

Bridges to the Present: Zimbabwean Painting at the Crossroads

by Hayden Proud

Politics has so infiltrated our lives that the personal, social and cultural are all political, and as always with Zimbabwe, it is impossible to talk of one without referencing the other. What we hope to do is encourage people to think beyond the minutiae detail [sic] of political immediacies, and to debate who we are as a people in this maelstrom, how do we define ourselves, where do we want to be going, how can we get there, and is there space for this richness of identity to be defined and celebrated in Zimbabwe today?

– Sokwanele, 17 September 2010¹

¹Anonymous, 'Art, Censorship and the Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe', Sokwanele, Art South Africa Initiative, 17 September 2013, <http://asai.co.za/art-censorship-and-the-gukurahundi-in-zimbabwe/> (accessed: 16 August 2018).

The title of this exhibition, *Five Bhobh: Painting at the End of an Era*, makes use of the Zimbabwean colloquial expression 'five bob', which is the standard fare for an urban minibus journey in either Harare or Bulawayo.² 'End of an Era' signifies a moment of historical closure, both politically and culturally. By implication it is also one of anticipated renewal. As Sokwanele reminds us, 'it is impossible to talk of one [the cultural] without referencing the other [the political]'. The curators behind *Five Bhobh* have taken up the metaphor of a journey to underpin their concept for this exhibition of contemporary Zimbabwean painting. 'For some', they state, '[this] journey may not be a comfortable one ... it may require coming back, picking up where one left off, or an unravelling of forgotten layers of the past'.³ In the preamble above, the Zimbabwean underground movement Sokwanele⁴ evokes similar notions of 'a journey' in relation to Zimbabwe's visual cultures. They ask: 'how do we define ourselves, where do we want to be going, how can we get there, and is there space for this richness of identity to be defined and celebrated in Zimbabwe today?'⁵ This last question is perhaps the most pressing and difficult to answer.

This essay confronts a few of the discomforts of the 'forgotten layers of the past' in relation to Zimbabwean painting, and attempts, at the same time, to draw parallels between history, politics, and some of the paintings seen on this exhibition. It dwells on examples of resistance to oppression and the struggle for a real democratic culture in both the colonial and post-independence eras, using precedents set by a few painters who are not necessarily represented in *Five Bhobh* itself. There is reference, for example, to the work of Marshall Baron (1934–1977), as well as the challenges to authoritarian thinking posed by the actions of Owen Maseko (b. 1974). Baron and Maseko are from Zimbabwe's 'second city' of Bulawayo, a traditional site of resistance to the dominant political culture of Harare.⁶ They are accorded space here because

they raise pertinent ethical and moral issues in their work. Similarly, the contemporary Zimbabwean artists represented in *Five Bhobh* respond in their own ways—each from a position of safety or risk—to the crises that afflict their homeland. These crises are well known to the world. They range from economic mismanagement and corruption to an authoritarian abuse of human rights and freedoms, sometimes on a colossal scale.⁷

Five Bhobh is an exhibition of singular diversity. It showcases some of the unexpectedly novel approaches taken by twenty-nine contemporary Zimbabwean painters to an ostensibly 'traditional' medium. From technically superb hyperrealist renderings of the glare of African light on everyday subjects, like John Kotzé's *Marata - Iron Curtain* (p. 182), to the expressionist and quasi-symbolist evocations of the realm of the ancestral spirits in Portia Zvavahera's *Ndakukurwa (Something Is Taking Me)* (p. 230), the selection has been highly inclusive. Charles Bhebe's vision of an endless queue to nowhere in *A Nightmare* (2014) speaks of shortages and the despair of an economy in free-fall (p. 180), demonstrating that forms of social realism are readily being taken up in response

²'Bob' (or 'Bhobh' in present-day Zimbabwe) is not related in any way to the first name of former President Robert ('Bob') Mugabe. It was a slang term for a British shilling that dates back to the 18th century and was commonly used in colonial Rhodesia. With the collapse of the Zimbabwe dollar and the adoption of the US dollar, 'five bhobh' is equivalent to 50 US cents, a 'half-dollar' or two 'quarters'.

³Curatorial statement issued by Zeitz MOCAA, July 2018.

⁴Sokwanele (Ndebele: Enough is enough; also known in Shona as *Zvakwana*) is a pro-democratic underground movement in Zimbabwe. It is committed to non-violent activism. In the face of tight state control of the media, Sokwanele uses online postings and newsletters that impartially assess and report on state policy, corruption, and violations of human rights.

⁵Similar existential questions were also articulated when Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) titled his most significant late painting, *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (1897–1898).

⁶Bulawayo, 'The City of Kings' is (or rather was) the industrial and railway hub of Zimbabwe and is the traditional Ndebele capital of Matabeleland. It is a stronghold of Ndebele resistance to the Shona dominance in Zimbabwean politics, but has experienced a major decline since independence in 1980 because of disinvestment and the bias of ZANU-PF's development schemes in favour of Harare-Mashonaland.

⁷R. E. Howard-Hassmann, 'Mugabe's Zimbabwe, 2000–2009: Massive Human Rights Violations and the Failure to Protect', *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 4, November 2010, p. 899.

to Zimbabwe's post-2000 socio-economic woes. Berry Bickle's series *The Victorian* (2018) uses multimedia approaches in a layering of texts and images from the colonial past, generating palimpsests of memory over Thomas Baines' 19th century topographical views of Victoria Falls (p. 114).

At this tipping-point in Zimbabwe's thirty-eight year post-colonial history, the implicit optimism in *Five Bhozh's* 'end of an era' has to be tempered with realism. There are many vagaries and risks attendant on hopes for the dawn of a new era. The first 'harmonised' elections of the post-Mugabe era have recently taken place amid blatant violations of the Constitution and accusations of rigging.⁸ Emmerson Mnangagwa's hold on the Presidency stands at a slim 50.6%⁹, while a challenge to the election outcome from Nelson Chamisa of the MDC Alliance is now before the Constitutional Court of Zimbabwe. The wild euphoria that greeted the military's *Operation Restore Legacy*¹⁰ in November 2017 has already been replaced by violence and pessimism. This indicates that any chance of a shift away from ZANU-PF authoritarianism in Zimbabwe seems unlikely.

