and forwards on a video tape. But enticing as this image is, I do not believe that this is what the curators of this exhibition had in mind. A video tape is pre-recorded, it is a self-contained piece of some reality captured. It is there: It can be looked at again and again, and once you have watched it, it is known and the more you speed backwards and forwards the flickering images confirm the familiarity. That is not what the South African art scene is about.

If any words are appropriate, they are in the category of innovative, transitional and searching. These concepts are useful because of a sense of energetic, but simultaneously not entirely predictable movement. South African art today is a live performance, where improvisation rather than the rigours of a written script excites and confuses the viewer.

Does it mean then that the title of this exhibition is inappropriate? Not at all. There can be no doubt that during the last couple of years South Africa has literally been hurtled head-on into the future ... As we plunge forward into history, it is not without wounds being inflicted and scars remaining. Often there is an overwhelming feeling of dislocation.

Artists are first and foremost the ones that not only register, but give expression to, the hopes and despairs of any society. More than the politicians or soldiers, they are up there in the watching posts experiencing the future, without forgetting the past ... To reconstruct a concept so effectively used by Alvin Toffler, South African artists are the “shock wave riders” of our society ... The best shock wave riders among our contemporary artists are those who are moving fast-forward – engaged in the aesthetic, cultural and social challenges of their time – but they also know where they have emerged from and are able to go back (to rewind) to find perspective, and to manage to maintain a precarious balance ...

If we can find a significant, possibly even healing synthesis, between old and new, traditional and modern, spiritual and material, utensil and art object, then the new millennium may seem more exciting and less daunting. Then there is also the hope that more creative – less mechanistic and less deterministic – more humane answers could be found to the terrible destructiveness of poverty and violence.”

A sting of relevance and urgency

Despite almost 30 years in Holland, South African born Bozzie Rabie has kept herself in touch with what is going on in the art scene of her native country. This enabled her to accept an invitation from the Van

South African contemporary art was recently exhibited at the Van Reekum Museum in The Netherlands. Gallery provides extracts from the opening address by Carl Niehaus, South African ambassador to The Netherlands, followed by a review of the work by Dutch art critic, Karel Levisson

Reekum Museum in Apeldoorn, in the eastern part of Holland, to curate an exhibition of present day art in South Africa. She chose eleven artists – black and white, male and female, (relatively) young and old – all of whom but one were in Holland to attend the opening of the exhibition. Unfortunately William Kentridge, one of the best known of them, was unable to come but his 8-minute video entitled *Ubu Tells the Truth* made an important contribution to this multifaceted exhibition.

The title of the show << Rewind >> Fast Forward . ZA, indicates the fast moving changes in that part of the world and a desire to look both forward and backward. Rabie characterises it as at once an exhibition and a news flash.

Varied though the work of the participating artists may be, they have one aspect in common: an authentically emotional content in their response to a far from settled situation combined with a very individual artistic language to express themselves. It is in this combination that the true impact of this show lies.

As Okwui Enwezor puts it in his essay in the informative catalogue: “*Nothing about culture and its relationship to the past and future of South Africa is abstract.*” Even where non-figurative forms are predominant, as in the festive decorative paintings of Esther Mahlangu, and even where there are no specific social or



political intentions, one feels the strong links with the joys and pains and the aspirations of the community. In this sense, this art could not have been made anywhere else. It has a sting of relevance and urgency that is generally absent in Western postmodern art. However, the doors and windows of South Africa are now more widely open to the rest of the world and, at the same time, the need for protest against inequality and repression at home is diminishing. As a consequence South African artists have come to show an increasing interest in intrinsically artistic values and in global developments. So in many ways one can speak of a period of transition.

The large paintings of Esther Mahlangu, with their bright colours and their straight black lines, are deeply rooted in Ndebele tradition. It was always the women who built the houses out of wood and clay, plastered the walls and painted them, originally with cow dung. Later the vivid colours of different kinds of soil were added and it was only her generation that turned to industrialised paint, again brightening the colour scheme. Ndebele painting does not depict the real world but heralds special occasions. Mahlangu was the first in her culture to transfer mural art to canvas so that her pieces can be seen all over the world. There could be a danger in

divorcing traditional art from its original function but it might just as well lead to interesting new developments. As a child Esther Mahlangu (b. 1936) was taught to paint by her grandmother and mother. For her it retains all its original meaning and all the joy of making it which contribute largely to keeping her art so radiant and convincing.

