



***Restless Imagination:
Material, Urban Space and Contemporary Art Practices
in Postcolonial Harare***

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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(Art History)

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by

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by means of complete references.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Date: 14 February 2024.

Abstract

The use of everyday objects as art materials has evolved into a contemporary phenomenon in Africa, deeply rooted in specific contexts and possessing global relevance. Despite limited scholarly attention, existing discussions tend to revolve around individual artists or particular mediums. Many discourses are associated with either the prevailing universalist perspective that views the trend as Western avant-garde derivation or the reductionist narrative that attributes it merely to local material scarcity. There exists a critical need to investigate historical genealogies and explore the theoretical frameworks essential for comprehending this phenomenon. Through a combination of visual analysis, fieldwork and interviews, this thesis conducts an in-depth examination of the use of found materials in Zimbabwe, exploring its historiography, mechanism, impact, and visual achievements.

This thesis situates the investigation in postcolonial Harare, the city that profoundly shaped the evolution of the phenomenon of using found materials. Regarding timeframe, this thesis examines contemporary Zimbabwean artists' practices, with a special emphasis on the period following the *Redefinitions* movement in the early 2000s. However, it also explores the pioneering material innovations of Tapfuma Gutsa and Keston Beaton, as well as analyses the importance of the Pachipamwe workshop between the 1980s and 1990s. Among the artists, it highlights those who consistently engage with found materials and delve into their interactions with urban spaces in their practices.

With the city as the analytical framework, this thesis draws on debates centring on contemporary African art and theories about materiality and urban studies. Approaching found materials as the materiality of both art and the city, it reveals a convergence of various interrelated artistic practices in Harare. The multidimensional relationships are manifested in the artistic processes, where the collection of materials, the creation of artworks, and collaboration with diverse urban groups, are intricately linked to urban spaces in Harare. By unfolding this process and emphasising the labour of artists, this thesis transcends conventional perceptions of artworks as mere visual objects, revealing the societal and spatial interactions inherent in artistic practices involving found materials. This thesis also explores the visual and semantical interactions between art and the city, centring on a curated array of artworks which is not merely a visual representation or reflection of the city but also provides critical thoughts on and dialogues with the city, as well as (re)imaginings and aspirations of the urban landscape. The relationship between art and the city is further deepened through

artistic practices, extending beyond the creation of artworks and involving art infrastructure building in Harare.

This thesis conceptualises artists' practices of working with found material as restless imagination, a term drawn from the name of the city, which refers to "no one sleeps" in the Shona language. The restlessness embedded in its naming has characterised the city in various dimensions and across time, with the haunting colonial legacy, ongoing urban crises, ubiquitous movements and the ordinary people's unwavering efforts for liberation and survival. Artists residing in postcolonial Harare also adopt and cultivate restlessness as a working strategy not only to cope with but also to transgress such conditions. The evolution of found materials has been unfolded through a continuous process of restless imagination and innovative manoeuvres, which are embodied in the continual re-imagination of the convention of art materials, the expressive capacities of specific materials, and a commitment to labour throughout the transformative process. This open-ended though productive process of exploration perpetuates and extends to the re-imagination and reclaiming of urban spaces, transforming them into artistic spaces that foster artistic creation and the reproduction of artists and imaginations.

This thesis argues the potential framing and comprehension of Harare city as the site of restless imagination pursued, embodied and materialised by artists through their artwork and engagement with urban spaces. Contemporary Zimbabwean artists have redefined their artistic practices, interacting with the materiality of everyday urban life, urban matters, urban spaces, and urban communities, and, concurrently, the relationship between art and city, art and society. By doing so, they open up space for possibilities to refashion the restless city, negotiate urban citizenship, and recreate themselves as agentive subjects in postcolonial Harare. It could be argued that artists, as urban citizens, akin to other residents grappling with everyday life in the city, also exercise their arts of citizenship through their creative innovations in artistic expression and practices. Therefore, this thesis not only delves into the contextualisation of artistic practices in Harare but also contributes to broader discussions on everyday practices in African cities through the lens of art.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

BAT	British American Tobacco
CCAEA	Centre for Contemporary Art of East Africa
ESV	English Standard Version
FFGH	First Floor Gallery Harare
HCBL	Heinrich's Chibuku Breweries Limited
ICA	Institute for Contemporary Arts
MACAAL	Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden
MAS	Mbare Art Space
MOCCA	Museum of Contemporary Art Africa
NGSVAD	National Gallery School of Visual Arts and Design
NGZ	National Gallery of Zimbabwe

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Preface: Restless Imagination

The Restlessness of Postcolonial Being

In March 2021, after a prolonged night of rainfall, I woke up amidst the bustling traffic in Harare's central district. The city's traffic hum was never at ease. The countless potholes that pockmarked the roads frequently disrupted the flow. Without consciously tuning in, one could recognise the distant sound of a truck manoeuvring around or leaping over a pothole. This is the rhythm of Harare—restless movements, navigating the bumpy and uneven paths. That same day marked the unfolding of my first field trip. Moving around in Harare wasn't easy, devoid of operational ride-hailing services or taxis available for a convenient wave-down. Thankfully, a friend had arranged with Rachel, a multitasking mother of two, to be my driver. Throughout the month, I was traversing the city nearly every day. I had time to look at the urban scenes outside the window. In Harare, everyone on the road was busy with something.

Pedestrians strode briskly, brushing past each other; some street vendors waved their hands to promote mobile data, others carefully curated their roadside fruit stalls; at the transport rank, the kombi bus conductor called out to passengers, and those rushing home sought directions from private car drivers; each day, we drove by various street markets, with clothing, vegetables, groceries, or crafts, manifesting a harmonious chaos. Occasionally, the scent of roasting corn would come in. Once, returning from an artist interview after sunset, I stumbled upon the small square I had passed by during the day, now transformed into a bustling night market with music and smoke in the air. I was aware that behind this liveliness lies an exceptionally high unemployment rate, and the long queues at the bank each day were not indications of financial prosperity but rather an enduring cash crisis. Yet, each time I navigated the streets of Harare, I felt the vibrant energy brimming the city.

However, there were also numerous moments of absurdity. Despite the busy traffic, most traffic lights were strangely malfunctioning. It wasn't uncommon to witness occasional accidents at certain junctions. Some had traffic police directing the flow, and we encountered an enthusiastic one—his every move resembled an open-air performance. Rachel was cautious, especially at crowded intersections, preferring a slower pace. Some drivers expressed their impatience with incessant honking. Rachel did not like the notorious kombi buses known for disregarding traffic rules. Every time they recklessly darted out, R would sigh, "Hah, these guys, they don't care". She would share road stories, like how police

stopped her, withheld her licence, and demanded a fine for reasons such as the headlights being dim. It wasn't until one day, when several companions and I were arrested by a group of police and taken to the station via kombi, that I truly grasped the absurd "creative" ways of hustling. The reason was that we were not wearing masks properly outside the studio, while one of the policemen only had his mask covering his mouth. I asked him if we followed different rules, and he casually replied, "My nose is fine". Each of us paid a \$5 fine at the police station and signed an admission of guilt. Our names were mostly misspelt on the document.

Navigating potholes, nicknamed "disholes", was a daily, if not moment-to-moment, routine. However, around the main road leading to the State House, we were moving on smoothly paved highways. At that point, R would remind me not to roll down windows and gaze around as the surroundings were guarded by armed security. I had thought that in most cities, road conditions in prosperous or middle-class areas would be better. Yet, in Harare, smooth traffic seemed to follow the corridors of power. On the night of pouring rain when I arrived in Harare, I waited at the airport for over an hour as Rachel was stuck on the road because the presidential convoy was en route to pick up the president, who also landed at the airport, coming from his broadcasted vaccination. Another time, I found myself on the sidewalk, forced to halt like all the other vehicles on the road. Everyone waited still and quietly, making way for a minister's convoy to stroll out of the view—such a performance too.

At that time, one of the busiest junctions in the city centre was undergoing construction for a monument dedicated to Nehanda, a female freedom fighter and a spirit medium. The significant investment during challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic sparked considerable debate. The construction, amidst malfunctioning traffic lights and poor road conditions, worsened congestion in this area for months. Adding to the poignancy, Rachel told me there were many homeless children at this site, sleeping under nearby buildings at night. Could they truly find rest? We wondered, was this what Nehanda envisioned when she died during the first Chimurenga against British colonisers? The statue eventually stood over the footbridge, although access was prohibited, said to deter vandalism. Restless spirit.

As the colonial capital of Rhodesia, the city was known as Salisbury with origins in the then British Empire's Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury. In 1982, shortly after Zimbabwe attained independence, it was renamed Harare in tribute to Shona Chief Neharawa, who had inhabited the area prior to the arrival of Cecil Rhodes's Pioneer Column. It was believed that Chief Neharawa and his domain earned the name Harare because his vigilant forces were

always on alert, thwarting any attempts to attack his territory (Kellerer 2017, 99). Harare, in the Shona language, refers to “no one sleeps”.

The restlessness embedded in its naming has characterised the city in various ways and across time. Harare, or Harari, was the name of Salisbury’s oldest township, now Mbare, established around 1908 under colonial rule. Lawrence Vambe (1976), a Harare resident and journalist dedicated to reporting on black community news, recorded the vibrant dynamics of daily survival, culture, social and political life in the township during the colonial era. As he observed, although put into the same box of “natives”, the African residents in Harari were cosmopolitan and represented “every level of human development” (Vambe 1976, 195). At times with a cutting tone, he depicted the dynamic groups without omission: the bottom class of *matanltera* – such as street-sweepers, garbage-collector or tobacco graders; strata level of the middle class and the elite – such as teachers, nurses or journalists like himself; business people – from the brothers who run a transport company to the powerful female shebeeners; cultural practitioners of mixed origins; as well as the political figures who tried to destabilise the very contained structure in which people navigated restlessly for survival.

This city was designed and built around the needs of the settlers. It’s an apartheid city where different geographic spaces not only signified diverse populations but also implied significant disparities in infrastructure and power hierarchies. This segregation also dictated the restless movements as a defining characteristic of urban life. With the combined influence of local development and external contexts, migrants constantly poured in, comprising both European settlers and, more predominantly, African migrant labourers. These labourers’ mobility occurred between rural and urban areas, intra-city between townships and city centres or industrial zones, and extended between the city and neighbouring countries. Along with these migrations were the expanded locations to accommodate African workers. For many people, the nature of these perpetual movements is displacement—whether the case of eviction from their lands or expulsion from the city centre. Displacement was also the condition of native locations, creating unsettled (un)belongings in the colonial city. For a long time, the city had been a temporary abode for many. They did not own the land they stepped on, the properties they squeezed within, or even the trajectory of their movement, let alone this vast city itself, although their sweat and traces had attached to the bricks which nurtured its growth. Moreover, hovering over their daily life was a colossal network of unequal power woven by ideology, legislation, police systems, and municipal administration. Their footsteps might be disturbed at any moment; their homes and livelihoods might be demolished at any time; they must be ready for police raids; they could only stay or move with permission, even

temporarily. The majority of the city's residents had to endlessly negotiate and navigate, transforming this concrete jungle into a liveable porous space.

The past is not settled in the postcolonial city. The renaming of the city does not mean the erasure of its historical sedimentation. Although the neighbourhood's name was changed from Harare to Mbare, it has not seen much wider roads, updated cramped dwellings, or satisfactory improvements in infrastructure. And the city, acquiring the name Harare, has embraced a pervasive sense of restlessness in its urban landscape. Influenced by various domestic and international factors, the postcolonial city has experienced relentless significant and profound urban crises, especially since the arrival of the current century. Infrastructure degradation, economic decline, industrial deterioration, and urban dysfunction paralysed the city. People struggled to find transportation, unattended garbage littered the streets, water and electricity supplies worsened, cholera outbreaks occurred, and essential goods and food were unavailable in the shops. Meanwhile, characterised by authoritarianism and arbitrariness, politics constantly impacts people's daily lives. These experiences are documented in academia, literature and art, and become the collective memory of its urban residents. In such unstable socio-economic environments, more citizens take to the streets, becoming vendors, scavengers, black market operators, sex workers, or creating objects, trying to make anything out of the city. Some are always "on the verge of departure" (Gappah 2009, 213), mothers carry dollies to the national border for food on the table, fathers return to the dim underground mines in South Africa, and young people leave their hometowns, working as precarious labourers in foreign countries as waiters, taxi drivers, or salon operators. These citizens in the diaspora send income back home, while a sense of placelessness becomes part of their life experiences.

Many residents in Harare, especially those in the lower echelons, continue to grapple with an unsettled existence in the city's volatile socio-economic milieu. Municipal mechanisms and police compound their restlessness. Consider, for example, Operation Murambatsvina, an extensive civic initiative executed in 2005 and officially presented as an effort to clean up illegal and informal settlements as well as businesses. The operation destroyed hundreds and thousands of homes, further aggravating the urban crisis. Scholar Maurice Vambe (2008, 5) identifies the hiddenness in such narratives, which diverted attention to debates around informality while concealing the arbitrary and violent nature of the campaign. It was manifested in the fact that many operations took place at night or dawn with little or no advance notice. Operation Murambatsvina, however, is not an isolated incident; it has a deep history traced back to the inception of the township, when natives originally residing in the

city centre or other non-native areas were similarly uprooted from their dwellings. Numerous “clearances” by colonial authorities targeting those classified and stigmatised as “dirty” or “illegal”, were followed by similar municipal operations in post-independent eras from the 1980s, 1990s to the 2000s and more recently. In this restless postcolonial city, what exactly defines citizenship? The social contracts can be disrupted or rewritten at given conditions.

