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NF/ Gareth Nyandoro

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### **Gareth Nyandoro**

Bikita (Zimbabwe), 1982

Gareth Nyandoro is noted for his large works on paper, which often spill out of their two-dimensional format and into installations that include paper scraps and objects found in the markets of Harare, where he lives and works. The artist's chief source of inspiration is the daily landscape of the city and its residents, both within the local milieu and the larger cultural panorama of Zimbabwe. Inspired by his training as a printmaker, and derived from etching, the artist's distinctive technique, Kucheka cheka, is named after the infinitive and present tense declinations of the Shona verb cheka, which means 'to cut'.

#### **Gareth Nyandoro**

He has exhibited at institutions such as Palais de Tokyo, Quetzal Art Centre, Rijksakademie, and Zeitz MOCAA, among others.

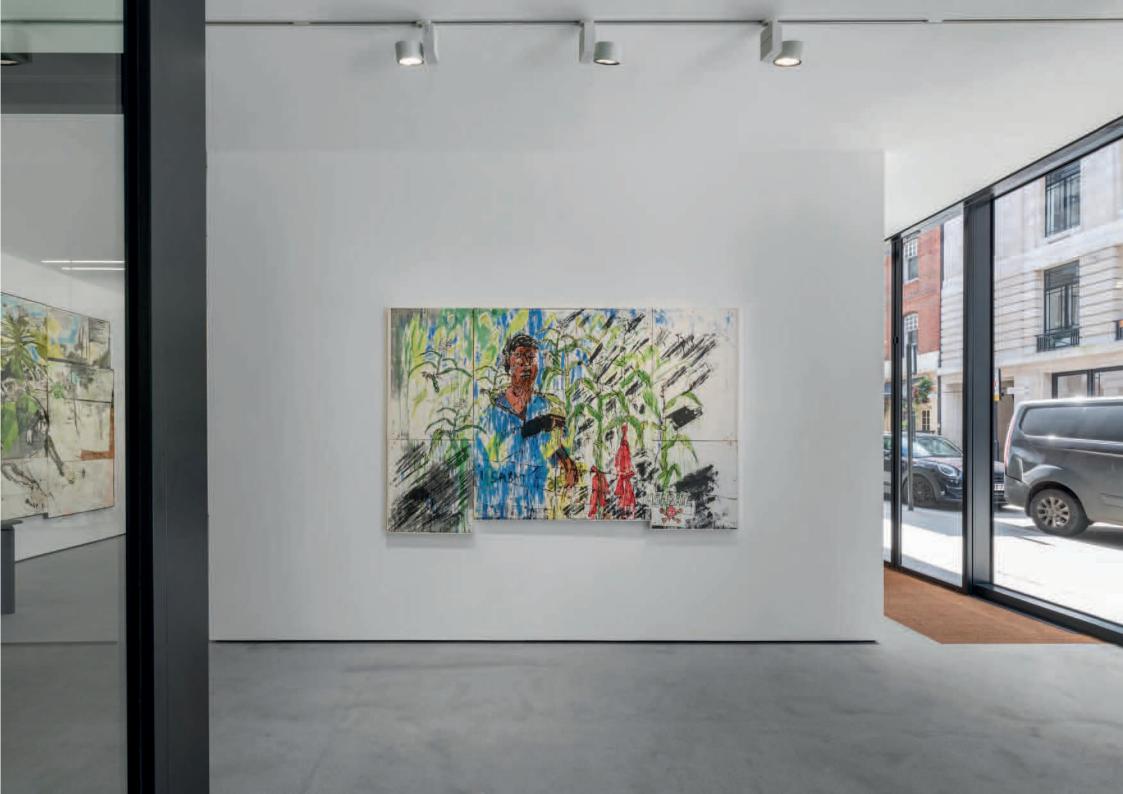
His work is part of collections such as MoMA New York, Zeitz MOCAA, Fondation Sindika Dokolo, Instituto Inhotim, Rachofsky Collection, SAM Art Projects and the National Gallery of Zimbabwe.