Equally clearly there are links between Noria Mabasa's present work and the culture she stems from, in her case that of the Venda community. Her wooden sculptures refer back to the ritual objects that play such an important role in many African cultures. But she transforms the common tradition into personal expression. She started working in clay and here again, her jars and vases excepted, she finds her own way, consisting of an intriguing form of realism that raises her objects above the reality that meets the eye. This relates to her explanation of the images of the pieces she is about to create: they come to her in dreams. The centerpiece in her part of the exhibition in Apeldoorn is a wooden sculpture, *Angry Woman*, a bowed figure that carries a child on her back. She seems beaten by life but not defeated. It is the delicate rendering of the head that lingers longest in one's memory.

Zwelethu Mthethwa brought ten large

photographs of women with children to the show. They are portrayed in their own colourful but poor dwellings, the walls plastered with discarded folders, posters and other printed matter. Mthethwa does not show his subjects at work or at play, but makes them look straight into the camera, the children shy or curious. In this frontal positioning he catches the silent pride and unobtrusive self consciousness of these women. His sensitive eye for colour and composition gives his photos a special beauty.

(Top left)
Dominic Tshabangu, A Long Way From Home, 1999, 105 x 155cm, collage on paper

(Top right)
Zwelethu Mthethwa, Mother and Child, 1998, 80 x 100cm, photograph

(Bottom right)
Esther Mahlangu, Untitled, 1999, 130 x 190cm, acrylic on canvas



ESTHER Mahlan 94 10-01-1999

Sue Williamson presents an installation called *Messages From the Moat*. From the ceiling hangs a huge net full of dirty bottles. Water drips into a pool underneath also filled with bottles in troubled water. Williamson points to the roots of the South African context by addressing her protest to the seventeenth-century Dutch slave traders. In the Deeds Office of Cape Town, records of some 1400 commercial transactions about buying and selling of slaves are kept. The artist collected an equal amount of bottles for her installation, each one engraved with the full administrative details of one slave. Most of them also contain scraps of imaginary paintings of the period, representing treasures now in Dutch museums and paid for through immense human misery. Once the idea behind her installation is grasped, it achieves its full emotional and visual strength.

Several contributors to the catalogue point out that a great deal of the protest art made in South Africa before 1992 was so involved in its message that it became less daring and less experimental from an artistic point of view. Sam Nhlengethwa made two large painted collages for Apeldoorn, with images of dramatic events that relate to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. His work is very much influenced by the ever-moving flashes of news items on TV. This journalistic approach has its disadvantages when applied to a non-moving sheet of paper. It does not give much to hold the eye of the onlooker. But, on the other hand, it strengthens the intended impression of senseless drama.

Kevin Brand takes more daring steps in developing new ways to express himself. He filled a great part of one wall with mosaics built up out of black, grey and white squares of sontoape. They look like enlarged newspaper photographs. Placed before them, one continually changes focus from the meaningful total image to the purely visual play of the small squares or pixels. By doing so the viewer is forced to look with closer attention. Brand's own comment on this development in technique is: *"The biggest change has been the quieter more contemplating attitude in my recent work. Rather than illustrating an event or message, the works themselves become the focus and have a dialogue with the viewer."*

Daily life in the impoverished communities of South Africa are the focus of Nkosana Dominic Tshabangu's animated collages, composed mainly of photo cuttings from popular magazines. Titles such as *No Place Like Home* and *A Long Way From Home* reflect the atmosphere of his work. He is, however, too good an artist to fall



Photograph Claus Lojferen



Sue Williamson, Messages From the Moat, 1997, installation and detail

into the pit of becoming 'folksy'. His handling of the photographic material produces a painterly effect, increasing the visual tension of the total image.