Despite this bleak outlook, *Five Bhozh* will still stand as a strong indicator that Zimbabwe's painters are claiming for themselves the psychological freedoms and imaginative space that their medium affords them. They may, in theory at least, assert the freedom of expression as guaranteed in Zimbabwe's new Constitution.¹¹ However, many are distrustful of the future, opting to do so from the survivalist point of exile. Busy redefining painting's parameters wherever they settle, these artists are bravely articulating critical and personal narratives in their work. In this they are similar to Zimbabwe's finest writers, who remain responsive to the crises and often suppressed narratives in a place that they still call 'home'.¹²

The reception of a variety of new ideas and the outward-looking approach evident in this exhibition gains perspective when compared to the character of what has preceded it. In Zimbabwe's colonial era, between the hoisting of the Union Jack by the invading Pioneer Column in Fort Salisbury in 1890, and final independence at Rufaro Stadium in 1980, settler parochialism and a militant 'low-browism' were, apart from some remarkable individuals and self-contained pockets of creative endeavour, the essential features of a dominant minority culture.¹³ The country's indigenous visual traditions were often patronisingly dismissed as being 'under-developed' and even 'uncivilised' by

⁸ Zimbabwe's first post-'coup-that-was-not-a-coup' elections were held on 30 July 2018 and the result in favour of ZANU-PF has, as of 10 August 2018, been challenged in the Constitutional Court by the MDC Alliance. The latter has alleged a repeat of the vote-rigging and fraud that characterised the elections of 2008 and 2013. The pre-result protests in Harare, which saw six people shot with live ammunition by the ZNA, and the harassment of members of the opposition do not bode well. See I. Mandaza and T. Reeler, 'July 30 election: Not free, fair or credible', *Zimbabwe Independent in Analysis, Comment, Opinion*, 20 July 2018, <https://www.theindependent.co.zw/2018/07/20/july-30-election-not-free-fair-or-credible/> (accessed 20 August 2018).

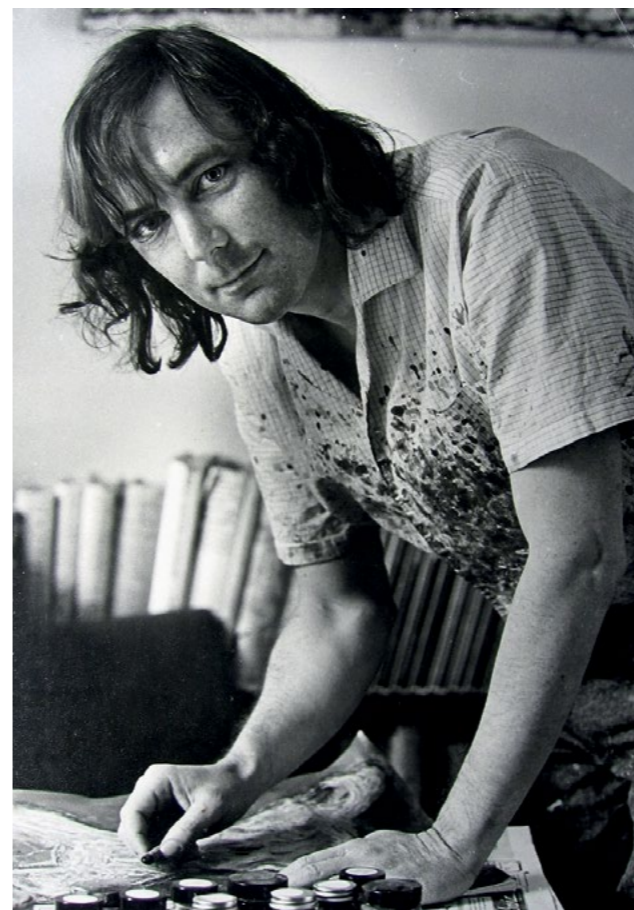
⁹ Voice of Zimbabwe, 'Zimbabwe Electoral Commission Reduces Mnangagwa Final Election Win by Over 4,000 Votes', *Voice of Zimbabwe*, 19 August 2018, <https://www.voazimbabwe.com/a/emmerson-mnangagwa-final-election-win-nelson-chamisa/4534461.html>, (accessed 20 August 2018).

¹⁰ *Operation Restore Legacy* was a strategic move launched by the Zimbabwe military on 13 November 2017 that saw the enforced resignation of President Robert Mugabe who had been in power for thirty-seven years since independence in 1980. The military claimed the move was not a coup d'état but an attempt to remove certain 'criminal elements' that had undue influence on Mugabe.

¹¹ Section 61 of the new Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe (2013) states as follows in relation to freedom of expression and freedom of the media: '(1) Every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes: (a) freedom to seek, receive and communicate ideas and other information; (b) freedom of artistic expression and scientific research and creativity; and (c) academic freedom.'

¹² They include Nobel Laureate Doris Lessing (1919-2013), who died in London; Chenjerai Hove (1954-2015), who died in Norway; Mbizo Chirasha (b. 1978), who is a roving exile; Petina Gappah (b. 1971), who lives in Berlin; Yvonne Vera (1964-2005), the former Director of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo who died in Toronto; NoViolet Bulawayo (pen name of Elizabeth Zandile Tshela: b. 1981); Alexandra Fuller (b. 1969), who lives in the US; John Eppel (b. 1947), who lives in Bulawayo; and Peter Godwin (b. 1957), who lives in New York.

¹³ As late as 1965, just before UDI, Frank McEwen (1907-1994), the first Director of the National Gallery of Rhodesia, vented his frustrations when he made the surprising statement in the *Commonwealth Arts Festival Catalogue* that Rhodesia was a country 'where there was no art neither traditional nor contemporary'. See M. Mackay, 'Africa and the Commonwealth Festival', *African Affairs*, vol. 65, no. 258, January 1966, p. 29.



Portrait: Marshall Baron. Image courtesy of Merle Baron Guttmann and the Marshall Baron website (www.marshallbaron.com).

the settlers' supposedly 'superior' western standards.¹⁴ In 1965 Rhodesia's UDI pushed the white minority of less than 230 000 into deeper isolation, increasing militarisation and, ultimately, a futile war fuelled by the rhetoric of the Cold War. In cultural terms, Rhodesia's settler rebellion against Britain and economic sanctions only reinforced a pre-existent, stubborn 'frontier' mentality while fostering a resourcefulness and make-do ingenuity. The resilience of Zimbabwe's people remains ingrained in the national character, and particularly in her artists.

To Rhodesia's laagered settlers, who had so determinedly barricaded themselves against world opinion, modernism and avant-garde thinking—so valued in sophisticated, urbanised cultures elsewhere—were regarded as either irrelevant or suspicious.¹⁵ They were seen as trivial, or worse, a symptom of the abandonment of moral values and of the 'decadence' of 'the West'.¹⁶ It is against this stultifying scenario that the Bulawayo painter, lawyer, music critic, and liberal humanist Marshall Baron, who passed away suddenly at the age of forty-two, stands as a lone and isolated symbol of determined non-conformity and freedom. Baron epitomised almost everything that the typical white heterosexual Rhodesian male of the 1960s and 70s resented. He was of leftist political views; he sported long hair (associated with draft-dodgers at a time of regular military call-ups); he drove a Citroën (seen

¹⁴ This attitude extended, in particular, to the Rhodesian government's blatant interference in publications and public information on the 'ruins' of Great Zimbabwe. There was active propagation of the myth that the structures could never have been built by indigenous African people, but by the Phoenicians or some other ancient people external to the region. For examples of this propaganda, see J. Frederikse, *None but Ourselves...*, Penguin Books, London, 1984, pp. 10 - 11.

¹⁵ As Kaarsholm has argued, white Rhodesia's minority aspiration toward an independent national and cultural identity through the arts was a self-defeating delusion:

... as a colonial form of modernisation, this cultural development towards autonomy was incomplete and flawed: all of these initiatives were at the same time part of white racist self-confirmation and contributed more towards tightening the fortifications surrounding the ruling camp than towards promoting a new universalist discourse. At the same time, there was no properly modernist drive in the genres that were being attempted: almost all of Rhodesian fine arts and 'culture' represented a bland rehash of respectable, old-European bourgeois forms.