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Gareth Nyandoro: Pfumvudza 2024 Tiwani Contemporary, London Exhibition view















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Drawing Africa on the Map 2018-2019 Quetzal Art Centre Exhibition view









#### **GARETH NYANDORO: ENTANGLEMENT AND PLACE**

Place matters in thinking about Gareth Nyandoro's materially inventive and insistently figurative practice, in particular the placeness of Zimbabwe's capital, Harare. Founded in 1890 as an outpost of the British Empire, today Harare is an agitated post-colonial city, home to more than one and a half million people, many of them reliant on informal trade to survive. Following the wholesale collapse of Zimbabwe's formal economy over the past two decades, hustle and can-do enterprise have emerged as the dominant modes of commerce in Zimbabwe. It is estimated that about ninety-five per cent of Zimbabwe's active workforce earn their living through informal employment, despite harsh push-back against market vendors and itinerant hawkers by the country's autocratic government. Nyandoro, who studied fine art in Harare, and continues to live and work in the city, draws conceptual sustenance from the human invention and material logics of his hometown's informal economy. The artist is eloquent about the way Harare's so-called 'kukiya-kiya' economy, where multiple forms of making-do coexist, has influenced his practice. Speaking in 2016, around the time of his debut London solo exhibition, Paper Cut, at Tiwani Contemporary, Nyandoro described his fascination with how informal market vendors occupy, display and arrange their wares. Hawking and other forms of unsanctioned street trade existed in pre-independence Harare, then called Salisbury, but over the past two decades have become more than a peripheral economic activity. Nyandoro elaborated: 'When I was growing up, vending was there but in a conservative way. Now it has turned out to be an art among the vendors as they compete for space and visibility through creative displays and even go to the extent of using megaphones and dance to lure customers'

Nyandoro's work offers more than mere documentation of this survivalist capitalism. Based on real-world encounters, his ambitious paper-based installations and works on paper reconfigure his observations of the everyday into

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imaginative statements of artistic translation. The word translation is key. Unlike photographers Sammy Baloji, Hicham Gardaf, Mame-Diarra Niang and Guy Tillim, who have all produced extraordinary visual essays on Africa's topsy-turvy urban transition, Nyandoro's aspiration is not realism. His practice shares affinities with that of Ghanaian artists Ibrahim Mahama and Serge Attukwei Clottey, both of whose sculptural practices are informed by the materials and logics of informal trade. There are, of course, precedents for this artistic kinship with the urban poor. The slum market was an insistent part of the miseen-scène of Senegalese filmmaker Djibril Diop Mambéty's luminous works, notably his late film The Little Girl who Sold the Sun (1999). The recent focus on working-class urban cultures in African cities nonetheless bears scrutiny. The focus is partly explained by immense shifts. Africa is currently witnessing rapid population growth and urbanization. The infrastructures and bureaucracies of cities across the continent are struggling to cope, if provide anything at all. Six in ten Africans currently live in over-crowded and under-serviced urban slums. These fragile. ready-made settlements, and the hustle that informs their endurance, have become a major site of artistic practice, as well as the source of new theory. Sometimes referred to as southern urban theory, this practice-interested discourse from and about sub-Saharan Africa, the Indian subcontinent and Latin America aims to identify coherence in the urban practices and occupation habits of the world's urban poor. This phenomenological theory is attractive for its limber methodologies and offers many portable ideas for thinking about the placeness and objecthood of Nyandoro's practice.

I want to briefly eavesdrop on a recent essay by Bangalore activist and urban scholar Gautam Bhan, who along with Teresa P. R. Caldeira, Filip De Boeck, Edgar Pieterse, Ananya Rov and AbdouMalig Simone forms part of a loose constellation of urban scholars committed to researching the creativity and logic of post-co-



lonial cities. Titled 'Notes on a Southern Urban Practice', Bhan's essay draws on his experiences studying behaviours in Indian cities to propose three words as useful to thinking about everyday practices in postcolonial cities: 'squat', 'repair' and 'consolidate'. The words are, however, also proposals towards a larger, as yet unwritten theoretical glossary of southern urbanism that, in Bhan's words, would make 'a range of realities intelligible, visible and relevant'. In the spirit of Bhan's project, and thinking across disciplinary borders, I would like to propose two words – 'cut' and 'spill' – as relevant to engaging with Nyandoro's practice.

Both terms are easily relatable to the construction and content of Nyandoro's applied paper collages and large-form installations, but they also function as propositional ideas, or leit-motifs, that speak to the vital context of his practice. Cutting, for instance, is fundamental to how Nyandoro works, quite literally, but also precedes him as gesture. Cutting is expressive of larger histories, especially in Southern Africa. Zimba-

bwe's modern history began in the nineteenth century when resource capitalism and white-settler colonialism spread north from South Africa. Bikita, a rural district in south-eastern Zimbabwe, where Nyandoro was born in 1982, has long been known for its mineral deposits of lepidolite and petalite. It is home to Zimbabwe's largest lithium mine. The region's natural resources are extracted through a mix of open pit and underground workings.