Mahmood Mamdani, in his book *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Colonialism*, wrote, “The form of rule shaped the form of revolt against it.” It is manifested in urban dwellers’ response to the restlessness of the city with a restlessness of their own. This energy is evident in the resistance against and navigation in the oppressing colonial rule and, during the independent period, in their resilience, creativity, strategy, and ceaseless labour given the ongoing crises. In 1980, Bob Marley performed for Zimbabwe’s Independence Day at Rufaro Stadium in the then-unrenamed Harare Township. The lyrics “no more internal power struggle” in the song *Zimbabwe* proved to be an unfulfilled aspiration. Instead, these repetitious lines have demonstrated a prophetic reflection of the persistent reality:

Brother, you’re right, you’re right
You’re right, you’re right, you’re so right
We gon’ fight (we gon’ fight)
We’ll have to fight (we gon’ fight)
We gonna fight (we gon’ fight)
Fight for our rights

If restlessness is the nature of modernity embodied in the (post)colonial city (Muchemwa 2013, 114), then, in a certain sense, restlessness is also the nature of the postcolonial beings in the perpetual process of becoming. On the one hand, it is the existential condition pronounced by the titles of numerous postcolonial writings, such as Tsitsi Dangaremba’s *Nervous Conditions*, Chinua Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*, or Valerie Tagwira’s *Uncertainty of Hope*. On the other hand, it is the human will and impulse uttered by Panashe Chigumadzi’s *These Bones Will Rise Again*, or what Judy (2020, 92) names “restless flying” oriented toward “the inclusive humankind Frantz Fanon calls for near the end of *Les damnés de la terre*”. It is the restless desire for freedom. Thus, the restlessness of Harare is not, or not merely, insomnia, a self-diagnosable symptom; rather, it is the self-stylisation, self-

nourishing, and self-definition of the urban citizens. The postcolonial beings do not rest, but they still dream.

Not exceptionally, restlessness also characterises the living and working conditions of artists in postcolonial Harare. Those who navigated their college years in the 2000s vividly recall the chaos of that era. They routinely faced transportation challenges, struggling to find a ride to campus or waiting for buses late into the night for the journey home. The campus cafeteria also grappled with shortages of meal supplies, and both teachers and students collectively bore witness to the city's daily metamorphosis, experiencing the same struggles for survival. Maintaining regular classes became increasingly challenging and the accessibility of basic artistic materials such as paint, brushes, and canvases emerged as a pressing concern.

A movement emerged in this pivotal moment of art, which was initiated by three fine art graduates from Harare Polytechnic College: Masimba Hwati, Gareth Nyandoro, and the late Munyanradzi Mazarire. The movement revolved around a series of exhibitions named *Redefinitions*, unfolding in 2004, 2009, 2011, and 2013. The inaugural exhibition took place at the amphitheatre in Gallery Delta's backyard. In the most simplistic terms, each artwork in this exhibition by the three artists was created using materials collected from the heaps of garbage on the campus or littered across the streets. This exhibition not only stirred waves but also gave rise to a cascade of related events, exhibitions, workshops, art competitions, and more, serving as a wellspring of inspiration for artists of their peers and the younger generations to redefine art materials. As declared in their manifesto (Hwati 2011b), "It is, however, not without challenges given the sociopolitical background in our immediate geography, and we are proud to have represented with integrity our individual values and aspirations through this medium of art".

Finding resonance in the wider contemporary art in Africa, the use of found materials has since then become a new norm in Harare, rooted in the local context yet possessing global relevance. Note that its origin in postcolonial Zimbabwe could be traced back to artists' efforts in decolonising and disenchanting art materials and practices since the 1980s. The *Redefinitions* movement, however, transformed the relentless crises in the postcolonial city into a catalyst for redefining art materials from a cognitive standpoint. It can be said that, after this movement, the perception of art material was liberated from any restrictions, boundaries or criteria. No longer is there a notion of conventional art material; instead, there is a constantly evolving convention of art materials.

Imagination is the very essence of working with found materials. To echo Joanna Grabski's (2017) reading of *récupération*, an akin artistic movement in Senegal, it's about "imagining objects otherwise". These materials are predominantly used everyday objects with different functions beyond the realm of art, each carrying its own unique history. The scattered refusal in urban spaces presents the denial of value and function, and their overwhelming presence often manifests as a problem that invades the territory of doing and working. Yet it is precisely at the verge, where the confrontation between to be or not to be, cessation and advancing persists, that artists begin to imagine the unimaginable and forge a hyphen connecting these dichotomies. Through a synthesis of imaginative and concrete labour, collaborating with habitual practices, they open up more space and ultimately equalise materials deemed artistic and ordinary.

South African writer Njabulo Ndebele (1986, 1994), reflecting on literature's past and future on the brink of national transformation, advocated for a "rediscovery of ordinary" as a departure from the representation of spectacle. Art historian and curator Thembinkosi Goniwe (2017) engaged with this notion and conceptualised the "postcolonial imagination" in contemporary South African visual art, which "demonstrated a shift away from the culture of resistance to that of innovative expressions and expanded subject matter". The artistic shift in postcolonial Zimbabwe appears deeply rooted in material innovations, influencing various conventional art genres such as sculpture, painting, and performance. Leading to the transformation of imaginations, these changes are not merely aesthetic but also epistemological. Specifically, in South Africa, it entails a shift of the idea that literature and art should serve political agendas towards liberating cultural expression. In post-independent Zimbabwe, this liberation is starkly evident in breaking free from past single-medium aesthetics, particularly "Shona stone sculpture" and its associated narrative of mystified "African art" driven by colonial agents. However, the emancipation of artistic expression doesn't imply detachment from reality. The "rediscovery of the ordinary" was a call for art's relevance to the realities of a new era. In a broader sense, this aligns with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1987, 87) "quest for relevance" in *Decolonising the Mind*, suggesting "a liberating perspective within which to see ourselves clearly in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe". Found materials, integral to the city's materiality, are inseparable from the conditions and dynamics in the urban and the broader context. Besides, the relevance is also reflected in artists' imaginations and re-imaginings of the city itself. Yet, they are not merely passive representations; the work of imagination involves critical thought and labour in its materialisation.

In postcolonial Zimbabwe, the evolution of found materials has been unfolded through a continuous process of restless imagination. In artists' practices, this involves a continual re-imagining of the convention of art materials, a determined re-envisioning of the expressive capacities inherent in specific objects, and an unwavering commitment to labour throughout the transformative process. This open-ended process of ongoing discovery perpetuates, extending beyond objects. The urban spaces also have a marked presence on the lists of found materials, leading to the expansion of artistic practices from creating artwork to the building of art infrastructure. They reclaim colonial architecture and urban decay, transforming them into artistic spaces that foster artistic creation and the reproduction of artists in a more equal sense. Their practices also catalyse the worlding of postcolonial Harare beyond its city borders. In this sense, their restless imagination proves to be productive. It not only yields tangible works and urban realities but also allows imagination itself to be reproduced, generating new ideas, desires and futures.

Most artists, including the initiators of the movement of redefining art materials, belong to the "born-free" generation, a label potentially discrediting and concealing their grievances, their endeavours in the ongoing process of liberation, or their "restless flying", especially after political setbacks. Through imagination and labour, they perforate various boundaries and structures, continually expanding this space of refashioning the restless city, negotiating urban citizenship, and redefining themselves as subjects in postcolonial Harare. Possibilities lie in the dialectical dynamics between the city they (re)imagine and the reality of postcolonial conditions. In this sense, their practices embody an enduring adventure of exploration, innovation, and transition, with restless imagination as practices of freedom.

Chapter 1 Contextualising Found Materials and Locating the Research in Harare

Introduction

As an introduction to the thesis, this chapter endeavours to contextualise the use of found materials in art and situates the research within the urban landscape of Harare. It commences by briefly mapping the phenomenon of utilising found materials in Zimbabwe and Africa, followed by a concise review of scholarly works and other textual references addressing artistic practices involving found materials in Zimbabwe. Subsequently, it delves into discussions regarding the interpretation of this phenomenon in Africa as a derivative of Western modernist art or its placement within the binary framework of Africa versus the West. After clarifying relevant terminology, this chapter defines the scope of the research, specifically focusing on artistic practices in the urban spaces of Harare. Additionally, it underscores scholarly works that have marked my theoretical departures throughout the thesis writing process. The chapter concludes with metaphorically framing an amphitheatre as a means of contemplating both the city and art in a dual perspective.

1.1 The “material turn” in contemporary art of Zimbabwe

The exploration of art materials, especially found and used everyday objects, has evolved into a contemporary art phenomenon in Africa, deeply rooted in specific contexts and possessing global relevance. This “new continental creative identity” (Akpang 2013, 41) could be exemplified by the work of renowned artists from different generations across Africa, such as, to name a few, Ghanaian artists El Anatsui and Ibrahim Mahama, Kenyan artist Cyrus Kabiru, Beninese artist Romuald Hazoumè, Mozambican artist Gonçalo Mabunda, South African artists Usha Seejarim and Igshaan Adams, and Ugandan artist Acaye Kerunen, as well as the many Zimbabwean artists discussed in this thesis.

As one of the most highly acclaimed contemporary artists in Africa and also in the world, El Anatsui¹ is known for his large-scale sculptures created from discarded daily items, especially aluminium liquor bottle caps. It should be noted that the artist also engaged in experimentation with various mediums, such as wood, clay, and concrete, particularly during

1 For more information on El Anatsui's practices and artworks, see: <https://elanatsui.art>.

the nascent phase of his career spanning the 1970s to 1990s. Anatsui expressed a penchant for broadening his material vocabulary, with a persistent quest for elements imbued with a profound connection to human hands (James, 2008, 38). Elucidating his fascination with liquor bottle tops, he remarked, “When I saw the bottle tops, what struck me was that they are from bottles that have been used... People have really drunk from these bottles, and therefore, human hands have left a charge on them.” (James, 2008, 38) Consequently, despite the significant cultural connotations embedded in the visual patterns of his works, referencing West African textiles, the significance of materials in the genesis of his artwork remains paramount (Binder 2008). His fabricated abstractions and innovative use of materials have found entrance into the work of many artists of younger generations.



Fig 1.1 El Anatsui, Fading Cloth, 2005, Aluminium liquor bottle caps and copper wire,
320 x 650 cm

Source: <https://elanatsui.art/artworks/el-anatsui-fading-cloth-2005>

The span of these art materials of found, used and everyday objects is extremely broad and intricately intertwined with specific social histories, spaces and times. Artist Gonalo Mabunda employs distinctive materials in his work: the remnants of arms recovered from Mozambique’s civil war that concluded in 1992, including bullets, firearms, rockets, grenades and so on. He uses these war materials to create artwork, expressing anti-war sentiments and addressing relevant issues such as healing. Renowned Beninese artist Romuald Hazoum  creates installations and sculptures with plastic jerry cans that are commonly used to contain

fuel in West Africa. His works, especially the masks series, delve into multifaceted themes of local economy, politics of representations, African culture, and the relations between Africa and the West. Ibrahim Mahama, a representative artist of the younger generation, is distinguished for his characteristic use of jute sacks. The material is deeply entwined with global trade, labour dynamics, and migratory issues. His large-scale, site-specific installations manifest an interactive engagement with sociocultural history, architectural landscapes and geographical contexts. His recent artistic endeavours involve a wider range of material collections with social and historical significance, such as sewing machines, shoeboxes, worn clothes, etc. South African artist Usha Seejarim incorporates a plethora of domestic objects, such as brooms, safety pins, and irons. Through these materials, she explores issues related to gender, domestic labour, and women's experiences.

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in this phenomenon and a discernible shift in approaching art through the lens of materiality, among numerous art exhibitions, institutions and events. In 2019, the Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (MACAAL) in Marrakech, Morocco, hosted a group exhibition titled "Material Insanity".² This exhibition brought together over 30 artists from the African continent and its diaspora to elucidate the significance of objects and materials in artistic practices across Africa. The above mentioned artists such as Ibrahim Mahama, Cyrus Kabiru and Igshaan Adams participated in this exhibition. So did Zimbabwean artists Moffat Takadiwa and Takunda Regis Billiat, whose work will be further discussed in this thesis. The Wits Art Museum (WAM) in Johannesburg, South Africa, has contributed to the discussion through exhibitions such as *Beyond the Readymade* (2018) and *Encounters with the (Im)Material* (2023).³ Both exhibitions were curated by art historian Alison Kearney, whose research examines the use of found object by a selection of South African artists. Particularly noteworthy in these exhibitions at WAM is the dialogue between contemporary practices and art from earlier traditions, as well as the discourse on materiality versus immateriality.

At the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022, the Uganda Pavilion, making its debut at the biennale, received special mention. The recognition was particularly directed towards Acaye Kerunen's choice of sculptural materials which illustrates "sustainability as a practice and not

² The exhibition was curated by Meriem Berrada, Artistic Director at MACAAL and Head of Cultural, and ran from 26 February to 22 September 2019. For more information, see <http://macaal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/FINAL-Material-Insanity-MACAAL-Press-release-FINAL-compressé.pdf>.

³ More information about the exhibitions can be found on Wits Art Museum's official website: <https://www.wits.ac.za/wam/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/>.

just a policy or concept”⁴. Acaye Kerunen’s primary art materials in her works consist of woven natural fibres such as baskets, mats, table placemats, bags and other domestic objects. These materials, deeply rooted in Ugandan culture and prevalent in everyday life, are predominantly handcrafted by local female artisans. Kerunen’s artistic practice and creative output are characterised by collaboration with these women, expanding the societal significance of her art. The artist underscores the collaborative process in her work, not only to highlight the labour of these women but also to question the dichotomy between fine art and craft as defined by West-driven art discourses⁵.



Fig 1.2 Installation view of some of Acaye Kerunen’s work at the Uganda Pavilion, 2022
Photo by Lifang Zhang

Indeed, the significant exploration of art materials could also be observed at the Zimbabwe Pavilion at the 2022 Venice Biennale. Curated by Fadzai Muchemwa, the exhibition *I Did Not Leave A Sign?*⁶ featured four Zimbabwean artists. Among the artists, Wallen Mapondera, Kresiah Mukwazhi, and Terrence Musekiwa all engage with found

4 For more information see the official statement: <https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/biennale-arte-2022-official-awards>.