See P. Kaarsholm, 'Quiet after the Storm: Continuity and Change in the Cultural and Political Development of Zimbabwe', in *African Languages and Cultures* 2, 1989, pp. 175 - 202.

¹⁶ Rhodesia's self-assumed role in making a stand for the defence of [Western] 'civilisation' was summed up in one of the points of the UDI proclamation signed by Ian Smith and his Cabinet, which ironically states: 'That the people of Rhodesia have witnessed a process which is destructive of the very precepts upon which civilisation in a primitive country has been built; they have seen the principles of Western democracy, responsible government and moral standards crumble elsewhere; nevertheless they have remained steadfast...'



Marshall Baron, *Untitled*, 1977. Oil on canvas, 177 x 366 cm. Image courtesy of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare.

as an impractical affectation in a country under sanctions); and he kept French poodles.¹⁷ His body of large, gestural abstract paintings, of which *Untitled* (1977) is but one example, constitutes a defiant gesture of personal liberation in the context of a deluded, inward-looking society that was bent on self-immolation. As Zvikomborero Mandangu has observed:

Baron placed art in a context, which ensured that the content of his work was personal and unrestrained to the extent that most of it was highly critical of the Rhodesian Front government of the day ... [his] scarred and deeply solitary way of addressing the flaws of a society that was suffering the evils of war and economic sanctions exposed the government's flaws from the wilderness, to the fury of a broken system ...

In the 1970s, Baron defined art as a vehicle for freedom ...¹⁸

Abstraction, largely misunderstood and even viewed with contempt during the isolationist Rhodesian era¹⁹, has blossomed in Zimbabwean painting since the country rejoined the world of international discourse. Painters have since participated in a succession of international workshops and residencies. An important

¹⁷ Born in Bulawayo of Jewish parents, Baron was a graduate in law from UCT, and was a practicing attorney at Ben Baron and Partners. Through his father (Ben Baron) he was related to the illustrious American Social Realist painter Ben Shahn (1898-1969). He had at one time studied at the Skowhegan School of Fine Arts in Maine, USA, where he had been exposed to the scale and approach of the American Abstract Expressionists. Baron stood as a candidate for the liberal-leftist Centre Party against the Rhodesian Front in the all-white elections of 1974.

¹⁸ Z. Mandangu, 'Bridging the Contemporary' in Ignatius Mabasa (ed.), *Mawonero/Umbono: Insights on Art in Zimbabwe*, Kerber Verlag, Berlin, 2015, p. 63.

¹⁹ I recall watching an interview between Baron and the conservative television personality James Thrush on RTV in Bulawayo in 1976. Thrush's line of questioning was unsympathetic and aimed at humiliating Baron, whose opposition to the Smith government via his practice as a defence lawyer on behalf of people of colour was well known. Baron's arguments in justification of his abstract paintings were met with a degree of ridicule.

contribution to this renewed energy were the intensive *Pachipamwe Workshops*²⁰, initiated by the artist Pat Pearce (1912-2006), and supported by the founders of the Triangle International Workshops, Anthony Caro (1924-2013) and Robert Loder (1934-2017)²¹. The first was held in Murewa in 1988 (*Pachipamwe I*), with a sequel at Cyrene Mission, south of Bulawayo, in 1989 (*Pachipamwe II*).²² The latter involved David Koloane (b. 1938) and Bill Ainslie (1934-1989), two significant South African practitioners then working in a highly energetic abstract idiom that employed action painting, staining, and squeegee techniques in acrylic.²³ One of the participants at *Pachipamwe II* was another Bulawayo painter Rashid Jogee (b. 1951), whose meditative articulation of fields of colour in mixed media, combined with collaged elements, is seen in his two paintings *Masimba Kuvanhu* (p. 218) and *Dudziro Series 2* (p. 220) Jogee 'sees art as work' in the Buddhist sense, as he says, of 'work[ing] diligently for your salvation'.²⁴ He was inspired by the poetic and transcendental qualities of Baron's generous deployment of colour combined with collage on his huge canvases, which he had seen in his younger days in Bulawayo, where he was also mentored by Baron's protégé, Stephen Williams (1949-1996).²⁵ The latter also showed an initial commitment to abstraction, generating expansive fields of mood-infused colour on a large scale that were evocative of the work of the American Abstract Expressionist Mark Rothko (1903-1970).

The complex universal language of international abstraction can reflect, as Jogee's philosophy of painting suggests, a psychic quest for 'salvation' and spiritual redemption in response to chaos and the unease of the physical world. To some extent the more figurative approach of Portia Zvavahera's work also points in this direction (p. 225). Helen Teede's painterly and more associative approach to image-making, with its

allusions to the deep, aqueous, psychological space of the automatist school of Surrealism, takes on an autobiographical dimension.²⁶ It reflects her anxieties as a white Zimbabwean whose identity and sense of belonging in a place she called 'home' is, thanks to the land invasions, no longer as stable as she imagined. This is seen in both *Between Two Fires* (p. 203) and *Uprooting* (p. 207). The sinuous, linear, floating forms in the latter suggest and 'express the pain of a tree being pulled out from the ground',²⁷ a clear metaphor for Teede's own liminal position; there is the likelihood of a sudden or sinister outcome. In contrast to Teede's automatist approach are two paintings by the veteran Indian-born artist Thakor Patel (b. 1932) that approximate a more

²⁰ *Pachipamwe* [Shona] means 'where we are all together'. The founder, Pat Pearce, was an artist who gave most of her long life to promoting artists and encouraging local crafts in the Inyanga (Nyanga) district of Zimbabwe where she had settled in 1945. She also spotted the potential of the stone carvers in the area, and had a major but uncredited role in Frank McEwen's establishment of the fame of 'Shona sculpture' at the National Gallery of Rhodesia's Workshop School in Salisbury in the 1960s. An ardent opponent of the Smith government in the 1970s, she developed a similar contempt for Mugabe after the destruction of homes in Nyanga by ZANU-PF thugs after the party's losses in the election of 2000. She died aged 94 in England in 2006.

²¹ The Triangle Network (also called the Triangle Arts Trust) is a registered charitable organisation in Britain. It has supported and fostered collaborations involving artists from grassroots organisations in different countries around the world since 1982. It also supported the *Thupelo Workshops* first initiated by David Koloane and Bill Ainslie in Johannesburg in 1985.

²² A subsequent workshop held in Bulawayo in 1992 was attended by the now-famous British-born painter of Nigerian descent, Chris Ofili (b. 1968), who was able to interact with local Zimbabwean painters and who first generated his controversial idea of using elephant dung in his paintings at this time. The workshops continued until 1994.

²³ Ainslie was tragically killed in a motor vehicle accident while returning to Johannesburg from *Pachipamwe II*.