Mining landscapes often share similar post-use attributes: they exhibit scratches, tears, gashes and other forms of penetrative puncture wounds. These cuts are plainly visible, but also easily overlooked. The meaning of these penetrative markings, which recur across Southern and Central Africa, was the fulcrum for a collaborative project between Belgian anthropologist Filip De Boeck and Congolese photographer Sammy Baloji in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Much of their research focused on Kinshasa. In a recent lecture, De Boeck offered the 'hole' as a master trope and key concept for understand-

ing the 'dismal quality' of urban life in Kinshasa. His vivid, if also morbid, diagnosis is strongly informed by the work of the provocative Congolese novelist and playwright Sony Lab'ou Tansi, who in an early play wrote of a metaphorical hole that encompassed hopes, reality and dreams. The meaning of the cut in Nyandoro's work is not as freighted with existential anxiety as the hole in De Boeck's thinking. Although raised in a mining region, Nyandoro's understanding of the cut was anyway formed much later, at art school.

It was during his formative training as a printmaker - first at Harare Polytechnic and later at Chinhoyi University of Technology, an hour's drive west of Harare - that Zimbabwe experienced its first bouts of hyperinflation. Art materials became unaffordable. 'We didn't have conventional materials for etching, linocut or silk-screen printing, so we were just improvising, sometimes cutting into paper to make prints,' Nyandoro has stated. This make-do inventiveness, of using paper as a ground for printmaking, yielded a propulsive insight for the artist: 'I realised the plate I was using to print was actually a finished piece of work itself.' While personal intuition played a key role in these technical breakthroughs, Nyandoro's lecturer at Harare Polytechnic, artist Chikonzero 'Chiko' Chazunguza, was also an important influence in cultivating an experimental approach to making. Known for his material innovation and interest in local modes of fabrication, Chazunguza pushed his students - including Virginia Chihota to experiment with processes, as well as explore everyday materials. It nonetheless took some time for Nyandoro to arrive at his mature style, where the cut now operates as a defining motif. After completing art school Nyandoro explored printmaking, assemblage painting, sculpture and even performance. In 2009 he staged a performance at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe that declared his interest in the impoverished aesthetics and defiant logics of informal markets. Titled *Dollar-for-Two*, the performance included a cardboard box displaying items such as mobile phone airtime cards pinned to a stick, a common practice on the streets of Harare. There is obvious kinship between Dollar-for-Two and Mushika-shika Wavanhu (2014), Nyandoro's mixed-media installation shown in the Zimbabwean Pavilion at the 2015 Venice Biennale. Presented alongside

work by Nyandoro's former lecturer, Chazunguza, and long-time friend, Masimba Hwati, *Mushi-ka-shika Wavanhu* is composed of a painting of a young market vendor pasted onto cardboard and attached to an upright frame leaned against the gallery wall. Nyandoro's seated subject tends real-world objects laid out on a crudely carpeted floor. This work literally spills out of the representational frame into the world.

The emergence of the spill and the cut as dominant leitmotifs of Nyandoro's practice materialized in the period between the making of Dollar-for-Two and Mushika-shika Wavanhu. In 2012, Nyandoro held his debut solo exhibition, Mutariri, at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe. His output at this point encompassed works on paper, painting and sculpture, and the materials for the sculptural pieces in his National Gallery exhibition included plastic bottles, food cartons and waste paper. Nyandoro's early sculptural practice includes numerous examples of work made with found materials, including tape measures.

My Book (2012), a sculptural piece composed of a hand-woven plastic box spilling 'sheets' of woven tape resembling paper, featured on a 2012 exhibition of artists' books at Gallery East in Perth, Australia, and was acquired by the State Library of Queensland. Tape Measure Mask (2012), a mask-like face delineated on a ground made from woven tape measures, was exhibited during an open studio in Harare in 2012. The latter work is notable for its blocks of cut-up tape measures pasted over the woven ground, in particular around the eyes and facial region. This collaging technique is central to the artist's current practice.