Willie Bester's subjects also deal with daily life in the townships as well as important events that concern him. However the differences in his approach and that of Dominic Tshabangu could hardly be greater and it is of course those kinds of differences that form one of the attractions of the exhibition. Tshabangu's pictures radiate an uncomplicated and very readable empathy and warmth, while Bester's assemblages of found objects are aggressive and need close reading. He mirrors and reflects on society as he knows it, without passing judgement. For the European visitor, an air of the concentration camps and Auschwitz hangs around his sculpture entitled *The Laboratory*, made for the exhibition and which relates to the chemical warfare during the apartheid years in South Africa. His works have a sinister kind of beauty.

Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa avails herself of a varied array of visual techniques in her installation entitled << *Flashes* >> including photography, slide projection

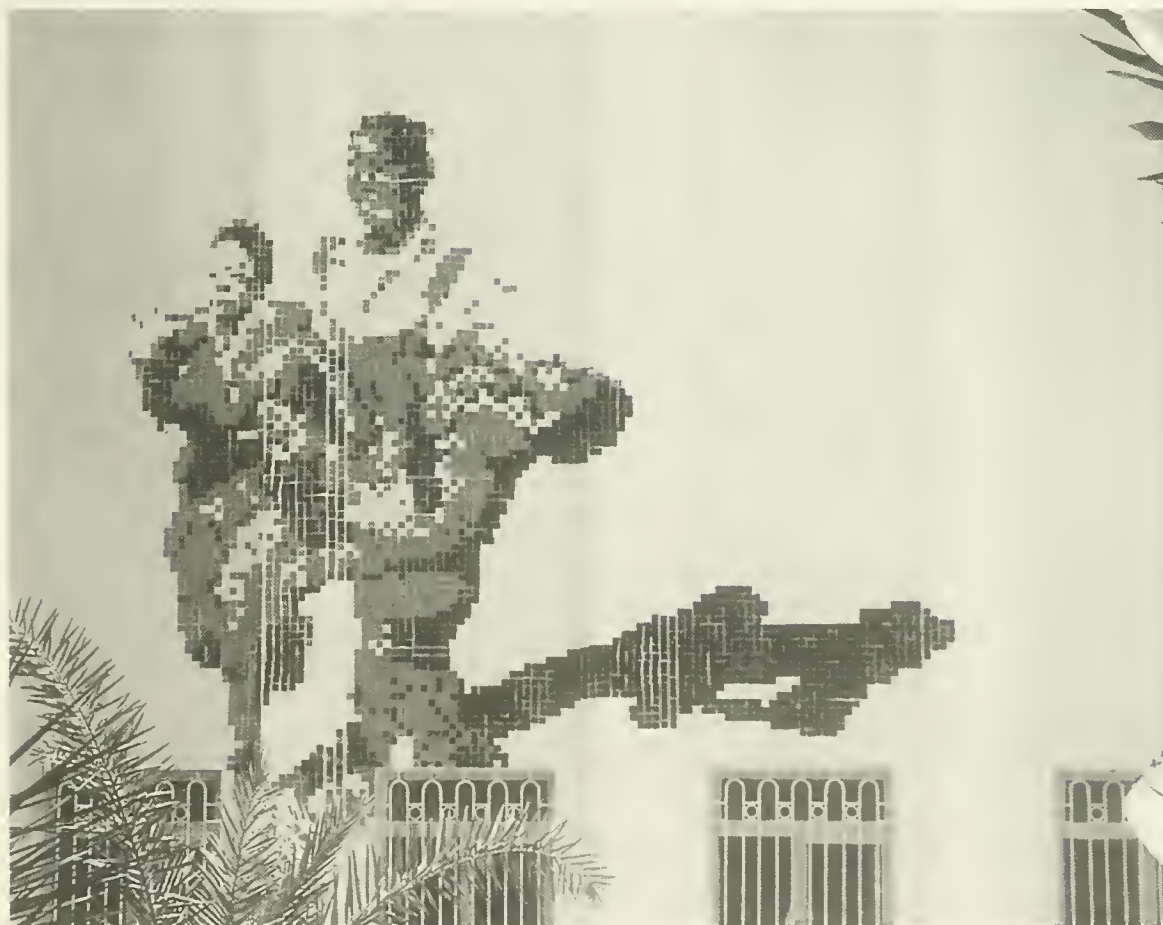
and linocut. She juxtaposes two aerial views, one of a rich residential quarter and one of a poor dwelling area. One item in her questionnaire for visitors is: How many houses do you think can be built on the space needed for one swimming pool? A series of well executed linocuts from the early 80s have a likeness with the critical prints on social issues made in Western Europe between the two world wars.