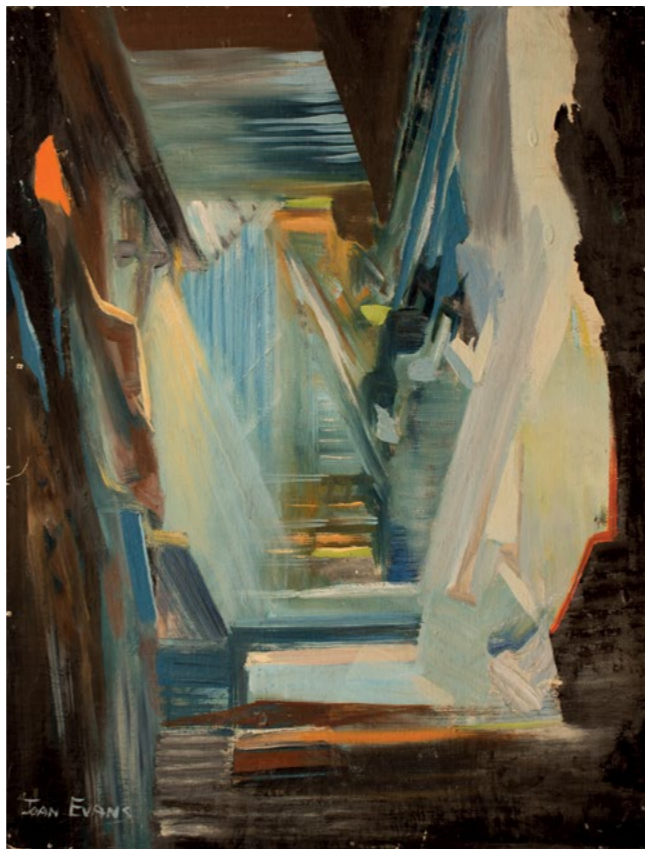
²⁴ I. Mabasa, (ed.), *Dudziro: Interrogating the Visions of Religious Beliefs, La Biennale di Venezia / 55th International Art Exhibition, Edizioni Charta, Milan, 2013*, p. 50.

²⁵ Williams knew Baron well and exhibited with him at Naakes Gallery in Bulawayo. Although born in Australia, he became a committed Zimbabwean. He majored in painting for his BA Fine Art degree under Kevin Atkinson (1939-2007) at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, UCT. He also held a Sociology degree from the University of Zimbabwe and an MA in Art and Design Education from De Montfort University in Leicester. He was at one time the Curator and Acting Director of the National Museum and Art Gallery in Gaborone, Botswana. Soon after his appointment as Director at the Bulawayo Art Gallery, he was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident.

²⁶ Surrealist automatism is an approach to making art in which the artist attempts to suspend conscious control over the creative process, allowing the unconscious and natural accident to dominate.

formal, hard-edge aesthetic. His *Untitled* (1989) paintings emphasise flat areas of colour, spatial shifts, ambiguities, and contemplative design (p. 244). Gillian Rosselli's expansive *Colonial Cemetery* (2018) alludes to a mood-filled space of memory, where architectonic, decorative, and figurative forms overlay and underpin more painterly and loosely applied areas of colour (p. 140). Her *Snakes and Ladders* (2018), on the other hand, with its use of elements of *papier collé* and plastic collage, would seem to conflate and integrate a variety of approaches to abstraction that emphatically demonstrate a command of diverse painting techniques (p. 162).

Economic sanctions have been an impediment with which Zimbabwean painters have had to contend for over fifty years. Economic measures in reaction to them have always prioritised basic necessities over 'luxuries' and made access to imported painting materials for artists difficult, even for educational purposes.²⁸ Sanctions were imposed for fifteen years against Rhodesia after UDI in 1965.²⁹ Against the austerities of this period, Rhodesian settler taste in painting, transfixed by the sentimental, anodyne landscapes of Joan Evans and Peter Birch,³⁰ came to look upon Baron's lavish painterly abstractions as excessive and self-indulgent. Since Zimbabwe's state-sponsored invasions of white-owned farms in 2000, 'smart' EU and US sanctions against targeted officials have been imposed yet again, this time to punish alleged human rights abuses.³¹ However, these new sanctions have only reduced the standard of living for the country's poorer citizens. In the wake of the farm invasions, hyperinflation made it impossible for young artists, especially those in devastated and impoverished rural areas, to obtain art materials. Admire Kamudzengerere (b. 1983) recalls how this situation compelled him to resort to discarded and natural materials as a substitute, and to be as resourceful as possible in the face of the country's parlous economic conditions:



Joan Evans, *Demolition*, 1963. Oil on board, 65 x 50 cm. Image courtesy of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare.

²⁷ J. Kalsi, 'Home and Identity', *Gulf News*, 3 May 2017, <https://gulfnews.com/culture/arts/home-and-identity-1.2021431#.WRB7lpzURik.facebook>, (accessed 20 June 2017).

²⁸ This is a fundamental reason why sculpture quickly took preference over painting in Zimbabwe, especially in the isolation years following UDI. The abundance and variety of local stone in Mashonaland Central gave a boost to local sculpture since stone was freely available and the sales lucrative.

²⁹ Following UDI sanctions were incrementally imposed; initially by Britain, and subsequently by the UN. South Africa and Portugal (until 1974) refused to comply. Censorship was imposed and the importation of art books and magazines from abroad was circumscribed. This had a serious effect on levels of art literacy.

³⁰ In 1961 Frank McEwen rallied against what he referred to as local 'airport-art' by Europeans [that] regorges from our shop windows in the form of sickly pink landscapes doused in jacaranda mauve ... [which] bespattered with a vulgarised version of Impressionist impasto stolen from the end of the last century ... exploits and encourages facile, grossly underdeveloped taste' (cited in M. Arnold, 1989, p. 178). Evans (1905-1986), perhaps the most popular landscape painter, was hailed in some quarters as 'Rhodesia's ambassador in oils'. Evans also toyed with modernism, and the NGZ holds two examples of her work in this mode (including *Demolition*; see artwork image above) but she remained entrapped by a genre that was highly lucrative. Peter Birch (1931-2016) achieved great popularity on RTV with his 'how to paint' demonstrations. After independence he established his own art school in Harare's Greenwood Park.

Growing up in Zimbabwe, I couldn't afford any paper or canvas. I was picking up leftover magazines, newspapers, and empty packaging boxes looking for colour that I didn't have in my collection. If something was blue and I had no blue paint, I would use it as a substitute. At the time (2003-2004) I had no paint. I was living in the remote village of Nyanga, which is where the best weather and most fertile lands of Zimbabwe are. Around that time, fires were erupting. I don't know if it was by accident or by deliberate effort to forcefully evict the white farmers. Or maybe it was the white farmers starting the fires out of sheer anger and frustration for being forced off the lands. All the same, the land suffered. I started collecting different kinds of soils and sieved them into a fine powdery pigment. I had to make work, and this was my surrogate. I wanted to do something about man and the land and fire. Using this colour from the land became the only way to express how I felt ... I feel free using these materials ...³²

The scarcity of painting materials in Zimbabwe has, as Kamudzengerere concludes, had an emancipatory rather than a restrictive impact on his work. It compelled him to move away from painting's conventional definitions to embrace a combination of multi-media approaches that make use of performance, drawing, and video, all the while referencing the medium of paint. Such works include installations of mud-pigmented monotypes on the pages of old telephone directories, and explorations of the genre of portraiture and self-portraiture using drawing, paint, and performance. The latter is typified by his video work,

Identity (2012), a performance where he utilises his own visage as a field of painterly intervention (p. 239).