5 For more information on the artist’s practices, see Acaye Kerunen’s personal website: <https://www.acayekerunen.com>

6 For more about the exhibition, see exhibition review titled *Dance with the Sign: Zimbabwean Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale* by Lifang Zhang: <https://www.artharare.com/post/dance-with-the-sign-zimbabwean-pavilion-at-the-59th-venice-biennale>.

materials in their practices and use everyday objects with non-artistic functions which possess profound social-historical meanings. Mapondera predominantly employs commonplace food packaging, specifically egg crates (Fig.1.3), while Mukwazhi primarily utilises highly intimate materials such as women's underwear garments, wigs and textiles. Some of their material selections and artworks will be further discussed in Chapter 4. It is worth noting that numerous artists who employ found materials have represented Zimbabwe at their previous national pavilions at the Venice Biennale⁷. For instance, Masimba Hwati and Gareth Nyandoro, together with their mentor Chikonzero Chazunguza, were showcased in 2015. They are among the artists who played a pivotal role in the “material turn” of contemporary Zimbabwean art emerging at the beginning years of this century. Other artists integral to this research, such as Tapfuma Gutsa and Georgina Maxim, have also represented Zimbabwe in the Venice Biennale. Additionally, Moffat Takadiwa, slated to represent Zimbabwe in the 2024 version, is also one of the focal artists in this thesis. These artists demonstrate the phenomenal use of found materials in the contemporary artistic landscape in Zimbabwe.



Fig 1.3 Wallen Mapondera, *Chisungu II*, 2022, egg crates, 180 x 110 x 110 cm

Photo by Lifang Zhang

⁷ For more information about Zimbabwe's previous national pavilion at Venice Biennale, see Chikukwa (2020).

The evolution of this phenomenon in post-independent Zimbabwe traces its roots back to the material innovation and experimentation of pioneering artists in the 1980s and 1990s. The extensive use of found material that emerged in the early twenty-first century was catalysed by the movement initiated by artists including Masimba Hwati, Gareth Nyandoro and the late Munyanradzi Mazarire. This trajectory will be specifically analysed in Chapter 2. Arguably, found materials have become a predominant artistic medium in the Zimbabwean art scene since then. The 2000s witnessed numerous art exhibitions, workshops, and competitions revolving around mixed-media or found objects, which even found their way into the instructional framework of the National Gallery School of Visual Arts and Design (NGSVAD), the art school affiliated with the National Art Gallery of Zimbabwe. In recent years, an increasing number of artists employing found material have gained recognition both locally and internationally. The emerging artists of younger generations are also joining this trend, contributing to the ongoing evolution of this artistic language.

The array of materials employed by Zimbabwean artists also spans a broad spectrum, permeating various art genres and finding a ubiquitous presence in most studios and exhibitions in one form or another. Of the materials, a substantial portion comprises discarded everyday items, yet they transcend mere refuse, encompassing domestic things to industrial objects. They constitute not only physical mundane objects but also extend into the realms of sonic and architectural dimensions. Artists have adeptly harnessed found materials to probe diverse themes in their artworks, ranging from notions of joy, labour and remembrance, youth and spirituality, as well as weightier social issues encompassing gender, war and colonial legacy. The creative processes in different artists' practices involve the application of various techniques, such as assembling, weaving, drilling, collage, sewing, stitching, printmaking, as well as drawing, painting, and so on.

The phenomenal use of found materials also blurs the boundaries of conventional genres and mediums. This is evident in the exhibition *Five Bhobh – Painting at the End of an Era* (2019 at Zeitz MOCCA),⁸ featuring contemporary paintings from Zimbabwe by around 30 artists. What should be noted is that the exhibition also underscored the significance of “material matters” (Bumhira et al. 2020) which led to the shift in the perception of painting and the basic form as pigment on a surface displayed on a wall. As the curator stated,

⁸ The exhibition was curated by Tandazani Dhlakama and ran from 12 September 2018 to 31 May 2019. For more information, see [https://zeitzmocaa.museum/exhibition/exhibitions/five-bhobh/#:~:text=Five%20Bhobh%20-%20Painting%20At%20the%20End%20of%20an%20Era%20is,kombi%20\(minibus\)%20in%20Zimbabwe.](https://zeitzmocaa.museum/exhibition/exhibitions/five-bhobh/#:~:text=Five%20Bhobh%20-%20Painting%20At%20the%20End%20of%20an%20Era%20is,kombi%20(minibus)%20in%20Zimbabwe.)

“painting is resilient. ... because the medium is flexible.” (Dhlakama 2019, 19) In some instances, paint is either blended with or replaced by alternative materials such as fabric, silicone and other garments, no longer confined to the traditional framed canvas presentation. The exhibition also includes artists consistently exploring found materials in their practices, such as Admire Kamudzengerere, Gareth Nyandoro, Kresiah Mukwazhi and Wallen Mapondera, whose work will be further discussed in this thesis. In light of the enduring and pervasive nature, coupled with the significance and profound impact, it is imperative and relevant to conduct an in-depth examination of this art phenomenon.

1.2 Literature review, locus and departures

Despite receiving significant attention, there is a noticeable scarcity of scholarly research on this art phenomenon in Zimbabwe as briefly mapped above. It is necessary to highlight the following aspects regarding literature references in this thesis. Firstly, the existing literature consists of a restricted number of articles, primarily focused on case studies. Therefore, the textual references regarding Zimbabwean art in this thesis encompass not only academic articles but also extend to contents from media contributions, exhibition materials, gallery publications and certain online sources. Secondly, this thesis also draws from academic works on the phenomenon of using found materials in other African countries. Due to the extensive geographical and thematic coverage of these studies, cited material will be discussed in context instead of being summarised here. This research, while focusing on Zimbabwean art as a case study, inherently positions itself within the broader conversations on contemporary African art. Thirdly, this thesis is enriched by insights drawn from interdisciplinary literature, particularly in the realms of urban studies, theories on materiality, and discussions of the intersections between city and art. Within this introductory chapter, emphasis is predominantly placed on art-historical literature on the phenomenon of using found materials in Zimbabwe, with theoretical departures articulated in subsequent sections. Reviews on additional references are strategically dispersed across chapters, each approaching diverse thematic dimensions. Specifically, the second chapter will discuss the notion of contemporaneity regarding the art of Africa, the third chapter will engage with theoretical frameworks surrounding materiality, and the fifth chapter will review the knowledge production concerning contemporary art infrastructure and independent art spaces in Africa. Notably, urban studies, particularly in the context of Harare’s colonial history, built

environment, crises, and transformative processes, are duly acknowledged and woven into the fabric of this thesis.

1.2.1 Writing on found materials in Zimbabwe

Academic research concerning artistic practices involving found materials in Zimbabwe has predominantly emerged and published in recent years (Mapondera 2019; Shaw 2021; Mubhuti 2022; Zhang 2019, 2022; Mpofu, Mamvuto, and Mupondi 2023). Artist Wallen Mapondera's Master of Fine Arts (MFA) thesis focuses on his artistic project wherein commonplace product packaging serves as the primary material. He traces the inception of found materials in Zimbabwe and exemplifies the societal responses in the materials and works of his peer artists Moffat Takadiwa and Gareth Nyadoro. Mapondera highlights the relationship between urban chaos caused by the government's cleanup movement, Operation Murambatsvina, and the utilisation of found materials by artists, exemplified by his artwork. Mapondera's insight is crucial as this specific urban event was rarely discussed in relation to found material movements in Zimbabwe. Barnabas Ticha Muvhuti ⁹(2022), a Zimbabwean art historian, contributes to this discourse through an article published in *Third Text*, which also focuses on Mapondera's work, specifically *Pahukama* (2018). Muvhuti's analysis of the work's main component, a road sign sourced from Harare, and the thorough discussion of its socio-political context provide a paradigm for subsequent scholars discussing the significance of materials in art. My article, published as a book chapter, is a case study on Moffat Takadiwa, focusing particularly on his utilisation of Chinese consumer waste (Zhang 2022). Developed from my MA thesis, this research was the initial foundation of my doctoral thesis. The contribution of this article lies in initiating a preliminary exploration of the artistic process and its engagement with urban spaces.

Valerie Shaw's article (2021) centres on the *Live 'n Direct* exhibition held at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe (NGZ) in 2010, a pivotal event in the evolution of the found material movement in the 2000s. Despite its significance, the exhibition curated by artist Tapfuma Gutsa has seen limited discussion or documentation. Shaw's insights, as one of the exhibiting artists at the time, are invaluable. This exhibition will be further discussed in chapter 2. The published dialogue by Bumhira et al. (2020) highlights the role of textiles in Zimbabwean art,

⁹ It is important to note that both Wallen Mapondera, Barnabas Muvhuti and I were all studying at Fine Art Department at Rhodes University from 2018 to 2019, respectively pursuing MFA, PhD and MA degrees. I benefited from our conversations and engagements.

specifically within the original category of painting, discussing various cultural and social meanings behind different textiles. An article by Njabulo Mpofu, Attwell Mamvuto, and Joseph George Mupondi, was published in 2023. It is based on interviews with five artists and field analysis. Their findings discuss the motivations behind these artists' use of found materials and the materials' contributions to the production of meaning in their works. The article's strength lies in its emphasis on the artists' voices, albeit without an in-depth discussion of the contexts of the corresponding viewpoints. In summary, these studies share a conspicuous emphasis on the interaction between materials and artworks with societal realities, touching upon the relationship with urban spaces, particularly in Harare. Despite the limitations, they provide diverse perspectives for researching this phenomenon in Zimbabwe, establishing a preliminary foundation for future exploration.

A handful of media articles have brought attention to the use of found materials as an art trend in Zimbabwe, including Celia Winter-Irving's (2006) *Mixed Media – New Approach to Sculpture*, Knowledge Mushohwe's (2012) *Zimbabwe: The Lost and Found Art* and Tony Mhonda's (2013) *Art of Recycling: How It All Began*. These articles keenly capture the phenomenon and, without in-depth examination, they primarily offer general descriptions and occasional mentions of significant names and events. Tony Mhonda's article, in particular, scantily addresses the *Redefinitions* series as a movement that will be analysed later in Chapter 2. In terms of the terminology and contextualisation of artistic practices, Mushohwe's article, for instance, interprets the Zimbabwean phenomenon as a derivation of Western avant-garde Found Object Art. Nyadzombe Nyampenza, an experienced writer with a prolific background in art journalism and criticism, has extensively covered exhibitions of Zimbabwean artists, including solo and group exhibitions where found materials are the primary medium. Many of Nyampenza's articles have been published in media outlets such as NewsDay Zimbabwe¹⁰ and Contemporary And.¹¹ Additionally, art researchers such as Fadzai Muchemwa, Barnabas Muvhuti, and I, have also contributed reviews, exhibition statements, or features related to artistic practices involving found materials which can be found online. Other significant materials include archives, catalogues, and interviews associated with art exhibitions and artists' activities, as well as monologues published by galleries for individual artists. Of particular importance is the manifesto on the *Redefinitions* movement written by Masimba Hwati (2011b), which will be the focal point of analysis in

10 NewsDay Zimbabwe: <https://www.newsday.co.zw>

11 Contemporary And: <https://contemporaryand.com>

Chapter 2. These materials not only contribute to the documentation of art events but also, as dynamic discussions and immediate responses, form part of the ongoing evolution of this art phenomenon at a discursive level. These texts also constitute a portion of the references in this thesis.

The brief literature review on the art phenomenon in Zimbabwe reflects not only the scarcity of academic research but also certain limitations within existing studies. Firstly, there is a lack of systematic investigation into the emergence, evolution or genealogy of this phenomenon from an art-historical point of view. Early pioneering contributions by artists such as Tapfuma Gutsa and Keston Beaton are merely mentioned by name without any substantive discussion. Significant artistic events from different periods are left unaddressed. Furthermore, the *Redefinitions* series exhibition in the early twentieth century that possesses remarkable significance to the occurrence of this phenomenon is largely overlooked in discussions. Secondly, the contexts of the phenomenon such as social history and urban space are not thoroughly examined. For instance, material scarcity is mentioned as the catalyser of the wide use of found materials in both academic research and media articles yet without in-depth exploration. Questions regarding how artists responded to this societal reality and the interactions between artistic processes and urban spaces where they derive tangible and thematic materials require further elucidation. Particularly noteworthy are the case studies by Muvhuti and I, which provide the possibility of in-depth investigation and contextualisation of specific materials from different perspectives. Thirdly, these articles touch upon theoretical exploration, concepts, and terms, but they remain undeveloped. Some are even vague and problematic in contextualisation. For instance, certain articles not only borrow but also place Zimbabwean artistic practices within the Western art historical lineage related to *Readymade* or *Found Object*, a point that warrants reconsideration. The relationship between art practices in Zimbabwe and the West needs further examination, a challenge frequently encountered in the study of contemporary African art, which will be discussed in the next section. This point also leads to the fourth aspect, which is the lack of exploration into the interaction of the Zimbabwean phenomenon with the broader global context of art, especially with other interconnected African or Southern countries. This thesis aims to address some of these shortcomings and contribute to the theorisation and art historical writing on this phenomenon.