Nyandoro's urban thematic figured more consistently in his 2013 solo exhibition, Weaving Life, at Gallery Delta, Harare. The exhibition featured works on paper (linocuts, woodcuts and card prints), assemblage paintings and applied sculptures. Many of Nyandoro's works in Weaving Life referenced street slang and tabloid news culture in their titles. His work *Mbobobo* (2013), for instance, alludes to a dark magic that supposedly enables illicit sexual conquests. His works *Portrait of an Airtime Vendor* (2013) and *Mudhara we Airtime* (2013) drew on the sale of airtime by start-up entrepreneurs owning little more than a chair, cardboard box and hand-painted sign



listing the network providers available. The use of pre-paid airtime is ubiquitous across sub-Saharan Africa and has led to its use as a form of fiat currency.

Vivid colour was a notable feature of Nyandoro's early work. His figural iconography, though, tended towards the unspecific. His studies of masks, young children and elderly women recycled familiar tropes from African art history. One work from this time is particularly noteworthy. Exhibited in 2013, at Njelele Art Station in Harare, as part of the group exhibition Afropolicity with Masimba Hwati. Misheck Masamvu and Portia Zvavahera, His Excellency (2013) depicts former president Robert Mugabe, who was ousted in a coup in 2017 and died in 2019. Nyandoro's head-and-shoulders portrait neutrally portrays the essentials of Mugabe, although the detailing of the strongman's face is unfinished. The vibrant ground of this painting is most significant: it is composed of blocks of card and features two visible seams that intersect in the dead centre of Mugabe's right eve.

In 2014 Nyandoro was awarded a residency at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam. It was at this prestigious art academy that he started concertedly working with paper incisions and paper cutting. Nyandoro's technique of repeatedly cutting thin, etching-like lines into large, densely layered pieces of paper bears fuller description. These crosshatched lines are key to his work's activated surfaces. Alone, these cuts would push his work into the realm of abstract sculpture, but drawing on his background in printmaking Nyandoro uses his paper like a metal plate or woodblock. After making his incisions he then inks the top, working layer of paper. This layer is later removed with tape, revealing a new surface coloured by seepage. The cutting process unavoidably produces damage and waste. Loosened twirls and strips of paper are repurposed: either as collaged elements on the surface of a work, or as scattered residue on the floor.

Nyandoro calls this inventive and labour-intensive process 'kuchekacheka'. It is a portmanteau word combining the Shona for cut, *kucheka*, with Harare street slang, which doubles the use of words for emphasis. The entanglement of artistic practice and everyday hustle is central

to the meaning of kuchekacheka. 'More than just reflecting the action of cutting into paper, Nyandoro's kuchekacheka is about reusing materials, and in doing so it is about redefining meaning; reinventing what it means to be, to survive and to thrive,' write art historian Ruth Simbao and artist Masimba Hwati, thoughtfully underscoring the significance of the entanglement of artistic practice and daily life.

The operation and the cut and the spill are similarly entangled, and work concurrently. This is clearly evident in two collage works from 2015, first exhibited in Amsterdam, and later at Tiwani in London and Modern Art Oxford. Kuguruguda Stambo (Hypnotic Lollipop Eaters) laconically depicts an assembly of human and animal figures. Unouraya Ipapo Ipapo (Parasite Instant Killer) is a fractured study of a lone male subject. Incised lines intersect and damage the figural unity of Nyandoro's subjects in both these paper assemblies. His lines bleed. Things spill. This lack of containment, of clear delineations blurring, of boundaries overrun, has prompted harsh pushback against Harare's informal traders.

In 2005, Robert Mugabe's government initiated Operation Murambatsvina. Variously translated from Shona as 'clear the filth' or 'drive out the trash', the initiative saw informal markets and settlements burnt, bulldozed and destroyed across the country. Around 700,000 Zimbabweans were left homeless. In Harare, flea market stalls and business structures were actively targeted. Even licensed informal traders operating in the city's markets had their stalls destroyed, reported Human Rights Watch. More than 30,000 vendors were arrested. The attacks came paired with remarkable displays of cultural chauvinism: informal settlers and traders were told to return to where they came from.