While Kamudzengerere has turned to the soil and discarded materials to create his own pigments and find his colours, Troy Makaza (b. 1994) has opted, through experimentation, to extend and expand the *matière*³³ of his limited paint or ink supply by infusing it into liquid silicone, which dries on exposure to the air. This gives him the potential to create format-free, near sculptural articulations of colour-imbued form that extend the definition of painting as a medium (p. 185).

As Makaza explains:

The medium is very intimately connected to my work on a number of levels. First of all, it combines a traditional art medium with a novel one. This is something that I am really conscious of doing as a contemporary Zimbabwean artist – bridging tradition with contemporary practice. Secondly, [it] allows me to move between sculpture and painting and to disrupt categories set up by people who are not us, so in a way it is me asserting my right as an artist to determine how I am seen and not allow myself or my content to be categorised. My subject matter is equally fluid, moving between

³¹ On 8 August 2018, following allegations of rigging in Zimbabwe's elections, Donald Trump renewed sanctions against the Zimbabwean government by signing the 'Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Amendment Act of 2018' (Zidera Act). This amended the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act of 2001. While the sanctions are targeted at an elite few, ordinary Zimbabweans are also affected.

³² A. Lehrer, 'Art Points The Way To Empathy' Zimbabwean Artist Admire Kamudzengerere Reaches A Global Audience', *Forbes*, 27 March 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/adamlehrer/2017/03/27/art-points-the-way-to-empathy-zimbabwean-artist-admire-kamudzengerere-reaches-a-global-audience/#29b876425794> (accessed 14 August 2018).

³³ *Matière* (French) is an art-related term often used in English to emphasise the 'matter', texture or physical substance of paint.

abstraction and figuration because neither category is in fact pure and the formality of these definitions don't make sense to me.³⁴

Makaza is also able to collaborate with other artists using this medium. In *Five Bhoobh*, for instance, he is represented in tandem with Shalom Kufakwatenzi, who, inspired by fashion design, has created an enveloping wall and floor installation using a range of coloured and textured fabrics that approximate the 'baroque' in concept.³⁵

The transformation and recontextualisation of discarded materials and found objects by Zimbabwean painters are not unique. In this they form a part of a diverse continuum of contemporary practice than can be seen across the rest of the African continent. Claims have been made that in such 'found object transformation, African artists have created a truly unique art form and have bequeathed a new art context to the world.'³⁶ Some artists, like Wallen Mapondera (p. 109) and Anthony Bumhira (p. 235), move with ease between conventional painting and the use of textiles, cardboard, paper, and other materials to construct wall-pieces of dynamic visual effect that challenge distinctions between painting and sculpture. Sometimes, both conventional painting techniques and 'bricolage'³⁷ are employed in a single work. The use of non-painting techniques to painterly effect, and their integration into installation work is also seen in the work of Gareth Nyandoro (p. 174). The latter's special invention of what he terms *kucheka cheka* (or cutting technique) involves the use of sharp blades to incise forms and shapes in paper, which are then covered with ink prior to the removal of the primary paper layer with tape. Further examples of ingenuity in action are Isheanesu Dondo's *Many Moods* (2018), a pyramidal wall installation consisting of one hundred and ninety-seven self-contained drawings, each executed on an individual discarded cigarette packet (p. 231); as well as Greg

Shaw's *Legacy: The Red Fence* (2017) and *Black Fence* (2018), which use painted paper refuse, soil, and wire, each within a containing frame (p. 122).

Despite having some of the highest standards of education in Africa, Zimbabwe's cycles of politically motivated violence and its economic decline over the past five decades have haemorrhaged its finest human potential into a diaspora. Included in this are some of the country's most talented painters. If there was a small white diaspora created by the dissolution of the Federation in 1963,³⁸ as well as the UDI crisis and the liberation war between 1972 and 1979, there have, unfortunately, been much larger dispersals of the country's intelligentsia since independence.³⁹ These emigrations have been prompted by political instability, ruthless state oppression, and economic collapse. To this can be added the State's open intolerance of its LGBTQ citizens.⁴⁰ These conditions have made the professional practice of making art within Zimbabwe's borders, especially art with

³⁴ L. Leiman, 'A conversation on colour, line and form with Io Makandal & Troy Makaza' on *Between 10 and 5: The Creative Showcase*, 7 September 2016, <https://10and5.com/2016/09/07/a-conversation-on-colour-line-and-form-with-io-makandal-troy-makaza/>, (accessed 14 August 2018).

³⁵ The Baroque was an exuberant style that flourished in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries, known for its tendency to merge the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture in impressive, almost theatrical combination.

³⁶ See Evans, 2010, cited in C. E. Akpang, 'Found Object, Recycled Art, Readymade or Junk Art? Ambiguity in Modern African Art', *Arts and Design Studies*, Vol.12, 2013, pp. 41-48, <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/ADS/article/view/7568>, (accessed: 16 August 2018).

³⁷ A bricolage is an object created from a diverse range of materials and other objects.

³⁸ On 31 December 1963 Zambia and Malawi were granted independence by Britain from the Federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland, also referred to as the 'Central African Federation'. The settlers of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), who were granted status as a self-governing colony in 1923 (with a limited franchise open to black voters), rejected an immediate shift to a 'one man one vote' constitution. The violent upheavals and the exodus of refugees following the decolonisation of the DRC in 1959 only seemed to confirm their fears. After 1963 the uncertain future of Southern Rhodesia and the rise to power of the right-wing RF caused settlers of a more liberal disposition to leave. Failing to reach any agreement on a new constitution with a Labour Party government in London, Ian Smith unilaterally and illegally declared Southern Rhodesia to be the independent state of 'Rhodesia' in 1965.

an activist stance, a dangerous undertaking. The *Gukurahundi* genocide in Matabeleland in 1983-1987 and the commercial farm invasions since 2000 have all prompted Zimbabwe's human capital to move elsewhere.⁴¹ In particular, the calamitous intervention of *Operation Murambatsvina*⁴² (2005), which led to the destruction of informal studios and the livelihoods of many artists.⁴³ The latter was followed by more orchestrated political violence, code-named *Operation Makavhotera Papi*,⁴⁴ which led up to the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) with the MDC in 2008. Record inflation; extremely high levels of

³⁹ It was estimated in 2015 that at least a third of Zimbabwe's entire population now lives outside of the country and that the remittances sent home now exceed the country's annual GDP. See E. Cross, 'Zimbabwe's Extraordinary Diaspora', *PoliticsWeb*, 16 November 2015, <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/zimbabwe-extraordinary-diaspora>, (accessed 18 August 2018).

⁴⁰ The new Zimbabwean Constitution of 2013 specifically prohibits same-sex marriage. Many articles on Zimbabwean attitudes towards same-sex relationships have been published. See D. Littauer, 'Zimbabwe president calls for the beheading of gays', *Genocide Watch*, 26 July, 2013, http://www.genocidewatch.org/images/Zimbabwe_2013_07_26_President_calls_for_beheading_of_gays.pdf, (accessed 20 August 2018).