1.2.2 Material matters: thinking beyond “Found Object”

It is necessary to converse on the tendency in art discourses which regards the use of everyday objects in contemporary African art as an extension of European modernism (Akpang 2021). In Western art history, the origin of Found Object is often traced back to the cubist collage works by Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) which incorporated non-conventional art materials. The earliest references include works such as *Guitar* (1912), which utilised cardboard, string, and wire, and *Still Life with Chair Caning* (1912), which incorporated oilcloth and rope (Waldman 1992, 25). Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) fostered this artistic trend with his work of *readymade*, a adaption of term coined by the artist, “which shaped the reception of artists’ use of found objects and materials, usually industrially produced or associated with mass production, as a reflection on, often a rejection of, subjective expression and taste, the medium and craft of painting, material creation, artistic originality, and the commodification of art.” (Mehring 2019, 60) *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), which included a bicycle wheel attached to a stool was his first assisted *readymade* (Mehring 2019, 60). Duchamp’s most well-known *readymade* work was *Fountain* (1917), featuring a urinal signed by the artist, and the object was “stripped of its real meaning when placed in a new context” (Waldman 1992, 139). Numerous modernist movements such as Dadaism, Futurism, Russian Avantgarde, and Surrealism adopted the use of found objects as an artistic strategy (Waldman 1992). Western Found Object art is often associated with narratives such as “anti-art” and “anti-aesthetics” (Iversen, 2004, 45), or as an “anti-conventional avant-garde ideology of ‘Art for Arts’ Sake” (Akpang 2016, 19). However, as noted by Akpang (2016) and Kearney (2016) and the analysis further presented in this thesis, these narratives do not necessarily apply to contemporary African art practices involving found objects and materials.

In the aforementioned discussions on Zimbabwean art involving found materials, regardless of localised reading of specific cases, the tracing back to European avant-garde art occurs loosely and ambiguously. The sentiment is not unique to this particular instance of found materials, as similar Africa/West dichotomies have been debated across different periods in the art of Africa. It reflects the Eurocentrism prevalent in the field of art, leading to the neglect or exclusion of other conventions, contexts, and narratives. This issue is intricately tied to the geopolitical dynamics of knowledge production and discourse, which has been challenged by scholars from the Global South who advocate for *Provincialising Europe* (Chakrabarty 2008), *Epistemologies of the South* (de Sousa Santos 2015) and *Changing Theory: Concepts from the Global South* (Menon 2022) to foster thinking and

theorisation that departs from Eurocentrism points of view. The field of art has also witnessed a rise in the discourse of multiple modernisms and the reorientation of artistic practices and discourses. Pertinent examples include the Nka Roundtable organised by Chika Okeke-Agulu (2010), which reflects on the scholarship of contemporary African art, Miguel Rojas-Sotelo's (2011, 153) exploration of "cultural subjectivity in the Global South", and Ruth Simbao's notions of "situating Africa" and "strategic southernness" (Simbao 2017a; Simbao et al. 2017b). These endeavours seek to challenge Eurocentrism, shift the geopolitics, and promote knowledge production from the Global South, thereby contributing to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of artistic practices and discourses in a global context.

Another issue within the Africa/West binary is the overlooking and suppression of African artists' agency in their interactions with and contributions to the global art world. This is exemplified by the numerous debates surrounding the notion of abstraction in the works of African artists over time. In the early post-independent years of Nigeria, artists adopting abstract forms were accused of endorsing artistic colonisation (Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu 2009, 41). South African black artists of the 1980s embracing abstraction were criticised for "American Imperialist influences", with doubts raised about its relevance in the contexts of South Africa (Martin 1991). Similarly, abstract works in the 1990 Thapong workshop¹² group exhibition in Gaborone, Botswana, faced criticism as "selling our artistic birthright for a mess of very colourful and energetic pottage" (Seidman 1990, 29). Pertinently, Sunanda K. Sanyal (2014) highlights that the selective recognition of El Anatsui as a "global" artist is based on the politics of inclusion, where multiculturalism is used as a pretext to position Anatsui within the history of Western art, disregarding his earlier innovations and trivialising the significance of differences. In other words, whether it is critique or celebration, African artists are often considered passive recipients, being influenced, assimilated or even "contaminated", as if they lacked agency or their subjectivity was inherently fragile. In contrast, Western artists such as Picasso borrowing from African masks are credited as innovative (Blier 2019). Scholar Susan Hiller (2015, 55) argues that this "borrowing" echoes colonialist attitudes, suggesting an increasing recognition by European artists that the artistic resources in the colonies were just as available for exploitation as their mineral and agricultural resources. The narrow binary framework ignores the individuality and agency of African artists and the complexities of specific temporal and spatial contexts. Challenging such perspectives, many art historians emphasise the multidirectional circulation, exchanging

12 A part of the Triangle Workshop which will be further discussed in next chapter.

and sharing of ideas (Okeke-Agulu 2021, 12; Goniwe 2022). It is crucial not to simplify and reduce the “dialectic between cultural traditions and artistic archives” into passive influence or a mere extension of a singular lineage (Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu 2009, 14).

Following such insights, rather than grappling with the question of whether Western Modernism can account for the artistic practices in African countries, this thesis seeks to bypass the Africa-West dichotomy and analytical framework. It does not imply a complete delinking from Western art or ignoring relevant connections and dialogues, but to decentre Western art history or discourse as the starting point. It emphasises thinking and theorising from Zimbabwe, Africa, and the South¹³. This aligns with Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s (1987, 94) inquiry, “from what base do we look at the world?” It is a repositioning of relevance. Furthermore, it is crucial not to reduce the “international” or “global” solely to the West in discussions of contemporary art of Africa in relation to art beyond the continent. In other words, one should contemplate diverse or broader frameworks of reference. For example, similar phenomena in other non-Western countries hold equal or even greater significance and relevance for understanding artistic practices in Zimbabwe. The discourse on Senegal’s *Récupération* art movement, utilising salvaged and reworked materials, the genre of Found Objects Art in Nigeria as defined by Akpang (2021), and China’s Material Art argued by Wu Hung (2019), all offer enlightening perspectives on the relationships between these movements or phenomena and local societal realities, artistic traditions, and their connections to the global art world. Such discussions contribute to a more insightful understanding of the inception of Zimbabwe’s *Redefinitions* movement and the widespread utilisation of found materials that followed.

Before delving into more specific discussions, it is necessary to clarify the used terminology, as it pertains to the definition, positioning, and scope of the research subject. Various terms have been employed in different contexts in studies addressing the phenomenon of using everyday objects in Zimbabwe and other African countries, such as “Mixed Media” (Winter-Irving 2006), “Found Object (Art)” (Mushohwe 2012; Mapondera 2019; Akpang 2021), “Readymade” (Muvhuti 2022), “Recycled Object” (Shaw 2021), “(Art

13 The “South” or “Global South” as a debated and diversely mobilised term, is often traced back to twentieth-century anticolonialism, the 1955 Bandung Conference, Tricontinentalism, and the Non-Aligned Movement, and is associated with Third World, postcolonial states or undeveloped countries. It is not the intention to discuss the South at a theoretical level in this thesis. However it is important to note that, in this thesis, the South does not denote a fixed location but a framework of reference, drawing from these geopolitical and historical relations, to shift from the West-driven art discourses.

of) Recycling” (Mhonda 2013; Schwartzott 2019), “Junk Art” (Swigert-Gacheru 2011), and “Transformations” (Binder, 2008), among others. These terms emphasise particular materials, focus on specific artistic processes or highlight the effects, and a few draw from discourses within Western artistic conventions. Art historian Clement Akpang, who exhibits a consistent interest in found objects in contemporary African art, especially Nigerian art, has begun to discuss related terminologies in his 2013 article *Found Object, Recycled Art, Readymade or Junk Art? Ambiguity in Modern African Art*. Akpang (2013) highlights the issues of classification within these ambiguous terms, whether it involves attempting to cultivate a unique identity that excludes other similar practices, introducing ambiguity in contextualisation, or lacking a localised understanding of practices within African contexts. He employs Found Object Art as a genre and advocates for grounded reading in specific contexts.

This thesis uses the terms “found materials” and “found objects”¹⁴ interchangeably, referring to materials that artists collect from everyday life and urban environments for their creative work. Specific materials, objects, items, or categories will be named in contexts, be they bottles, fabric waste or tyres. Although materials contribute to artwork in various ways, the significance of found materials in the generation of artistic meaning could be roughly categorised into three types in relation to the dialectic between visuality and materiality. However, it should be noted that material does not necessarily refer to only physical objects. For example, sound from urban spaces is also considered as found material by some artists and contributes significantly to the meaning production of their works.

First, the original objects used as art materials have undergone a substantial transformation, rendering them visually unidentifiable in the completed work. For example, Jurio Rizhi’s practice mostly revolves around the use of discarded plastic beverage containers, bags and other plastic items. As a result of the process of shredding, melting and mixing with paint, it becomes challenging for audiences to identify the materials used in Jurio Rizhi’s work, let alone recognise the original plastic objects. Plastics have been transformed to create visual images in his work, replacing paint, acrylics or other conventional pigments. However, it does not necessarily mean that the materials have been entirely “absorbed” and do not contribute to the meaning of Rizhi’s abstraction work due to the agency of materials as further unpacked below.

¹⁴ When capitalised as “Found Object,” the term specifically refers to an art genre, especially within Western art history.

Second, while being processed to create visual imagery, the found materials remain recognisable and play a role in the work's semantic connotation or visual representations of the subject matter. For example, Wilfred Timire adopts worn polypropylene bags used for groceries to create realistic representations of urban youth. Getting close to his work, one can easily identify the materials. The bags, incorporated into the composition of images, are associated with youth's lives in Harare and play an integral part in capturing the conditions of youthhood, as further elaborated in Chapter 4.

Third, art materials predominantly determine the meaning of the artwork. This category of material significance could be exemplified by Georgina Maxim's work which is mostly created from worn garments sourced from her families or friends. With stitching as the key technique involved in her work, the costume pieces at times maintain the original formation and contribute essentially to the meaning and subject matter in the artist's exploration of memory in relation to women's experiences

These three types are associated with artists' strategies and methods in dealing with materials in their work, which not only emphasise the necessity of focusing on art materials but also draw our attention to the creative process, a crucial part of understanding the materiality of art which will be further discussed in chapter 3. Indeed, the notion of material refers to substances intended for further treatment. To become artworks, materials undergo various forms of processing, which can include remaining untreated, and they hold significant meaning in the artists' creations and expressions. Lange-Berndt (2015:12) argues that,

Material generally denotes substances that will be further processed, it points to the force of production at the time. From a critical perspective, the term 'material' describes not prime matter but substances that are always subject to change, be it through handling, interaction with their surroundings, or the dynamic life of their chemical reactions. It is therefore a political decision to focus on the materials of art: it means to consider the processes of making and their associated power relations, to consider the workers – whether they are in factories, studios or public spaces, whether they are known or anonymous – and their tools and spaces of production.

In this regard, the renowned art historian and curator Wu Hung (2019, 15) serves as a source of inspiration with his insightful concept of *Material Art* within the context of contemporary China from the 1980s:

Material Art always entails artists' consistent use of unconventional materials to produce works, in which material, rather than image or style, is paramount in manifesting the artist's aesthetic judgment or social critique. Certain special materials, either intimate or generic, natural or artificial, are selected and "adopted" by artists and given agency to become their private means of making art over a significant period of time. These artists use these materials to make painting, sculpture, and installation, and to conduct performances. As a result, such material substances transcend these codified art genres to become a 'super-agent' in their works.

Furthermore, this thesis underscores the role of artistic materials as the focal and entry point for understanding contemporary art practices in Zimbabwe. As elaborated in the next two chapters, the progress from breaking away from conventional art materials in the 1980s to redefining the convention of art materials in the 2000s signifies that materials serve as the substrate and thread for contemporary artistic innovation and evolution in Zimbabwe. Innovation, as Mavhunga (2017:46) suggested in his exploration of Chimurenga as an idea and laboratory, pertains to the transformation of surroundings. In this study, artists' innovation encompasses their novel approach and strategies to redefine material and material conditions. This thesis analyses the material innovations in Zimbabwe from various dimensions, exploring how artists create new aesthetics and visual languages and redefine artistic practice and art's relationship with society.

1.2.3 Locating the study in Harare

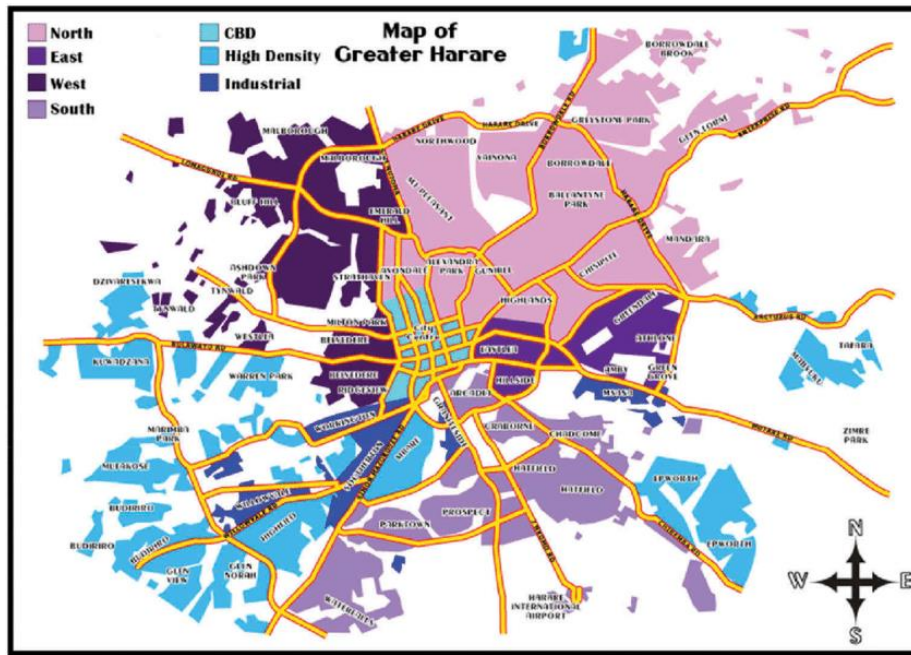


Fig 1.4 Map of Harare

Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-Harare-showing-land-uses-concentrated-across-the-city-Source-Surveyor-General_fig2_333703757

The scope of this research focuses on artistic practices in Harare that involve the use of found materials. From a historical point of view, the evolution of using found materials corresponded with the urban transitions of Harare, especially its phenomenal proliferation in the first decade of this century. While it can be traced to prior artistic explorations in the 1980s and 1990s, its significant emergence, catalysed by the movement propelled by some artists, was interwoven with the transformations in the urban landscape of Harare under crisis as further discussed in Chapter 2. This artistic trend is still developing today and has been entangled with Harare's built environment, landscape, consumption practices and globalisation. Thus, the artists' works also speak to the lived experience of the city they inhabit. From a spatial point of view, these artistic practices are intricately linked to and embedded in the physical spaces in Harare, encompassing the sources of materials, the artistic creative process, the presentation of artworks, and the derived interventions in the urban space itself. Consequently, approaching the study from an urban perspective is not only necessary but also provides the possibility for novel theoretical frameworks and perspectives for understanding these artistic practices. As artists work and reside in various regions of Harare, while their practices exhibit intra-city mobility, this thesis does not impose specific geographical constraints on the urban spaces. Some regions frequently mentioned in the text,

such as the CBD or city centre, Mbare neighbourhood, Chitungwiza, and Ruwa, among others, all fall within the administrative coverage of the city of Harare unless otherwise specified. Considering the mobility of artists and their connections to Harare, the research also extends its exploration to peripheral regions such as Mutare.