Zimbabwe's robust informal economy has deep roots. Ambulant hawkers and illegal traders, many from outlying rural areas, were a feature of colonial Salisbury (now Harare) as far back as the 1940s. Typically it was women who engaged in self-employed work, in large part due to a shortage of formal work for them. They sold cooked foods, fresh fruit and vegetables, nuts, newspapers, wood and handicrafts on the street, or became sex-workers and beer brewers. These women were part of Harare's early urban fringe

that lived on the edge of colonial law, writes historian Eric Makombe. In a fascinating account of their existence and activities. Makombe points out, 'even though Rhodesian municipal authorities considered the African as "a form of pollution, a menace, a hazard to the urban settler" Africans treated Salisbury as much as [sic] their town as that of the Europeans. It was an African city.' This history is encoded in the metonymic figural arrangements that typify many of Nyandoro's mature collages, including Kuguruguda Stambo (Hypnotic Lollipop Eaters) and Unouraya Ipapo Ipapo (Parasite Instant Killer).

During the 2005 government crackdown, informal traders were accused of economic sabotage. This claim is partly a reflection of the growing power of the informal markets in Harare, and indeed Zimbabwe generally, as an economic entity. In a country whose formal sector has bled jobs, Harare's informal economy has developed muscle. Traders have united into membership-based organizations and begun to demand economic access and rights. The irrefutable character of Harare's informal economy has provided Nyandoro with a durable subject to riff on in his work. It is also a versatile subject, as was evidenced in 2017 when Nyandoro took up a residency in Paris with SAM Art Projects. The residency culminated with an exhibition, Stall(s) of Fame, an immersive installation at the Palais de Tokvo. The work showcased Nvandoro's strategic identification with Paris's entrepreneurial. if highly regulated, street vendors, in particular the Bouquinistes, booksellers who ply their trade from lock-up boxes installed along the Seine, as well as the flea market of Saint Ouen.

Nyandoro's presentation included a green box modelled on those of the Bouquinistes, inside of which he displayed four portraits of black footballers on irregular, sutured-together paper grounds. An overflowing collage titled Legendary Pockets (2017) depicts a flea market-like display of football shirts. The names inscribed on the shirt backs evoke a pantheon of black African sporting achievement, including the Ivorian Didier Drogba and Cameroonians Samuel Eto'o and Roger Milla. The latter's uproarious goal celebration at the corner flag during the 1990 FIFA World Cup forms the basis of Nyandoro's sprawling installation, Roger Milla (Legendary) (2017). Later

shown at Tiwani. Stall(s) of Fame reiterates a consistent subject of Nyandoro's practice: black subjectivity. If place matters in thinking about Nyandoro's work, so does race. This entanglement is productive. The informal market is more than simply a material site; it is an idea that exceeds the continental mass. Harare is locatable everywhere, even in Paris and London.

- Nyasha Muchichwa, Working Without Pay: Wage Theft in Zimbabwe, Washington D.C.: Solidarity Center, June 2016, p.6
- 2 See Jeremy L. Jones, 'Nothing is Straight in Zimbabwe': The Rise of the Kukiya-kiya Economy 2000-2008', Journal of Southern African Studies, 2010, Vol. 36.2, pp. 285-299
- 3 Aïcha Diallo, 'Exploring the Dimensions: In Conversation with Gareth Nyandoro', C&, 19 April 2016: https://www.contemporaryand.com/magazines/exploring-the-dimensions/
- 4 Gautam Bhan, 'Notes on a Southern Urban Practice', in Environment & Urbanisation 2019 n. 2
- 5 Filip De Boeck, 'The Future of the African City as Seen from Kinshasa' keynote lecture at the conference The Future of the African City, Leiden, 24 January 2019
- Rose Carr, 'Gareth Nyandoro, winner, Emerging Voices 2016 Art Award', Financial Times, September 27, 2016
- Tony Monda, 'Turning junk into masterpieces', The Herald, 20 August 2012: https://www.herald.co.zw/turning-junk-into-masterpieces/
- 8 Diallo, op.cit.
- 9 Ruth Simbao and Masimba Hwati, 'Street Slang and Visual Improv: Gareth Nvandoro's Kuchekacheka', pamphlet distributed at Armory Show, New York, 2017
- 10 Human Rights Watch interview with Otto Saki, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, 21 June 2005: https://www.hrw.org/legacy/ backgrounder/africa/zimbabwe0905/4.htm
- 11 Eric Kushinga Makombe, A Social History of Town and Country Interactions: A Study on the Changing Social Life and Practices of Rural-Urban Migrants in Colonial Harare and Goromonzi (1946-1979), Doctoral thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg 2013 p 155
- 12 Barbara Slaughter, 'Zimbabwe: Mugabe's "Operation Murambatsvina". World Socialist Web Site, 16 July 2005; https://www. wsws.org/en/articles/2005/07/zimb-j16.html