⁴¹ The *Gukurahundi* [loose Shona translation: 'the early rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains'] was a campaign of genocide against Ndebele civilians in Matabeleland and Midlands carried out by the North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade of the ZNA. In 1976, during the Rhodesian Bush War, the two rival nationalist movements, Mugabe's ZANU and Nkomo's ZAPU, and their respective guerrilla armies, ZANLA and ZIPRA, merged to form the Patriotic Front (PF). ZANU drew support from the majority Shona people, whereas ZAPU found support with the minority Ndebele. After Mugabe's ascension to power as Prime Minister of Zimbabwe in 1980, his ZANU-dominated government was threatened by so-called 'dissidents' – disgruntled former ZAPU-ZIPRA guerrillas whose integration into the ZNA had, because of inter-factional tensions and unfair treatment, not been a success. In early 1983, Mugabe's special North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade began a ruthless suppression of the dissident 'problem'. Thousands were arrested, sent to re-education camps or murdered. Estimates vary, but the International Association of Genocide Scholars holds that more than 20,000 Ndebele were liquidated.

⁴² *Operation Murambatsvina* [Shona: 'drive out the rubbish'] also known as 'Operation Restore Order', was a massive Zimbabwean government drive launched in tandem with the military in the winter of 2005 to clear informal settlements in urban areas. It has also been referred to locally as 'Zimbabwe's urban tsunami'; a reference to the natural disaster of the Asian tsunami of 2004. UN estimates put the number of Zimbabweans directly affected by the loss of their homes at 700 000, and at 2.4 million impacted in terms of hunger, health risk, and the loss of livelihood. The State's official reasoning, ironically, was that the action was needed to deal with illegal housing and illicit commercial activities, as well as public health concerns. The UN described the operation as a calculated move to act against the urban and rural poor who supported the opposition MDC. Other writers have described it as 'a gross violation of human rights.' R. E. Howard Hassmann, see fn. 7.

unemployment; the collapse of the Zimbabwean dollar; the growing power of the military; and the expansion of State security, seem, in retrospect, to be irreversible. All of these serve to mitigate against freedoms of artistic practice and expression, despite the adoption of a new Constitution in 2013.

Zimbabwean artists in exile, however, are far from silent. Duncan Wylie's paintings *Self Construct (Zimbabwe undertones)* (2017) and *Bee Sting Therapy (Gaza/ Zimbabwe): Hommage to Helen* (2018) conflate and connect the rubble and wreckage seen in his first-hand experience of *Operation Murambatsvina* with his subsequent witness of the relentless devastation of the built environment in Israel's 'final solution' to the Palestinian 'problem' in Gaza (p. 134).⁴⁵ Wylie's visual evocations of the savagery of this 'urban cleansing' are the antithesis of any 'romance of ruins'. His images of man-made disaster call to mind the philosopher Walter Benjamin's apocalyptic vision of 'wreckage piled upon wreckage'.⁴⁶ His paintings make synonymous the inhuman social engineering of a Mugabe and a Netanyahu, exposing them as the ideologically opposed faces of the same coin. As Wylie's example shows, contemporary Zimbabwean painters are highly adept at political and social critique. One of the ironic continuities of

⁴⁴ In 2008, the Zimbabwean military launched *Operation Makavhotera Papi* (Operation 'Where did you place your vote?') to ensure President Mugabe's re-election in the June Presidential run-off elections. The deployment of the Zimbabwean military to rural villages in the pretence of championing food security in an operation code-named *Operation Maguta* was a further part of ZANU-PF's strategy to instil fear in the electorate ahead of the planned elections.

⁴⁵ In a YouTube interview Wylie talks about the significance of this politically motivated tragedy. He then relates how he witnessed an old grandmother being forced by soldiers to demolish her own house while making fun of her: 'This [says Wylie], is frankly perverse ... a total absurdity which makes me angry ... so I had three or four reasons to let go. I had my passport, my freedom; I was pissed off; and I needed to build something.' Wylie then left for Paris. He later accepted an invitation to visit Israel, where he witnessed the Israeli Defence Force actions against Palestinians in Gaza. See interview with Duncan Wylie, 'Painting vs Images', YouTube, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpjrPtcVvus>, (accessed 20 August 2018).

history is that a number of old laws promulgated by the illegal RF government conveniently remain on Zimbabwe's statute books. These include the out-dated *Censorship and Entertainments Control Act* of 1967 and the *Law and Order Maintenance Act (LOMA)* of 1960. These laws were provided for the prosecution of the media, journalists, and individuals for making statements, which might cause 'fear, alarm or despondency'.⁴⁷ LOMA was only repealed by the Zimbabwean Parliament in 2002, but it was replaced by the equally draconian *Public Order and Security Act*.

As an artist who also happened to be a practising lawyer in the 70s, Marshall Baron was often in defence of those on the wrong side of such legislation. He had to deal directly with the Rhodesian regime in the courts. His painting *UDI Plotters* (1975) is a caustic and apparently private essay in figuration where, in a feverish pitch of expressionist rage, he briefly abandoned his music-inspired abstractions to create a searing satire on an unjust status quo. Painted ten years after UDI, the canvas makes clear reference to the official photograph of Ian Smith signing the ill-fated proclamation in Salisbury on 11 November 1965.⁴⁸ This photograph shows Smith seated in the centre of a table, appending his signature to the declaration while his Cabinet looks on with approving gravitas. A key inclusion in the photograph is the print of Pietro Annigoni's famous official portrait of Queen Elizabeth II (1955), which peers down from the wall behind them.⁴⁹ In Baron's quickly rendered oil reworking, Smith wears a pointed dunce's cap, and the portrait of the Queen is notably omitted.⁵⁰ Upon seeing *UDI Plotters* at an exhibition at the NGZ in 2012, a Harare art critic speculated that Baron's satire was inspired by a Renaissance-style *Last Supper*, presumably the iconic mural by Leonardo da Vinci.⁵¹

If Baron's *UDI Plotters* is a macabre RF approximation of da Vinci's *Last Supper*, then Richard Mudariki's ironic reflection on Zimbabwe's darker political absurdities, *The Passover* (2011), makes a more deliberate transcription of it. At the time of its making President Robert Mugabe had been in power for thirty-one years. In the painting he presides Christ-like,⁵² making an open, symmetrical gesture with his hands over a plucked chicken splayed on a chequered gaming board. This is no simple, humble or private *Last Supper*, but an official State banquet attended by contemporary political leaders and dignitaries

⁴⁶ In his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (1940) the German critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin interprets a small painting of an angel by Paul Klee entitled *Angelus Novus*, which he calls the 'Angel of History'. 'The angel's face', says Benjamin, 'is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.'

⁴⁷ LOMA allowed the Smith regime to detain offenders without trial, deport individuals deemed to be a security threat, and ban publications that did not support the RF point of view. Several hundred Zimbabwean nationalists were executed under LOMA, and a number of publications, including *The African Daily News*, *Moto magazine*, *Umbowo*, *Zimbabwe News*, and the *Zimbabwe Review* were banned.