Temporally, the primary focus is on the phenomenon of the widespread use of found materials that emerged in this century. However, in the process of exploring its origin and development, it also delves into the practices of some artists and art events from the 1980s and 1990s in post-independence Zimbabwe¹⁵. The periodisation will be situated in and discussed in relation to the broader context of contemporary art in Chapter 2. This thesis uses the term “postcolonial” to indicate the time period and, more importantly, to highlight the colonial legacy which not only permeate and haunt the city but also influence and enter into artists’ work and practices. This aspect is discussed in the thematic discussion in different chapters, such as infrastructural conditions since colonial urban planning discussed in chapter 5. Some key scholars and their works mark my thinking trajectories and theoretical departures as below.

Art historian Alison Kearney (2016) conducts an investigation into the use of found objects within contemporary South African artistic practices, with particular attention directed towards artists Usha Seejarim, Penny Siopis, and Alan Alborough. Kearney underscores the dynamic ontological status of objects as they transition from quotidian realms to the context of art, traversing various social domains in the process (2016, 12). The social-anthropological lens employed within Kearney’s study offers valuable insights into the materiality of objects. It inspires an exploration of the nuanced meanings attributed to objects within their respective contexts, specifically in relation to the urban spaces of Harare, as well as their significance in the meaning production of artwork. While Kearney (2016, 21; 196) advocates a shift of perception of found object beyond the anti-art gesture as in the early twentieth century European modernism, she locates contemporary South African artists’ practices in the longer genealogy of iterations of the avant-garde that traced back to Picasso and Duchamp.

Akpang’s (2013, 2016, 2021) discussions on related phenomena and discourses within contemporary art in Nigeria and Africa, while also conversing with the Western modernism, emphasise a localised and different genealogy in culture-specific context. He traces this phenomenon within Nigerian artistic conventions in both modern and pre-modern periods

¹⁵ Zimbabwe gained independence on 18 April 1980.

which predates Western Avant-Gardism, highlighting the importance and possibility of presenting a local lineage (Akpang 2016, 83). His research prompted me to further contemplate the specific context and evolution of material innovation in contemporary Zimbabwe. In terms of approach, Akpang (2021) considers Found Object as an artistic genre and reads its Nigeria lineage while debating in and on the Africa/West framework. Notably, this thesis does not discuss found material as an art genre that denotes a type and the contents of art. The use of found materials in Zimbabwe blurs the boundaries of different conventional art genres and finds its entrance into different mediums such as painting, which is mentioned previously. This thesis considers found materials as the focus and thread of analysing Zimbabwean artists' consistent explorations of art materials and artistic practices engaging with urban spaces. Besides, a local genealogy is one of the dimensions of unpacking this phenomenon of using found materials. This research advocates a shift beyond the Africa/West binary and places greater emphasis on initiating theoretical and analytical frameworks grounded in the specific context.

Locating the research in Harare, urban study becomes a crucial field for reference, especially discussions on the city's history, built environment and socio-economic dynamics, which will be expounded upon in subsequent chapters in specific. In a broader conversation, this thesis also joins the body of scholarship revolving around the artistic practices in African cities (Diouf 2008; Grabski 2017; Gurney 2016; Pieterse and Simone 2013; Till 2013). Joanna Grabski's book *Art World City: The Creative Economy of Artists and Urban Life in Dakar* (2017), not only holds relevance to my research subject but also inspires me to consider the relationship between art and urban spaces from more diverse perspectives, transcending the notion of the city merely as a site or location. The structure of Grabski's book has also prompted me to organise my thesis around different dimensions of the interactions between art and the city. According to Grabski (2017, 3), an "art world city" is a "multiscalar, urban site for artistic production, mediation, and transaction", and she proposes this paradigm to account for the "imbrication of the creative economy and the urban environment as well as the interplay of local and global dynamics shaping Dakar's art world". In the current international art landscape, Harare inevitably functions, to some extent, as an "art world city". However, given the differences in the art infrastructure, market, and other circumstances between Dakar and Harare, this thesis places emphasis on, instead of

“worlding”¹⁶, the becoming of an “art world city”, but the working conditions, processes, and dynamics of artistic production and practices in the city as further discussed in different chapters. Particularly concerning this phenomenon, the emphasis lies on how artists make use of and bring about changes to the city through their imagination, labour, and practices.

In the later stages of my thesis writing, Zimbabwean literature works and literature studies have provided me with valuable insights. Writers and artists share the urban experience, and their concerns often overlap. In particular, Kizito Zhiradzago Muchemwa’s (2013) doctoral thesis *Imagining the city in Zimbabwean literature 1949 to 2009* deepened my understanding of Harare as both a tangible and an imagined city. Muchemwa’s analysis of literary texts resonated with me significantly, especially his consideration of the city as a site of subjectivity and his emphasis on the city’s haunting colonial legacy. His reading of metaphors and writing style has also inspired me to place a greater emphasis on the importance of imagination in the artistic practice process, even if the focal point is physical materials.

Focusing on artistic practices in Harare, this study approaches the interaction between art and the city from historical and spatial, imaginative and visual, as well as material and tangible dimensions. How does this phenomenon of using everyday objects as art materials come into space? What are the multiple relationships between artistic practices and urban spaces? By exploring these questions, this thesis aims to join and contribute to the broader conversations on found materials in the following aspects. Firstly, the thesis delves deeply into the local social and art-historical contexts and traces the genealogy of this phenomenon in Zimbabwe. Throughout this investigation, it also explores its interconnections with broader contexts of contemporary art in and beyond Africa. Secondly, employing an interdisciplinary perspective that integrates urban studies, material theory, and knowledge from art history, the study proposes novel pathways and analytical frameworks for comprehending artistic creation utilising found materials. Thirdly, the research places importance on the agency of artists, the locality of the study, and the relevance of theory, engaging in broader discussions about knowledge production and methodological concerns in the realm of contemporary art in Africa and the Global South.

16 For more discussions on “worlding”, see Roy and Ong (2011) and specifically the imbrication of local and global art Dakar, see Grabski (2017).

1.3 Methodology and procedure

The primary methodologies and procedures in this thesis include interviews and studio visits during my field trips in Harare, conversations through online platforms, visual analysis, and the acquisition of relevant archival materials from art institutions and individuals. Field research was conducted at varying durations in March 2021, January 2022, and April 2023. The field trip and subsequent collection of materials in 2021 laid the foundation for this thesis. Across these diverse trips in Harare, I witnessed the growth of artistic practices, changes in working conditions, and the evolution of the research subject of found materials itself. It also brought to light elements that remained stubborn, unchanged and haunting continuously as further discussed in the thesis. While these methods, particularly interviews, are commonly employed in research, they reveal the collaborative and processual nature of knowledge production on contemporary art practices.

1.3.1 Towards a process of *knowing with*

As scholars Carol Magee and Joanne Grabski (2013) have noted, interviews are inherently intertwined with the scholarly endeavours of African art studies. Their edited volume, titled *African Art, Interviews, Narratives: Bodies of Knowledge at Work*, compiles a compelling collection by artists, curators, art historians and anthropologists, illustrating how interviews can yield fresh interpretations and foster innovative critical insights and knowledge. They position interviews as bodies of knowledge rather than merely exchanges of information, which possess the capacity to do productive and constitutive work (Magee and Grabski 2013, 1). This thesis adopts their proposition and reads interviews and conversations with artists as bodies of knowledge that interact with and produce other bodies of knowledge, embodying the process of *knowing with*, a concept proposed by the sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos¹⁷. In his discussion on the epistemology of the South, de Sousa Santos stressed the need for different forms of knowledge and advocated for “knowing with” rather than “knowing about” those being researched (Bausch et al. 2020). This concept of *knowing with*,

17 Professor Boaventura de Sousa Santos presented a lecture at Rhodes University as part of an interdisciplinary and collaborative seminar program, addressing on “Southern Epistemologies: Thinking beyond the Abyss for a Transformative Curriculum”. For more information, see Bausch et al. (2020) and <https://www.ru.ac.za/latestnews/archives/2019/internationalscholarreignitesdecolonisationatjournalismseminaries.html>.

as pointed out by Baasch et al. (2020, 2), “creates a form of collaboration that stresses mutuality, understands intersectionality, and demands humility”.

Due to the paucity of publications on most of the artists researched in this study, interviews become crucial points of reference and sources of knowledge in this thesis. In my fieldwork conducted in 2021, I interviewed the majority of the artists under study, along with conversations with a few art educators and art institutional personnel. Additionally, interviews with several artists were supplemented during trips in 2022 and 2023. I also followed up with artists on their practices through long-distance means facilitated through online meeting platforms and social media. The majority of these interviews were semi-structured, engaging with the artists’ careers, specific artworks being analysed, the artists’ urban experiences in Harare and their practices of working with found materials.

Given the centrality of materiality to this thesis, considerable and extensive time is dedicated during interviews with artists to discuss materials and artistic processes. As these materials are often intricately linked to the artists’ personal experiences and the proximate urban and social contexts, the interviews not only reveal factual information but also encompass their perceptions, interpretations, and imaginations of the materials. Such knowledge is crucial for the generation of meaning in their artworks and subsequent production of knowledge in my research, engaging in dialogues with the bodies of knowledge acquired from texts, documents, and other artists. In this thesis, artists’ voices extracted from interviews are extensively employed to substantiate assertions and, on occasion, as exemplified by the epigraphs in Chapter 4, to establish dialogues between my interpretative analyses and the utterances of the artists. Thus, interviews are also a strategy and approach which underscores one of the key aspects of this thesis, namely the emphasis on artists’ agency. Moreover, as Magee and Grabski (2013, 5) highlight, knowledge production involving interviews is characterised by its open-ended and continuous nature, wherein the revisiting of artworks and interviews is undertaken in conjunction with other streams of knowledge and new conversations. In this sense, interviews are also collaborative and cumulative processes (Arnoldi 2013, 131). These iterative acts of learning, unlearning and relearning, facilitated through dialogues with the artists, delineate the methodology employed in my research.

Most interviews were conducted in artists’ studios in Harare, manifesting the process of *knowing with* the artists in space and time. Studios are artists’ authoritative spaces of both art making and narrative making or of what Senegalese artist Abdoulaye Ndoeye describes as “putting sound on objects” (Grabski 2017, 98). In this sense, the studios are emphasised as

sites where artists exercise agency in the process of knowledge production. During the conversation, the artists might stand up to demonstrate a certain technique, unpack a specific piece or explain how they collect some of the materials. Sometimes, they would demonstrate documents or photos to show a significant event in which they participated or an important figure they have worked with. These materials and acts intertwine with the conversations, creating comprehensive narratives about their work and practices. Beyond the interviews, I would also spend time together with the artists in the studios, experiencing the space and having small chats on things that might not be directly related to their art practices. In some cases, they would play the music they listen to when they are creating work or introduce me to their neighbours who pass by as on any other day. Such closeness in time and space in the studio space allows me to further my understanding of their practices and materials, their working spaces and immediate environments, as well as their lives and experiences.

Studios are also visual sites with artworks in different states and materials collected from different places, which extends the visual analysis in this thesis from mere artwork to space. Visual analysis is a primary methodology in the field of art. Centred on the form of artistic works, it examines elements such as visual language, imagery, colour, and composition and, when necessary, establishes connections with other intertextual artworks. In this study, materiality serves as the crucial gateway to an artwork, which will be further discussed in the following chapters. For instance, analysing the specific materials employed involves an investigation into their quality, texture, sources of origin, properties, dimension and the visual elements they encompass. It also involves understanding the way artists deal with the materials. The relationship between these characteristics of the materials and the visual narratives of the artwork is essential for comprehending the significance of materiality in the meaning production of artworks. The materials, their manipulation processes, resulting outcomes, and the tools and techniques utilised by the artist are presented in the artist's studio. As I engage visually with the space, I begin to place a heightened emphasis on the artist's creative process and the labour involved therein. Looking through a broader lens, the lifespan of an artist's work or a body of works unfolds across my various field trips. For example, during numerous visits to Moffat Takadiwa's studio, I have traversed paths strewn with toothbrush handles, which later evolved into the installation work *Walk of Shame* showcased at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, which will be further elucidated in Chapter 3. Studio visits allow me to read and know the work *with* the artist before "a progressive removal from its own reality, from its origin" (Buren 1979, 53). Among the studios that I visited, a considerable number were collective and independent art spaces initiated by artists.

The exploration of these spaces holds paramount significance for my comprehension of the spatial configurations, organisational frameworks, and artistic processes inherent within the collective studio.