Seventy-nine year old, English born Robert Hodgins is by far the senior of the participating artists. He seems to be the only one amongst them whose main interest lies in the act of painting; the long effort to master the painting materials, the marvel of a painting taking shape while working and the unpremeditated conjunction of colour and space on the canvas. His main subject matter, for he needs a link with reality, lies in the interaction between human beings. He has a delightful way of simplifying the human figure but most fascinating of all is his bold use of contrasting and mutually strengthening colours.

The South African ambassador to The Netherlands describes those represented in this exhibition as "... *first and foremost*

good artists whose work, like all good art, is influenced by the society and history they come from." Compared with this, some of the art produced during the period of apartheid has become dated because of a lack of technique and creative ability.

Dutch artist, Marc Brusse, who made several recent visits to South Africa, remarks in a short essay: "*South Africa is still one of the countries that has a chance to maintain its own national identity and escape from international uniformity.*" In this context it is interesting to note the opinion of Okwui Enwezor, born in Nigeria and living in New York, already mentioned before. He was the director of the Johannesburg Biennale of 1997 and has recently been appointed director of the next Documenta of Kassel (Germany) in 2002. In an interview following this latter nomination, he questioned the relevance of cultural identity in a constantly changing world. One can no longer make a clearcut distinction between Western and non-Western culture since information technology opens the road for instant exchange of notions and opinions. So the cultural dialogue Bozzie Rabie asks for in her introduction to the catalogue seems already to be en route. Artists and art from Africa have an essential role in this dialogue.



Kevin Brand, *Pieta*, 1998, 650 x 550cm, sontape

letters

Dear Editor

I read Derek Huggins' article about the Dakar Biennale in *Gallery* no 18 several times and will make some comments, if you don't mind. Some things puzzle me. I like the way he writes, moving words. He writes about the difficulty for African contemporary art: new forms "to excel the old". But why to excel the old? Is 'different' not good enough? Different times, different works. They should be true, there should be integrity. But to excel? Why? That would be impossible for most artists in most countries. To excel Vermeer, Velasquez, the Dutch seventeenth-century masters? In Holland there are painters who come close but it is in the craftsmanship, not in something else. No, art from the 'old' is a point of reference, I think. Only one of the beacons on a dangerous shoreline.

The other half of the author's same sentence is about convincing a biased international market. I think that is a completely different subject and should not be mixed with the art that is produced in Africa. Does 'meaning' lie in acceptance? I don't know, but I have my doubts. There is a danger that non-acceptance serves as a scapegoat for the (perceived?) lack of good contemporary African art.

Also, while writing about Diba, the author makes a distinction between the "decorative" and the "powerful and expressive". Why? Diba's works remind me of old African art as well as the works of Rothko (and in that way he derived from both). I like the article but I feel a bit uneasy with the importance the author lays on 'meaning'.

What is the 'meaning' of a landscape? Van Gogh got 'meaning' in retrospect – in the history of painting. But the landscapes – his expression – would be the same, whether recognised or not.

These matters are confusing. It is easier for me to react than to state something. I know what I like and what I dislike. But I also want to be liked so I don't say always everything – trying to be careful with the feelings and sensitivities of others. But still, I think it is easier to point a finger at the past and to become somebody because of that past: a victim. A victim of history, of Hitler, of slave traders, of the emperor and the rapist, of the teachers, the paedophiles, the parents and what have you not? All this pain gives you identity. But is it fruitful? And does it produce an open mind for the present? And does it lead to acceptance of your responsibility for the present?