⁴⁸ The photograph, a centrepiece of Information Minister P.K. van der Byl's propaganda at the time, has been referred to by die-hard RF loyalists as 'Rhodesia's most famous picture'. See B. Cole. *The Elite: Rhodesian Special Air Service Pictorial*, Three Knights Publishing, Amanzimtoti, 1986, p. 161.

⁴⁹ Although the portrait was strategically included in the photograph and loyalty to her was fully asserted in the UDI declaration, she ignored the offer of the title of 'Queen of Rhodesia'. In fact, Elizabeth II formally instructed the legal Governor of the colony, Sir Humphrey Gibbs, to dismiss the Rhodesian Government. Rhodesia later discarded the Queen as putative official Head of State, and in 1970 proclaimed itself a republic.

⁵⁰ One personality in particular seems to be a target of Baron's repugnance: that seated on the far left of the table. His profile is particularly grotesque. He is none other than Desmond Lardner-Burke (1909-1984), Rhodesia's ruthless Minister of Law and Order, with whose draconian legislation Baron, as a legal practitioner, had often to contest.

⁵¹ T. Monda, 'Baron's political satire on display', *The Herald*, 12 July 2012, <http://www.herald.co.zw/barons-political-satire-on-display/>, (accessed 7 December 2017). A comparison of Baron's painting and the UDI photograph of 1965 shows the allusion to this Renaissance precedent to be a rather superficial one, and that Baron made a very close approximation of the RF personalities in the photograph, which was apparently posed and formally taken after the actual signing of the UDI Declaration on the part of most of those present. Given the date of Baron's painting (1975), we can speculate that he painted it in response to the 10th anniversary of UDI, by which time it was very clear that politics in the region had overtaken Smith and that his gamble to preserve white minority rule had failed.



Marshall Baron, *UDI Plotters*, 1975. Oil on canvas, 153 x 285.5 cm. Image courtesy of Merle Baron Guttman and the Marshall Baron website (www.marshallbaron.com).



Ian Smith signs the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965.



Richard Mudariki, *The Passover*, 2011. Acrylic on canvas, 120 x 159.5 cm. On loan from a private collection. Image courtesy of the artist.

who include Queen Elizabeth II and Pope Benedict XVI. A haloed Jesus Christ, now displaced from his key position, finds himself pushed to the far left of the table. The focal iconographic element is the splayed rooster, a clear reference to the male chicken or *jongwe*, the official emblem of ZANU-PF. In informal media the emblem has been mercilessly lampooned and ridiculed by cartoonists who prefer to keep their anonymity. Depicted on the run, injured, plucked, or even roasting in a pot, the condition of the rooster functions as a visual metaphor reflective of ZANU-PF's disastrous policies and internal faction-fights.

Since 2000 (and the critical, violent year 2008) the growing repression and intolerance of the ZANU-PF regime has led to the gradual imposition of what prominent Zimbabwean historian, the late Professor Terence Ranger (1929-2015), has defined as 'patriotic history'.⁵³ This he describes as a sharply selective and narrow view of Zimbabwean history, one that is wholly biased towards the aims of the ruling ZANU-PF party and the 'education' of its youth militia. One could argue that its visual equivalent is to be seen in the North Korean Socialist Realist bronzes and reliefs that were commissioned for Heroes' Acre outside Harare.⁵⁴ 'Patriotic history' regards 'any history which is not political' to be 'disloyal' and 'irrelevant'.⁵⁵ In its selective view it makes deliberate connotations and omissions. A notable incident of the post-independence era, and one that ZANU-PF would prefer to remain buried, is the *Gukurahundi* of the Ndebele people in the early 1980s, in which some 20 000 civilians were systematically massacred. This history is very close to the personal life of the artist Owen Maseko, who made it the subject of an installation at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo in March 2010. Entitled *Sibathontisele* (Let's Drip On Them), the exhibition comprised three installations and a dozen paintings. As a young Ndebele boy who was scarred by the *Gukurahundi*, Maseko's passion for making

art that dealt with the subject was highly expressive, emotional, and intense. His words evoke the spirit of a true expressionist painter:

... if that energy grips me in that particular moment it means I can actually let out what I feel ... if you look at my exhibition like as you are saying about brush strokes it's how the particular energy I felt at that time [was let out].⁵⁶

Maseko was charged under the previously mentioned *Public Order and Security Act* (2002) for undermining the authority of President Robert Mugabe. He was charged with 'causing offence to persons of a particular race or religion', under the old Rhodesian *Censorship and Entertainments Act* of 1967. The exhibition was closed to the public and the artworks confiscated as evidence. At one stage Maseko was facing a possible twenty-year prison sentence. In September 2010 his trial was postponed pending consideration by the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe as to 'whether criminalising creative arts

⁵² Mudariki's painting has continued to have resonance. Since it was completed Mugabe has made several comparisons between himself and Christ. Interviewed on ZBC radio in 2012, in reference to repeated rumours of his death, he wryly stated: 'I have died many times. I have actually beaten Jesus Christ because he only died once'. In reference to those within ZANU-PF who were plotting to oust him he once said: 'Others are like those that Jesus spoke about during his Last Supper, when he said "some of you eating with me here shall betray me". The Judas Iscariot. They are here among us'. See Reuters Staff, Reuters, 28 September 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-zimbabwe-mugabe/zimbabwes-mugabe-likens-rivals-to-judas-for-seeking-his-retirement-idUSKCN1C31TH>, (accessed 20 August 2018).

⁵³ T. Ranger, 'Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: the Struggle over the past in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2, June 2004, pp. 215 - 234.

⁵⁴ Marion Arnold notes that ZANU-PF incurred huge debts with North Korea during the liberation war, part of which the North Koreans agreed to waive if their artists were given the Heroes Acre commission. See M. Arnold, 'A Change of Regime: Art and Ideology in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe', in A. Nettleton and D. Hammond-Tooke, *African Art in Southern Africa: From Tradition to Township*, A.D. Donker, Johannesburg, 1989, p. 248.

⁵⁵ T. Ranger, see above fn. 53, p. 218.

⁵⁶ S. Mpofo, 'Art as Journalism in Zimbabwe: The Case of Owen Maseko's banned Zimbabwean genocide exhibition', *Journalism Studies*, 11 August 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2017.1358652>, (accessed 20 August 2018).