In addition to conducting interviews, I also engaged in site visits with several artists to explore the urban spaces where they gather materials. For example, Jurio Rizhi facilitated a visit to the recycling centre at Magaba, where he procures plastic material, and introduced me to his collaborators who worked at this place. Together with Moffat Takadiwa, I visited a landfill in Chitungwiza where he collected his materials. Johnson Zuze guided me through a walk around his neighbourhood in Chitungwiza, elucidating the intricacies of his wires collection. Zacharaha Magasa provided insight during a visit to one of the roadside stores at Domboshawa where he acquires old tyres. The iterative process of engaging with these spatial contexts and the journeys undertaken to these locations have deepened my understanding of the urban mobility manifested in their practices and enriched my understanding of their material-gathering practices and the pronounced emphasis on the artistic process in this thesis, which will be further unpacked in Chapter 3.

During my field trips in Harare, I gathered a handful of archival materials at the NGZ and Gallery Delta in Harare. Particularly noteworthy are the materials from the *Redefinitions* series of exhibitions in the 2000s at Gallery Delta: this is a landmark event in the use of found materials in Harare and will be discussed further in the next chapter. At some studios, artists also willingly shared their personal documents. Through online platforms and email communications, I have collected relevant materials from art institutions beyond Harare. The majority of the archival materials from the 1980s and 1990s on Tapfuma Gutsa's and Kesten Beaton's practices were obtained through communication with the respective art institutions mostly outside the continent. Some individuals have greatly assisted me in archives, especially Elsbeth Court, who generously provided materials she collected related to the Triangle Workshop. Valerie Shaw also shared information and images with me related to the *Live 'n Art* exhibition, which took place in the National Gallery of Harare in 2010. These archival materials and documents, intertwining with interviews, constitute essential sources of knowledge in my thesis.

1.3.2 Being in the city: the amphitheatre as a metaphor

Being in and experiencing the city is an implicit yet vital method in this thesis. Although it does not generate materials such as documents and interviews for direct analysis, the

experience essentially permeates my fieldwork, reflections and writings throughout the research. Experiencing a place may involve auditory, visual, sensorimotor, olfactory, tactile, symbolic, and conceptual dimensions. These correlated sensescape are also used by urban sociologists to make sense of city life at the experiential and sensory levels (Borer 2013). The embodied and emplaced experiences of being in the city could be illuminating in understanding “the practice of everyday life” (De Certeau 1988), as well as artistic engagements with urban spaces. It is effort of “shifting the geographies of sensing, believing and knowing” (Mignolo 2013).

As further unpacked in this thesis, the proximity to urban life in artists’ practices requires a deeper understanding of locality that extends beyond mere spatial and temporal dimensions. It encompasses the history, reality, and the intricate experiences and ambivalent emotions of people in and about the place. Moving through the city and observing the scenes outside windows have provided me with a more tangible understanding of the city itself, the environments where artists live and work, and how they navigate urban spaces. These trips of moving, seeing, listening, and pulsing have deepened my understanding of the city’s rhythm and the contrast between the relentless movements and the slowness of progress common in many artists’ labour-intensive creative processes. My experiences become the entry points and path through which I cognise the city. In the words of Lindsay Bremner (2010, 33), an architect and scholar, “It speaks of a way of being in the world that is essentially nomadic—and perhaps part of feminine topology—and that, through movement, seeks to make connections between things”. This is evident, for example, in the cartography of my research pathways illustrated in Chapter 5. The “maps of unexpected” (Vergès 2013, 39) reveal the novel dynamics in the urban art landscape of Harare.

The amphitheatre at Gallery Delta¹⁸ could serve as an instructive metaphor for making sense of experiencing the space in relation to understanding the interplay between art and the city in this thesis. In April 2021, I went to the gallery which was located in the residential area near the CBD of Harare, intending to dig the archives of some relevant exhibitions but I drew a blank without indicating that in advance. Besides, the gallerists, the late couple Derek Huggins and Helen Lieros, were about to select some fresh artworks for an upcoming exhibition. This process was taking place in the semi-open amphitheatre (Fig. 1.5) that held the first *Redefinitions* exhibition, the landmark event of redefining art materials in Harare. Constructed in the early 1990s, the amphitheatre embraces the main exhibition building from

18 The gallery was closed in 2022.

its back. With a small wooden door, the theatre is attached to and also separated from the indoor gallery space. On one side of the theatre is an iron railing gate opening to the gallery's front yard, and on the opposite side is a tiny tunnel leading to a washroom by the bounding wall. One could hear the busy traffic on the street next to the amphitheatre.



Fig 1.5 The amphitheatre at Gallery Delta, Harare, 2021

Photo by Lifang Zhang

I did not leave. During the two hours, I stood quietly at most time in the amphitheatre, watching, observing, listening and having small conversations in between. The young emerging artists and some veterans brought their artworks into the amphitheatre through its side gate. Lieros, who was also an artist, would sit on the cement steps, look at each work closely, answer or ask questions, encourage the artists with passion or critique harshly, consult Huggins on occasion, and then make decisions. The selected works would then be labelled and transferred to the indoor gallery space for exhibition and promotion to domestic and overseas collectors.

With the breeze, the subtle movements and the intermittent dialogues, I deeply felt the emotions pulsing through the air: expectation, uncertainty, heaviness, delight, and at times embarrassment. It was at these moments of sensing the space and feeling others that I started to grasp the significance of this amphitheatre, not just for the gallery but also in the history of contemporary Zimbabwean art. Many contemporary Zimbabwean artists, if not most, had their debut exhibitions at this gallery in the past few decades, as in one gallery staff's words,

“they start from here, emerge from here”.¹⁹ Since the early years of this century, the amphitheatre has been a space for selecting works, mentoring young artists and conducting workshops. *Redefinition I*, marking the movement of using found materials, was shown in this semi-open theatre when the white cubes were not yet ready to accommodate the works. The *Found Object Clinic* workshop conducted by Masimba Hwati and attended by many of his contemporaries, as further discussed in Chapter 2, was also taking place in this backyard space. The amphitheatre symbolises an incubator space and a gateway for the found material movement.

Thus, the amphitheatre became a portal, an interface, a passageway for art travelling from studio to gallery space. It is also a space of redefining and a passage of becoming. Watching an artwork passing through the wooden door reminded me the notion of “courtyard” from Sharjah Biennial 11. Rooted in Islamic culture, the courtyard is an architectural component and space between the door and the house. “It is not the place of the Muses, or the solitary place of study, but a place where inside and outside meet – where people live and pass each other. It is also a place where cultural identity is rooted” (Mignolo 2013, 8). Japanese curator Yuko Hasegawa (2013) used courtyard, commonly seen in Sharjah, as her curatorial anchor for Sharjah Biennial 11 to create space for artworks that are embedded in and engaging with local memories and histories.

Thinking with the concept of courtyard, the amphitheatre could also be framed as a metaphor although it does not have the loaded historical and cultural significance. It is a liminal space with two entrances that link to the inside art space and the front yard opening to the non-art urban street. As a space of emerging and a locale of process, it blurs boundaries. Yet, you cannot see it from either the outside public space or the indoor gallery. You can only experience it by being in the space. The amphitheatre not only draws my attention to the significance of locations and spaces but also reminds me of “going both ways” (Hasegawa 2013). Reading found materials as the materiality of both art and the city, how do they encounter, intervene, disturb, reject and transform each other? How do the artists source materials from the city and, in turn, impact the urban spaces they are interacting with? How does art represent and provide different ways of experiencing and imaging the city?

19 A personal conversation with staff member Admire Matsvisi when I visited the gallery.

1.4 Paths and Scape

As an introduction to the study, this chapter contextualises the research of found materials and locates it in postcolonial Harare, unpacking relevant debates, terms and methodologies. The second chapter focuses on the evolution of found materials in Zimbabwe. It traces the lineage of artists who pioneered material innovations, followed by the extensive experimentations with everyday objects in the 2000s, and the subsequent institutionalisation of this visual language. Note that a local genealogy spotlights the artists' agency, examining how they engage with the social conditions and the evolution of visual art in Zimbabwe, as well as the global art scene. It particularly illuminates the Redefinitions movement which turned the urban deterioration into catalysts for redefining art materials in the backdrop of the social-economic crisis.

The third chapter elucidates the correlation of artistic practices with found materials and the city from a spatial perspective. Focusing on the materiality of art, it adopts the "social life of things" (Appadurai 1986) as a method and analyses the transformation of found materials from used everyday objects to works of art. As artists collect and deal with found materials in the city, the transitions are embedded in the urban spaces of Harare. It unfolds the art-working process in the city and foregrounds artists' labour and activities in the process of materialisation, which entails a complex network of social relations and interactions between things, people and the city.

The fourth chapter analyses the imagination of the city in artworks created from found materials, featuring curated themes that revolve around the idea of "restlessness" in and of the city. Specifically, the selection of work discusses topics including the precariousness of home and the (un)housing issue, youth and the informal sector, the gendered city as well as the notion of citizenship in Harare. With art materials sourced from the city, this direct linkage highlights the profound interplay between artistic imaginations and the urban environment, establishing a more rooted and grounded connection to the creation of urban imageries.

The fifth chapter investigates artists' practices in reimagining and (re)creating the city as a space working for the production and reproduction of art and beyond. In tandem with the development of the found materials movement is the flourishing of platforms, spaces and institutions established by artists. This thesis draws on the knowledge production of independent art spaces in the broader context of Africa and explores artists' initiatives in building art infrastructures in Harare, a postcolonial city that lacks sufficient art institutions

while undergoing persistent crises. It investigates the significance of these practices in changing the conditions of artistic creation, reshaping the power dynamics within the art ecosystem, and transforming the built environment in the city.

To conclude the thesis, the six chapter reviews and reflects on the contributions and constraints from three aspects: art historical writing on found materials in Africa, city as the analytical framework of analysis, and its methodological exploration of the collaborative dynamics inherent in the process of knowledge production. It also points to avenues for future scholarly inquiries, such as further exploration in tracing the deeper history of local trajectories beyond post-independent era and engagement with the broader conversations on African cities.

Chapter 2 *Redefinitions*: Towards a Local Genealogy of Redefining Art Materials

Introduction

Visual art in colonial Rhodesia was first driven by the missionary art centres such as Cyrene Mission and Serima Mission, which focused on painting and wood carving (Morton 2013). Since the late 1950s, stone sculpture, or “Shona Sculpture”²⁰, had become the dominant art form in the country. It is often considered a modern art movement as well as an invented art tradition under Rhodesian rule (Zilberg 1996; Sibanda 2004; Muvhuti 2023). Promoted by Franc McEwen, the founding director of the Rhodesian National Gallery, stone sculpture was often associated with mysterious narratives or “spirit in stones” (Zilberg 1996, 155; McEwen 1972). Other art communities and centres focusing on stone sculpture included Tom Blomefield’s Tengenenge Art Centre, the later Chapungu Sculpture Park, and so on. The stone sculpture convention dominated the Zimbabwean art scene for decades and attained fame in the international art market with some seminal exhibitions taking place in Europe, such as Musée Rodin in Paris and Institute for Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London. The art scene, characterised by single-media aesthetics, then experienced profound thematic and material shifts throughout the liberation war and subsequent independence era.

In the current art scene in Zimbabwe, found material has become a prevalent medium. Yet, how does this phenomenon come to be? To explore the question, this chapter provides an analysis from a historical point of view, tracing the local genealogy in contemporary art of Zimbabwe from the 1980s. This chapter also complicates the notion of “contemporary art” beyond merely temporal indication, interacting with the evolution of this art medium in the context of Zimbabwe. Note that a local genealogy does not necessarily imply an exclusive framework or the reversal of other narratives as discussed in Chapter 1: rather, it is a story that emphasises the agency of local artists, investigating how the art movement was motivated by its social realities and the evolving of visual art in the specific context of Zimbabwe.

To begin with, this chapter traces the work of pioneering artists and driving events in the 1980s and 1990s. I highlight the work by Tapfuma Gutsa and Keston Beaton, who played

20 The history of stone sculpture, also known as “Shona Sculpture”, has been debated by many scholars, see Zilberg (1996), Sicilia (2010), and Muvhuti (2023).

crucial roles in the shifts of art materials in Zimbabwe. Gutsa was considered one of the foremost second-generation stone sculptors, following the well-recognised Joram Mariga, Nicholas Mukomberanwa, Henry Munyaradzi and so on. However, he departed from this convention and became one of Zimbabwe's leading innovative artists in many aspects, which will be further discussed in this chapter and Chapter 5. This chapter focuses on his experiments in mixed media that broke away from the stone sculpture tradition and bridged contemporary forms in relation to the broader context of the regional and global art world. Keston Beaton was another significant figure who worked prominently with found materials before 2000 and inspired many younger artists in their practices. This chapter explores his practices in disenchanting art materials and analyses his signature musical instrument series sculptures. The Pachipamwe workshop and its underlying network are also discussed as an important event in material experiments in Zimbabwe. This chapter then unfolds the imbrication between the phenomenon of using found material and the urban conditions in the beginning years of this century in Zimbabwe. The series exhibition *Redefinitions*, initiated by Gareth Nyandoro, Masimba Hwati, and the late Munyanradzi Mazarire, is highlighted as a landmark event in the movement of redefining art materials. This chapter then unpacks the institutionalisation of found materials as a visual vocabulary in Zimbabwe.

2.1 Becoming contemporary

2.1.1 Tapfuma Gutsa and the Inception of Mix Media

What you must understand is that I've been lucky. The things I did as a child are the things I am still doing ... So the idea of mixed media, I don't think it was a conscious decision. It was collective memory, recollections coming together and finally materialising it.