To blame the outsider is easy. It gives a one-dimensional art, which can be powerful but is often populist and does not do justice to the complexities of history, people and situations. If you try to paint these 'meanings' more often than not you paint slogans. Once you take responsibility for your own life, with all that is inherited then you are more open to paint the present as it is, in all its varieties. Likewise countries have to come to terms with the past and be done with it, in order to deal with the present in an unbiased way.

I think, but of course don't know. But still, painting is different – it is not pop culture like music, film or literature can be. Compare it with poetry: you have a relatively small public which understands that much is untold.

Some sentences of Marlene Dumas (a painter living in Holland, born in South Africa) come to mind:

"Why should artists be validated by outside authorities? I do not like being paternalised and colonised by every Tom, Dick and Harry



Bert Hemsteede, A Concise Biography and a Sailor's Tale (detail), 1995, 18.5 x 13.5 cm, woodcut

that comes along (male or female). "

"Meaning and mis-understanding are not that useful as terms to describe visual issues."

Returning to the article on the Dakar Biennale, much can be said about the 'lack of individuality' which the author talks of. It is not typical only for Africa. In Nepal, where I painted for several years, it was also a strong tendency, not to talk about the West where it is very easy to lose your individuality in the abundance of images.

There is still something else on my mind about the Dakar article ... African artists react to their old art. But so did the Europeans in the beginning of this century. They reacted in different ways. Not just copying but also going further from it.

Picasso etc took the form, the plasticity, the closedness of the African statue, and its 'otherness' also. The expressionists used it as their resistance to their society. Disgusted with the war which tore Europe apart, they used these images (Nolde painted them with the same importance as his models on the same painting) as a 'protest'. For surrealists, dadaists, the meaning of this 'primitive' art lay in its subconscious qualities.

There are very few works (out of the enormous amount being made) that excel the artifacts of the tribal societies, from which these European artists took their inspiration. And I see no reason why it will be different for the present-day African artists.

What the author writes about the doors, and how Diba paints them, is telling – it is the doors as seen by outsiders. If you stay outside the house, the door is closed; stay inside the house, the door is open. I think it should be done from the position of the black insider. Yes, I think Marechera was important and courageous and, like Tapfuma, an example for the attitude of artists towards art in Africa and the rest of the world.

So, I'm happy to receive the *Gallery* magazine. It is really beautiful and of importance. People who come to my house and whom I show the magazine are interested because so little comes to us from Zimbabwe which is not 'airport art' or of high international standard. Still, the stone sculpture is a story in itself. Mediocre work is sold well. The actual stone sculpture is more or less the focus point of what is already in the heads of the buyers – their opinions. So *Gallery* magazine is a good antidote.

Bert Hemsteede, Roden, The Netherlands

Dear Editor

In response to Annette Eastwood's letter (*Gallery* no 19) may I attempt to distinguish further between recycling and the transformative use of sculptural source material? ('A Changed World' *Gallery* no 18). When I expressed the hope that artists might be stimulated to expand the nature of their sculptural practice I was not referring to anything as dispiriting as recycling but rather to the kind of imaginative creativity that is the defining prerogative of the artist.

Annette Eastwood implies that Zimbabwean artists will be perfectly OK as long as they continue to reuse household waste and we all continue to be upbeat about the conditions that oblige them to do so. However, artists – particularly in the twentieth century – have all too often had to demonstrate their resistance to restriction and manipulation; they are the most sensitive barometers of any society and this is certainly true of Zimbabwean artists.

As she supposes, I did not see the two exhibitions to which she referred but I have seen bags made of bottle tops, boxes made of lollipop sticks, musical instruments made of tin cans and scraps of wood, innumerable wire toys and so on. They all show resilience, courage, ingenuity and wit. Principally, though, they show poverty; they demonstrate that their makers are excluded by poverty from using the tools, materials and techniques normally considered the stock in trade of artists. I do not believe that any benefit will result from valorising an art of poverty, nor do I see any plausibility in claims to a moral high ground for the reuse of the lollipop stick over, for instance Duchamp's bicycle wheel. To claim that Duchamp (who transformed) was frivolous while those Zimbabweans who recycle are sustaining some rhetoric of purity is to repeat a chesnut so elderly and out of date that I can hardly believe anyone still thinks it worth kicking around.