Heroes' Acre, Harare, Zimbabwe. Photo: Jekesai Njikizana

infringes on the freedom of expression and freedom of conscience', as guaranteed by the Zimbabwean Constitution. A judge granted an application to the Supreme Court on constitutional grounds, and on the grounds that Maseko's art depicted events that had happened beyond doubt. The case of Owen Maseko has become a focal point of much debate about the role of art and culture in a future Zimbabwe, particularly in opposition circles and the diaspora. It shows how the Zimbabwean state's response and determined suppression of history is only planting further seeds of internal dissent and undermining true national unity. As Shepherd Mpofu notes:

The Zimbabwean genocide not only ruptured societal modes of existence but also disrupted how the Ndebeles see their Ndebeleness not only as an ethnic identity but also as a political one. In so doing they have adopted and used genocide memory, maybe much more than liberation war memory, to forge a certain identity of nationhood based on the Ndebele nation while rejecting the Zimbabwe one.⁵⁷

An immediate response to the Maseko case was published online in 2010 by Sokwanele. Entitled 'Art, Censorship and the Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe', it made the following point:

Maseko's case is a clear illustration of what happens when 'art' and 'freedom of expression' come together to challenge ZANU-PF's 'Patriotic History' project. It reveals how the rule of law in Zimbabwe has been crafted and subverted to support the ZANU-PF party's ideological priorities ... if the State is allowed to ban critical works



Owen Maseko, *Signing the Unity Accord*, 2010. Mixed media installation, dimensions variable. Image courtesy of the artist and Sheperd Mpofu.

that investigate and challenge the state's role in history, and if they are allowed to intimidate and harass artists who dare to think beyond state-controlled boundaries, then all artists will find themselves unable to truly be 'artists' in the fullest sense of the word.⁵⁸

Some of the socio-political, critical, and satirical works on *Five Bhobh*, like those by Richard Mudariki and Kufa Makwavarara, have been made in artists' residencies at the museum. Mudariki's *Reform, Scan, Format* (2018) and his *Patriotic Stereo Tape* (2018) are cynical, cryptic encapsulations of the 'mechanisms' and ironies surrounding Zimbabwe's 'harmonised' elections, which took place on 30 July 2018 (p. 149). In his carnivalesque

⁵⁷ S. Mpofu, see fn. 56, p. 13.

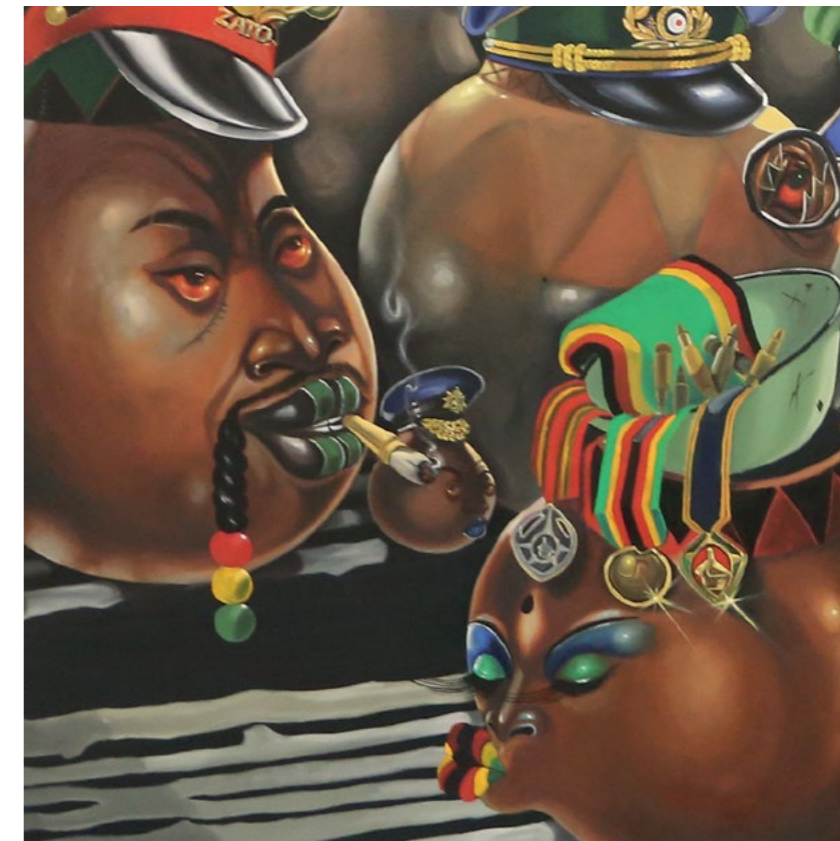
⁵⁸ Anonymous, see fn. 1.

⁵⁹ See this point in relation to the work of Van Gogh and the words of Edvard Munch: 'It is the human aspect, life that one must convey. Not dead nature. A chair can be as great of interest as a human being. But the chair must be seen by a human. It must in some way or other have moved him and one must cause the viewers to be moved in the same fashion. It is not the chair that must be painted but how a person has experienced it'. See M. van Dijk, M. Bruteig, and L. Jansen, (eds.), *Munch: Van Gogh. Mercatorfonds, Brussels/Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam/Munch Museum, Oslo*, 2015, p. 122.

Pre-2018 Election: Zimbabwe Presidential Inauguration (2018), with its conflation of clay pots and faces of bloated generals and bureaucrats, Kufa Makwavarara makes a pungent statement about the hard realities lurking behind the façade of democratic pretence (p. 157).

Cosmos Shiridzinomwa seems to go even further with the titles accorded to his very recent paintings. These include *The Last Moments*, *Party of Crooks I*, and *Party of Crooks II* (2018). His evocation of chairs, which seem to move and dance like the brooms in Walt Disney's animation *Sorcerer's Apprentice from Fantasia* (1940), seem mysterious at first. However, an 'empty' chair is often thought to be a powerful symbol of authority. In the context of current Zimbabwean politics it serves as a potent metaphor. The example of Vincent van Gogh, whose stylistic influence on Shiridzinomwa seems clear, also seems pertinent here, especially in relation to Van Gogh's paintings of chairs, where his existential emotion came to be expressed through ordinary, everyday objects (p. 154).⁵⁹

Since 2000, Zimbabwe's social and economic meltdown has long since shifted from being an internal issue to one of dramatic regional and international concern. However, by going into exile, millions of the country's



Kufa Makwavarara, detail of *Pre-2018 Election: Zimbabwe Presidential Inauguration*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 150 x 200 cm. Image: Zeitz MOCAA.



Cosmos Shiridzinomwa, *Party of Crooks II*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 143 x 198 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

citizens 'have created a new regional dynamic both through their physical movement to neighbouring states and by generating new economies and socio-political formations [that stretch] beyond Zimbabwe's borders'.⁶⁰ With their shared identities and camaraderie in adversity, Zimbabwean artists today constitute a significant force and an important voice in international contemporary African art. They are often high-profile personalities with unfolding and successful international careers that would have been impossible to achieve at home. Contemporary Zimbabwean painting is no longer narrowly defined by what is made or shown in Harare and Bulawayo, but by what is exhibited and traded in international galleries or accessed in cyberspace. In 2001, the veteran Harare gallerist Derek Huggins published an article that made some profound points about the difficulties and unappreciated virtues of being a Zimbabwean painter:

Painting has much, if not more relevance and importance in providing the clues that trace and link the country's visual art history and its bridges to the present. It presents an interesting story of the self-determination and labour of a few for the inherent love and need for self-expression in art, despite personal hardship.⁶¹



Cosmos Shiridzinomwa, *Party of Crooks I*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 143 x 198 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

⁶⁰ A. Hammar, J. McGregor and L. Landau, 'Introduction: Displacing Zimbabwe: Crisis and Construction in Southern Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2, 'The Zimbabwe Crisis through the Lens of Displacement', June 2010, p. 263.

⁶¹ D. Huggins, 'The Beacons: Zimbabwean Painting in the last Fifty Years', *Gallery: The art magazine from Gallery Delta*, Gallery Publications, Harare, 2001, p. 8.