— Tapfuma Gutsa (2021)

Born in 1956 in Harare, Tapfuma Gutsa has been practising as an artist for over half a century. Reflecting his path into art, Gutsa (2021) recalled that "it is not like I consciously decided I want to be an artist". He was passionate about "making things" with materials such as clay when he was a child. After graduating from St. Ignatius College in Chishawasha, Gutsa entered his father's construction company but left after two years as he found it limiting to merely work with architect's drawings. In 1976 he took a job as a photographer

and survived on taking pictures for people in the countryside for two years. In 1978, Gutsa's cousin introduced him to an art school after seeing Gutsa carving living trees. Gutsa sold his caravans and photography equipment and went to Driefontein Mission School, where he started his professional career as an artist.²¹

Located in Mvuma in the Midlands province, Driefontein Art School was established by Swiss Bethlehem Mission in 1972 under the guidance of Father John Groeber, who was also the founder of Serima Mission school. Groeber primarily taught drawing and woodcarving at Serima using instructional techniques based on life drawing (Morton 2013, 241). He introduced West African and Congolese masks as models to his students for aesthetic inspiration (Chikukwa 2015, 18). Trained by Father Groeber, the foremost Serima carver Cornelius Manguma then became the head of Driefontein art school. Gutsa was taught to sculpt in wood by Cornelius Manguma in accordance with Groeber's techniques, alongside a large number of younger trainees (Morton 2013, 242; Gutsa 2021). In September 1979, when Gutsa (2021) returned to school from holiday, seventeen young people from the surrounding villages were found killed by the Rhodesian state on the campus.²² They buried the bodies and the priest decided to close the school.

Gutsa moved to Salisbury (now Harare) after the abrupt termination of his student life following this tragedy. He became a frequent visitor to the National Art Gallery, which at the time promoted predominantly stone sculpture. With his technical grounding and talent, Gutsa soon moved into stone sculpture. In 1981, Gutsa approached Gallery Delta²³ for a solo exhibition when he was working in Tafara neighbourhood, Harare. Helen Lieros and Derek Huggins, the gallerists, turned down his collection of stone sculptures, stating, "We are not interested in Shona sculpture." (Gutsa 2021). Pondering their question "where is your voice", Gutsa created a new body of work and exhibited it at Gallery Delta in March 1982 alongside Nicholas Mukomberanwa and Jannie Jordan. In this show, he debuted a series of works with mixed media, mainly wood and stone. With these experimental works, this exhibition surprised the audiences as they had not "seen this thing before in the country" (Gutsa 2021). Because of this show, Gutsa was awarded an art scholarship from the British Council. He

21 Unless otherwise specified, the biographical information about Gutsa in this section is drawn from my interview with the artist in Harare in 2021.

22 According to Gutsa (2021), the guerrillas who fought against the Rhodesian state sometimes came into the village and gathered the young people for indoctrination. These young people were found in a group and were shot by the state force.

23 Founded in 1975, the gallery also played an important role in Zimbabwean art. The gallery's role as an art institution in the evolution of found material movement will be further discussed in section four in this chapter.

found himself in London later in the same year, pursuing an art degree at City and Guilds London School of Art until 1985. During his time in London, Gutsa was exposed to a wide range of different art styles and new ways of art training. He was soon recognised as a prominent sculptor and a leading vanguardist²⁴ artist in the country after he returned to Zimbabwe.

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, artists from African countries gained more attention and exhibited increasingly in the international arena, beginning roughly with Jean-Hubert Martin's *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) in Paris and Susan Vogel's *Africa Explores* (1991) in New York (Okeke-Agulu and Hassan 2008, 156). Tapfuma Gutsa was also among the continent's significant up-and-coming artists within this trend. He was involved in many seminar art exhibitions and events in the 1990s. He coordinated the first Pachipamwe international art workshop in Zimbabwe and participated extensively in the Triangle Art workshops in different countries, an important event in the evolution of contemporary African art and in pushing material experiments as further discussed in this chapter in section 3. Gutsa was selected from the touring exhibition *Contemporary African Artists: Changing Tradition* exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1990, to represent arts from Sub-Saharan African countries at the Venice Biennale for the first time alongside El Anatsui, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Nicholas Mukomberanwa and Henry Munyaradzi.²⁵ Some scholars highlighted his efforts in artistic explorations demonstrated in this travelling exhibition. Kate Ezra (1990, 79) observed the way in which Gutsa's treatment of materials "not only created an extraordinary visual and tactile experience, but also contribute to the expressive quality of the sculptures—the graceful movement of *The Mask*, *The Dancer*, the tender intimacy of the two figures in *Ari and Farai*, and the sense of organic growth in *Plant Form*". Salah Hassan (1992, 95, 97) pointed out "the quest for a new identity" reflected in Gutsa's use of local materials, techniques and colours and further cited the artist who stated "I wouldn't want my art to be taken as Shona property", a claim the artist made on several occasions.

According to Morton (2013, 250), Gutsa energised Zimbabwean sculpture in many ways with his treatment of surfaces being particularly influential. The stone sculpture convention

24 I use the term "vanguardist" to acknowledge Gutsa's innovative and experimental practice, especially in relation to the context of Zimbabwe. It does not refer to any specific art movement or styles.

25 The itinerary of the touring exhibition: The Studio Museum in Harlem in New York from January to May 1990; Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum in Philadelphia from July to September 1990; Chicago Public Library Cultural Center in Chicago from January to March 1991. The African Countries pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1990 was curated by Kinshasha Holman Conwill and Grace Stanislaus. As part of the African Countries Pavilion, Gutsa received an Honourable Mention.

driven by McEwen favoured polished surfaces. However, Tapfuma Gutsa's intervention led to a new trend with his unpolished stone sculptures (Morton 2013, 250). Besides, he also broadened sculpture's subject matter, which prompted sculptors of his generation and later to shift from the motif of "the spirit of stone" (Morton 2013, 250). Gutsa's artistic expression of social issues and urban lives went further with his experimental forms and mixed materials beyond the established aesthetic rules of single media sculptures. His work through the 1980s and 1990s presented a strong sense of social concern.

The Future, Gutsa's retrospective exhibition at the NGV in 1997,²⁶ was a testimony to his formal exploration and a profound evocation of the social realities in Zimbabwe and beyond. No comprehensive archives could be found on this exhibition except two reviews and scattered information mentioned in a handful of other writings when some works were exhibited elsewhere. One centrepiece in this exhibition was *African Genesis* (Fig. 2.1), which had been exhibited at the *Genesis* exhibition²⁷ in Emsdetten, Germany. As Deketeke (1997, 8) vividly depicted when he entered the National Gallery:

Your attention is immediately grabbed, if somewhat ghoulishly, by a strange assortment of corpses. Closer inspection reveals an interesting order, the corpses all have their feet pointed towards a volcano and are arranged in a circle. The tiny wrapped bodies of two children are especially chilling. A wheelbarrow with United Nations markings is carrying a corpse and forms part of the installation.

Gutsa was concerned with the conditions in Africa around the 1990s. The mummified human forms, radiating outwards in a star shape with heads furthest towards the cosmos, spoke to the "spectacle of death in Africa ... Ethiopian famine and the Rwanda genocide. When the massacres were taking place in Rwanda — passive people being hacked to pieces with machetes — a volcano in Zaire erupted" (Gutsa cited in Huggins 1995, 15). The title and

26 There is no archive on this exhibition at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe. The artist himself also does not hold any documental materials. For more information about exhibition besides the discussed works below, please see Marks (1997) and Deketeke (1997).

27 A group exhibition by artists from Germany and Zimbabwe taking place at Galerie Münsterland in 1995. Other participants were Keston Beaton, Felix Droese, Jupp Ernst, Luis Meque and Peer Christian Stuwe.

concept *Genesis* is a recurring theme in Gutsa's work, and refers to the dialects of death and the birth and reproduction of life²⁸ (Gutsa 2021).



Fig 2.1 Tapfuma Gutsa. *African Genesis*, 1994, Mixed media.

Source: <https://www.kunstforum.de/artikel/genesis/>

Another work in the exhibition, *Hwange* (1994) (Fig. 2.2), is an installation in memory of the Hwange mine disaster in 1972. On 6 June 1972, a series of methane gas explosions ripped through the underground workings of Wankie No. 2 Colliery in Wankie (later known as Hwange). 427 miners from Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia), Zambia, South Africa, Angola, Malawi, and Costa Rica lost their lives in this violent disaster. On 11 June 1972, a mass memorial service took place in a nearby stadium and over 5,000 people attended to pay their tribute. However, all (except 4) of the miners' bodies were left where they were, 7,000 feet below the surface in the underground shaft²⁹. As shown in the image, “using metal casts of coffin parts and rusted piping, Gutsa constructs a three-tiered A-frame which simultaneously recalls a sarcophagus and a sacrificial altar. The chains and small pile of coals at the base suggest not only the slave-like conditions of the miners but also their fiery

28 His recent *Madamba* series also partly explores the theme. A solo exhibition including this series was hosted by First Floor Gallery in 2021. For further information on the exhibition, see: <https://artafricamagazine.org/giants-playthings-tapfuma-gutsa/>.

29 For more information, <http://rhodesianheritage.blogspot.com/2012/03/agonny-of-wankie-july-12-1972.html>

release” (Marks 1997, 4). This work was definitely a “haunting tribute to miners” (Deketeke 1997, 8). Other works in this exhibition sparked debates about socio-political issues such as democracy, borders and colonial frustrations on the continent.



Fig 2.2 Tapfuma Gutsa. *Hwange*, 1994, mixed media

Source: Gallery Magazine

This exhibition at the National Gallery raised questions about the social realities of Africa in relation to its past, present and future through artwork. Meanwhile, with the experimental forms and mediums, the audiences were challenged by the “avant-garde and the rebel ... being asked to redefine our concepts of Zimbabwean sculpture” (Deketeke 1997, 8). Overall, it is crucial to acknowledge Gutsa’s pioneering contribution in establishing venues for physically and thematically exploring art materials in order to trace a local genealogy and gain a more in-depth understanding of the current art phenomenon of using found materials.

2.1.2 Becoming “Contemporary”: Tapfuma Gutsa’s *Odd Coupling*

In his chapter in the book *Mawonero/Umbono: Insights on Art in Zimbabwe*, Zimbabwean museum curator and researcher Farai Chabata (2015) contextualises the vital period of social changes and art transformation from the 1980s entering the new millennium. Chabata (2015,

81) opens the text with a proposition that “the notion of contemporaneity in Zimbabwean art could be attributed to the advent of inception of mixed media in the country”. Although the essay did not provide a well-defined clue about the inception of mixed media, this argument nevertheless confirmed the predominance of single-media aesthetics and the transformative significance of mixed media in art in early independent Zimbabwe. Actually, “mixed media” was still claimed to be a “new approach to sculpture” even in art reviews from early 2000s (Winter-Irving 2006, 178).

In this sense, if we read Chabata’s claim in light of Gutsa’s pioneering work with mixed media discussed previously, we could possibly identify Gutsa as one key figure contributing to the contemporaneity, or the process of becoming contemporary, in Zimbabwean art. However, considering the basic dictionary definition of the word “contemporary” which means belonging to the same/present time, this assertion would lead us to further questions as it reveals that being contemporary is beyond merely being in the current time. Indeed, what does “contemporaneity” entail in the arts of Zimbabwe and beyond? Pertinently, in the context of Africa, concerns about the notion of “contemporary” are addressed by art historians and curators such as Sidney Kasfir, Chika Okeke-Agulu and Okwui Enwezor who have contributed significantly in this field. Art historian Terry Smith, who consistently grapples with the meaning of contemporary art, is a common reference in these scholars’ discussions. It is necessary to provide a glimpse into Smith’s work, especially his influential publication *What Is Contemporary Art?* (2009), in order to understand these Africanist art historians’ reading of Smith’s work and their propositions on contemporary art of Africa in relation to broader theoretical discussions.

Terry Smith’s contentions pertain to the question of temporality, which entails considerably more than merely embracing the present. The concerns of contemporary art are often addressed “not only by each work of art to itself and to its contemporaries but also, and definitively, as an interrogation into the ontology of the present” (Smith 2009, 2). Thus, it is fundamental to map the conditions of contemporaneity, or the current world picture, in response to which contemporary art is made. Smith (2009, 6) offers a description of three sets of forces within contemporaneity: *globalisation* in the face of increasing cultural differentiation, accelerated *inequity* among peoples, classes and individuals, and an *infoscape*—the image economy or the regime of representation we are immersed in. In a rough timeline, these developments of the world picture with their prehistories within modernity, is nascent in the 1950s, emergent during the 1960s, has been evident to most since 1989, and obvious to all since 2001 (Smith 2009,6).

Profoundly shaped by the conditions, contemporaneity in visual arts manifested in a comparable timeframe with the big story from modern to contemporary becoming unmistakable since the 1980s. Smith then discerns three major currents within the flow of contemporary art accordingly. Firstly, artists who embrace globalisation and neoconservative aesthetics with “remodernism”, are repetitions of avant-garde shock tactics or retro-sensationalist spectacles (Smith 2009, 26; 91). This trend is evident in the art museums that are committed to modern art and become sites of attraction within the globalising cultural industry. Secondly, the plethora of art shaped by the postcolonial turn with local and internationalist values in constant dialogues. Smith (2009, 151) also exemplifies the trend with works that critique capitalism or explorations of ecological values. It is fair to say Smith’s observation on this current does not cover the practices in postcolonial countries, for example, on the continuing colonial legacy, the local politics or the historical connections of the South, etc. Thirdly, artists seek to grab the immediate, the tangible and the surrounding time, place, actions and so on (Smith 2009, 193). Smith’s (2009, 4) discerning of the three currents in contemporary art is linked to his three core meanings of the term “contemporary”: the immediate (the current happenings), the contemporaneous (the coming into being at the same time as other beings), and the coterporal.

The late art historian Sidney Kasfir unpacks the notion of “contemporary” drawing from Smith’s “coterporality” which means the coexistence of distinct temporalities (Smith 2009, 3). Writing extensively on different aspects and periods of arts in Africa, Kasfir’s work *Contemporary African Art* (2020)³⁰ analyses the transformations in African artistic practices from late colonialism to independent statehood and the current. Kasfir (2020, 19) highlights the continuity in their practices before and after the independence era, and the paring of Western-driven media and local approaches, “acknowledging the continuing presence of one in the other”. According to Kasfir (2020:9), “contemporary art in Africa has developed through a process of *bricolage*, building upon the already existing structures and scenarios in which the older, precolonial and colonial genres of African art were made”.