#### SELECTED WORKS



# NF/ Gareth Nyandoro

Education		Selected group exhibitions	
2008	Bachelor of Technology in Creative Art and Design, Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT), Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe	2024	Chimera/Kupinda nemenje mudziva: The School of Harare - Zimbabwe Contemporary Painting, Fondation Blachere, Bonnieux, France
2003	National Diploma in Fine Art, Harare Polytechnic College, Harare, Zimbabwe	2023	Yinka Shonibare: Free The Wind, The Spirit, and The Sun, Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, UK
	xhibitions	2022	I See You, Tiwani Contemporary, London, UK Forever Etched On My Mind, Tiwani Contemporary, London, UK
2024	Pfumvudza, Tiwani Contemporary, London, UK	2019	Art Boool Miami Boook Tiwani Contamporany Miami El LICA
2022	Suburban Bliss, Althuis Hofland Fine Arts, Amsterdam, the Netherlands	2019	Art Basel Miami Beach, Tiwani Contemporary, Miami FL, USA
2021	Maworks, Van Doren Waxter, New York City NY, USA	2018	Defying the Narrative: Contemporary Art from West and Southern Africa, Ever Gold [Projects], San Francisco CA, USA
2020	Ruwa, Tiwani Contemporary, London, UK		Five Bhobh - Painting at the End of an Era, Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town, South Africa
2019	JUGGLING SKILLS, SMAC Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa		For the Love of the Game 1998-2018, Magasins Généraux, Paris, France
2018	Read All About, Van Doren Waxter, New York City NY, USA		Drawing Africa on the Map, Quetzal Art Centre, Vidigueira, Portugal
2017	Stall(s) Of Fame, Tiwani Contemporary, London, UK	2017	All Things Being Equals, Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town, South Africa
2011	Stall(s) of Fame, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France	2016	A Moment of Grace (part of KALEIDOSCOPE), Modern Art Oxford, Oxford, UK
2016	Paper Cut, Tiwani Contemporary, London, UK		
2015	Gareth Nyandoro, Galerie 23, Stichting Beeldende Kunst, Amsterdam, the Netherlands	2015	RijksakademieOPEN 2015, Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam, the Netherlands Pixels of Ubuntu/Unhu, Zimbabwean Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale,
2013	Weaving Life, Gallery Delta, Harare, Zimbabwe		Venice, Italy Trek: Following Journeys, smac Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
2012	Mutariri, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe	2014	RijksakademieOPEN 2014, Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten,

	Amsterdam, the Netherlands Zamboni for the Moose, Juliet Jongma Gallery, Amsterdam, the Netherlands	2010	Artist in Residence, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe 1st Prize, Live & Direct exhibition, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe
2013	Zimbabwean Contemporary Art, Galerie 23, Amsterdam, the Netherlands	2009	2nd Prize for Graphic, The Land exhibition, Gallery Delta, Harare, Zimbabwe
2011	Colour Africa, Gallery Delta, Munich, Germany Expression of Zimbabwe, University of Avignon, Avignon, France	2008	Artist in Residence, Greatmore Studios, Cape Town, South Africa
		2005	3rd Batapata International Artists Workshop, Harare, Zimbabwe
2010	Live 'n' Direct, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe		
	World Art Print Annual, Lessedra Gallery, Sofia, Bulgaria	0-14-	d collegations
2009	Redefinitons II: Gareth Nyandoro, Masimba Hwati, Munyaradzi	Selecte	d collections
2009	Mazarire, Tapfuma Gutsa,	Museur	n of Modern Art, New York City NY, USA
	Gallery Delta, Harare, Zimbabwe	Fondation Sindika Dokolo, Luanda, Angola	
	Ubuntu, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe		Museum, Minas Gerais, Brazil
	,	Rachof	sky Collection, Dallas TX, USA
2008	Thupelo: Found Objects, Cape Town, South Africa	SAM Ar	t Projects, Paris, France
	Silver Jubilee of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe	Zeitz M Africa	useum of Contemporary Art Africa (Zeitz MOCAA), Cape Town, South
2006	Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA), National Gallery of	The Na	tional Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe
	Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe	Fondati	on H, Antananarivo, Madagascar

#### Commissioned projects, awards & residencies

2016	Emerging Voices Award in Art, FT/OppenheimerFunds SAM Art Projects residency, Paris, France
2015	Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten residency 2014-2015, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
2012	Expressions of Zimbabwe, University of Avignon, Avignon, France