Margaret Garlake

forthcoming exhibitions and events

The Batapata International Artists' Workshop 1999 is happening at the Mutare Diocesan Training Centre in Chikanga from 27 September to 9 October. The 24 participants include 13 Zimbabwean artists and 11 international artists from India, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Poland, South Africa, Kenya, Zambia, Botswana, Uganda and Britain. Various outreach activities are planned including regional painting, textiles and ceramics workshops. There will be an International Art Forum at NGZ (Harare) on 17 October. The works made during the workshop will be exhibited at NGZ (Mutare) from 15 October, at NGZ (Bulawayo) from 19 November and at NGZ (Harare) in January 2000. For more information contact Gemma Rodrigues (Tel: Harare 335541 or 303903) or Odiola Vurinosara (Tel: Harare 227634).

Following the Batapata International Artists Workshop exhibition from mid-October, the National Gallery in Mutare will host the newly formed Mutare Group which will present their work from mid-November and in December the Cotton Company of Zimbabwe's FACT: Fine Art, Craft and Textile exhibition will be on show.

Thatha Camera runs at the National Gallery in Bulawayo from 29 October to February 2000. Also in October will be a photo exhibition courtesy of the Embassy of Israel entitled Holy Sites in Israel. In November, paintings, graphics and textiles by **Annika Westland** and **Britta Kleberg** from Sweden will be on show. December will see the opening of Workshop Ten with recent work by Bulawayo's ten prominent artists and also in December is the 13th Annual VAAB Exhibition.

The Bonzai Society of Zimbabwe will be having an exhibition at the National Gallery in Harare opening 27 October. The World Press Photo Exhibition will be on show in early November, followed by a display of work by the staff of the Harare and Bulawayo National Galleries. Most

notably, **Arthur Azevedo**, Zimbabwe's master metal sculptor – an important innovator, teacher, influence and mentor in the local art scene – will hold a retrospective (1958 - 99) exhibition of his work at the National Gallery running from 17 November until January.

Hilary Kashiri is having a solo show of paintings at Gallery Delta from 19 October to 6 November. This will be followed by installation work by **Berry Bickle** exhibited from 9 to 27 November. December sees the annual Summer Exhibition and on 31 December 1999 Gallery Delta presents a Millennium Exhibition with work by Zimbabwe's prominent artists. Also part of this Millennium Exhibition may be a showing of the first art-videos created in Zimbabwe by **Chaz Maviyane-Davies**, **Berry Bickle** and **Luis Basto** as well as art-videos from The Netherlands, Indonesia, Costa Rica, the UK and South Africa.

Olivier Sultan will launch his second edition of *Life in Stone* at Pierre Gallery during October. The redesigned book now includes discussion and reproductions of 20 additional stone sculptors who have developed since publication of the first edition. During November **Christiane Stolhofer** will have a solo exhibition of wood sculptures. Pierre Gallery are extending their operations to 4th Street (cnr Nelson Mandela Ave) in the CBD with a gallery in Beverley Court which will among other things sell art books and art postcards.

Mutupo Gallery will be opening a show of clay sculptures by **Eino Nangaku** in October as well as an exhibition of prints by Argentinian artist, **Facundo de la Rosa**

During November, Sandro's Gallery will display paintings by **John Kotze** and **Myrna Benatar**, and in December, **Fidel Regueros** will exhibit works from the date of his arrival in Zimbabwe, 1990, to the present which will include graphics and paintings.

The Zimbabwe Association of Art Critics meets every last Monday of the month at the Bookcafé to discuss various issues, exhibitions and events. Come and join us. For more information contact Barbara Murray (Tel: Harare 861195 or email: bmurray@mango.zw).

The Graphics Association of Zimbabwe (GRAZI) is holding the Annual Design Awards on 30 November. For more information on how to enter or tickets for the event contact Jane Shepherd. (Tel/Fax: Harare 570179, e-mail janeshep@icon.co.zw)

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