Building on and also shifting from Kasfir’s contention, Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009, 12) approach this “field of mismatched genres” by drawing inspiration from Terry Smith’s concerns on temporality and Arthur Danto’s (1997) assertion of the end of the historical periods bound to styles. They contend that “at a minimum, contemporary African art comes both at the end of traditional arts (seemingly precolonial) and at the end of colonialism”

³⁰ The first edition of this book was published in 2000.

(Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu 2009, 12). In other words, contemporary African art is postcolonial in terms of time and liberation from periods strictly bound with traditional art styles. However, they further complicate the contemporary as a hybridised space of practices in relation to the discursive landscapes of art of Africa in ethnography and fine art, its connections and tensions with the archives of traditions, and argue that “the root of contemporary African art, outside of postcolonial temporality, lies in its attempt to separate itself from the skilled competence of the traditional artist/craftsman in a self-conscious process of ‘deskilling’” (Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu 2009, 14).

Chika Okeke-Agulu (2021), in the more recent publication *African Artists from 1882 to Now*, further elaborates on the idea by unpacking the distinctions and connections between “modern” and “contemporary” in terms of African art. For Okeke-Agulu (2021, 11), “artistic modernism in Africa, as elsewhere, was ineluctably tied to the processes and experiences of a modernity that is itself a consequence of the colonial encounter”. The features of modernist practices could be summarised as the formal experimentation and intention in the first decades of the twentieth century in defiance of colonialism’s oppressive conditions, and the “postcolonial modernism” aligned with newfangled ideas about national culture at African countries’ independence in/from the mid-twentieth century, which often involved intensive formal experimentation with indigenous arts. Contemporary art, according to Okeke-Agulu (2021, 14), covers diverse practices, embraces various forms, and holds a critical view towards cultural nationalism and postcolonial modernity.

From a historical point of view, echoing Smith (2009) and Danto (1997), these Africanist scholars also identify the 1980s as the key moment of becoming contemporary with the expansion of the art world as a result of economic globalisation. This is evident in Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu’s seminal book *Contemporary African Art Since 1980*, and Kasfir’s (2020, 9) description of the late 1980s as the second transformation of African art, the independent era being the first one. Chika Okeke-Agulu (2021, 14) embodies the era with events taking place in the region as two main drivers of contemporary African art, Triangle Arts workshops and the rise of artists groups, and further emphasises the continental and international base of this field since then. In this period, roughly from the late 1980s, artists from African countries gained more attention and exhibited increasingly in the international art world. Tapfuma Gutsa was also among the continent’s significant up-and-coming artists within this trend.

These debates provide an illuminating guide to understanding contemporary art in Zimbabwe. While most West African countries that gained independence in the 1960s, Zimbabwe only claimed its statehood in the 1980s. In this sense, the concept of “postcolonial

modernism” seems not applicable to the modernist art movement of “Shona Stone Sculptures” under Rhodesian rule. It was rather a modernism with a colonial agent. Although the National Gallery was the driving ground as mentioned previously, “shona sculpture” falls into what Kasfir (1984) referred to as the “one tribe, one style” paradigm, not to mention that many sculptors were immigrants from neighbouring countries. Furthermore, the process of becoming contemporary took place in Zimbabwe right after its independence in the 1980s, as Zimbabwean art became postcolonial in terms of time and also diverged from the single-media style of stone sculpture. Thus, as Zimbabwean’s independence converged with the expansion of the global art world in the 1980s, artists confronted not only issues of traditional and modern, colonial and postcolonial in the local context but also conditions of contemporaneity as diagnosed by Smith (2009, 5-6), namely the globalisation, inequity and *infoscape* mentioned above.

These situations are embodied in Tapfuma Gutsa’s seminar work, *Odd Coupling* (Fig. 2.3), which was first exhibited in 1996 at his solo exhibition titled *Seeking Permissions* at Reece Gallery in New York. As seen in the image, the piece is composed of wood, stone, and a blue table. The branch-like wood component is joined by stone on both sides. While the base-like end is hanging off the table edge, the top side has two twigs pointing upwards in a different direction from the twig of the wood component. Although the work appears to be a sculpture resting on the table plane, the table is an integral part of it.



Fig 2.3 Tapfuma Gutsa. *Odd Coupling*.

Source: Image reproduced from the exhibition brochure cover by Chido Johnson

It could be reaffirmed that Tapfuma Gutsa's innovative work with mixed media pronounced the contemporaneity of Zimbabwean art. Transcending the borders of different art forms via improvisation and experimentation, *Odd Coupling* demonstrates a bold attitude in departing from the expected modernist style of stone sculpture by black Zimbabwean artists before and around the independence era. The title of the work, "Odd Coupling", which serves as an introduction to the piece, also speaks to the arguments around contemporaneity as mentioned above, embodying "cotemporality", "bricolage" or "a field of mismatched genres". Thus, through this work, Gutsa demonstrated a sense of historicity and also situated himself in the contemporary.

If one looked closely, one could discern Gutsa's reference to Anthony Caro's *Table Pieces*. Contributing significantly to the development of modernist sculpture in the twentieth century, the late British artist Anthony Caro was known for his large-scale abstract sculpture on the floor. In 1966, he started seeking ways to make small sculptures in their own right that did not resemble a maquette for large pieces. Since then, he created hundreds of intimate-scale pieces which involved table tops and were mostly made from industrial materials such as steel. Gutsa (2022) recounts the creation of *Odd Coupling* and acknowledges his familiarity with Caro's work:

At the time I'd discovered a new stone in between serpentine and slate. When I took the piece into the house and placed it on our coffee table, it could not go anywhere else. The Reece [Gallery] people saw it on the table and of course, it had to go with the table. I'm aware of Caro's use of table surfaces and actually knew him personally ... I had reasons to move out of stone. The *Odd Coupling* is iconic of the period moving into conceptual abstraction.

Similar to artists who travel, exchanging and sharing ideas, Tapfuma Gutsa also draws inspiration from different art traditions for fresh artistic expression to push beyond boundaries. His improvisational and intentional reference to Caro's table pieces was firstly a statement for fresh artistic expression beyond the dominant stone sculpturing in Zimbabwe. This desire was demonstrated in his other works around the same period such as *Chimpira* (thug), another abstract assemblage of unpolished stones and "rogue works among Zimbabwean sculpture praxis" which were often polished as mentioned above (Gutsa 2022). Yet painting the table in his signature blue and using the local material that carries loaded meaning in Zimbabwe art, Gutsa marked a personal registration in his move into conceptual

abstraction. Thus Tapfuma Gutsa's work in the 1980s not only embodied the contemporaneity of Zimbabwean art but also demonstrated his agency as an artist in consciously inserting himself into this hybridised space of sharing and exchanging and asserting this particular temporality and spatiality of the contemporary in the broader context.

Furthermore, Gutsa's consciousness of the new circumstances with the expansion of the global art world as an artist was highlighted by the playful and provocative title of this exhibition "Seeking Permission". This circumstance, namely the institutionalised complexes and network through which the art of today presents itself. Gutsa also spelt out and questioned the geopolitics in this field:

The exhibition title questions the moniker African art. Up to now, African art has to be certified in Western terms. I was questioning my position as an artist in the world. Because I began to realise an artist from Africa, somehow, you needed permission from the west. They asked me why is Seeking Permission. [I said] because you are going to pronounce me an artist. They didn't find it funny. (Gutsa 2021; 2022)

2.2 Disenchanting art materials

Following Gutsa's vanguardist mixed media work in the Zimbabwean context, the use of found materials was further highlighted around the 1990s at the Pachipamwe workshops and demonstrated in works by other artists. This section revisits the happening of Pachipamwe workshops and the works by Keston Beaton, examining the experimental use of materials at that time and its echoes in today's art practices in Zimbabwe.

2.2.1 Pachipamwe Workshops: Improvising with found materials

As mentioned above, Okeke-Agulu (2021, 14) identified the short-term international artists workshop associated with London-based Triangle Arts Trust as one of the key drivers of contemporary African art, and pointed out that these workshops created a continental and international base for the field by catalysing artists' travel and the circulation of ideas. Pushing the moment of becoming contemporary, Pachipamwe ("we come together") workshop, a Triangle network partner from 1988 to 1994 in Zimbabwe, also created conditions and opened up space for fostering material improvisation and experimentation.

Triangle Workshop was originally established by Robert Loder and British sculptor Anthony Caro in New York in 1982, in order to create spaces for artists to exchange ideas and develop practices in different locations (Loder 2005, 237). Expanding from the involvements of artists based in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, Triangle started to include participants from other countries in 1984. South African artists David Koloane and Bill Ainslie attended the workshops. During his stay in New York, Koloane started the conversation about bringing the workshop to South Africa (Kirumira 2008, 130; Goniwe 2022). These interactions and networks led to the realisation of the first Thupelo workshop in South Africa in 1985, followed by the adoption of the Triangle workshop model in other African countries, as well as the establishment of physical studio spaces such as Bag Factory in Johannesburg in 1990.

The idea of organising a Triangle workshop in Zimbabwe was initiated by Robert Loder and British-Zimbabwean artist Pat Pearce, then “subsequent discussions with Tapfuma Gutsa bore this out”.³¹ The first Pachipamwe workshop was inaugurated in 1988 at the Culture House in Murewa, a town located in the northeast of Harare where Gutsa was born and is now based. With the success of this workshop, Pachipamwe II (1989), V and VI (1993) took place at Cyrene Mission near the heritage site Matopo Hills³², III (1990) and IV (1991) in Marondera and the 1994 version “Zim-Sculpture” in Shurugwe.

While it might differ slightly in different places,³³ generally, the workshop brings twenty to twenty-five artists to live and create works together for a period of two weeks in a semi-isolated location where they can also converse, exchange ideas and build networks. After the workshop, a group exhibition with the works created during the process takes place in local art institutions.

What is the (local) artists’ agency in these workshops in terms of both the organisation and art-making process, provided that the model was established by Loder and Caro and first brought to these African countries through their network? In terms of planning, according to Robert Loder (2005, 238), a working group of artists from each country was responsible for the management of all aspects of the workshops. As indicated also in the workshops’ brochures, the organisers, participants and sponsors are different and are more closely tied to local contexts. For example, most Pachipamwe participants were Zimbabweans and much of

31 Robert Loder’s personal email to Elsbeth Court, 1990/02/15. Archives sourced from Elsbeth Court.

32 For more information about the Matobo National Park, see <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/306/>.

33 For more information, see <https://www.trianglenetwork.org>.

the moral, financial and other support was from the region, whether individuals or institutions.³⁴

While the material support depended more on artists who had connections to resources³⁵, workshop veterans also contributed to the planning and logistics with the idea of “artists by artists” (Kirumira 2008, 180) For example, South African artists David Koloane, Bill Ainslie and Helen Sebidi offered their expertise and assistance for setting up Pachipamwe workshops, and Stephen Mogotsi and Veryan Edwards attended to gain experience for holding workshops in Botswana. Not all the workshops were initiated or organised by Triangle founders. The Pachipamwe Zim-Sculpture 1994 workshop was, for the first time, organised by the artists themselves and took place at Gutsa’s Surprise Art Centre in Shurugwe.³⁶ Gutsa (2021) noticed that the workshops and material support were inclining towards paintings. “Acting like a rebel”, Gutsa (2021) initiated the all-sculpture version in 1994. Another example was Thapong workshop in Botswana which, according to Stephen Williams (1990, 27), was independent in its planning and financing and was only linked to the Triangle Workshop on the level of concept.

It is important to discuss the artists’ agency in order to push beyond the criticism that reduces artists as simply submitting to Western resources and even aesthetic norms. Not to deny the power dynamics and the primary role of Triangle founders,³⁷ the artists’ limited involvement in planning and running the workshops showed their initiative in utilising various platforms and ideas to meet local needs and to find inspirations for future activities embedded in local circumstances. More pertinently, as observed by Elsbeth Court³⁸ (2022), the artists’ agency was in the “openness with which people came to that space. When people entered the workshop, the ground was levelled in terms of people speaking up and working together”.

It is based on this openness that the Pachipamwe workshop created conditions for experimenting with materials. It was characterised by the following aspects among many others. First of all, each Pachipamwe workshop brought together artists with great diversity

34 Acknowledgements in Pachipamwe workshop (1990) exhibition brochure.

35 Mostly European-descended artists such as Bill Ainslie in South Africa, Berry Bickle in Zimbabwe and Stephen Williams in Botswana.

36 Page 1 in Pachipamwe Zim-Sculpture ’94 workshop exhibition catalogue, Alliance Française, Harare.

37 For example, in my conversation with Elsbeth Court, she mentioned that there were negotiations between the Working Group and Robert Loder about the selecting of artists, even though it was stated that the Working Group was in charge of planning.

38 My personal conversation with Court, 29 November 2022. Online.

from different countries, in different generations, and working with heterogeneous art forms and mediums. The 25 artists attending the Shurugwe workshop, for example, were from Zimbabwe, Namibia, Zambia, Mozambique, England, Jamaica and Germany. Court's (1992) account of Pachipamwe II at Cyrene provides informative details of the artists' backgrounds and their interactions through conversations and practices. Working together in the same place, artists were able to observe each other's creative processes, exchange ideas, converse on contemporary art and reflect on their own practices and situations. This created an environment for Zimbabwean artists to explore beyond the dominant single-media art norms, as "moving between materials with less definition of 'painting' or 'sculpture' created a curiosity to work in extended dimensions." (Berry Bickle in Pachipamwe 1994, 12)

Furthermore, working in a semi-isolated place created opportunities for the artists to temporarily detach from their everyday social-political realities and their familiar art norms. They could focus on their creative processes and respond to the immediate natural and artistic surroundings. South African artist David Koloane (cited in Court 1992, 42) highlighted the impact of the surrounding environment on his work when he participated in Pachipamwe II: "most noticeably I have seen my formations become more organic and my colours much brighter." One of Koloane's paintings was an abstract depiction of the Matopo landscape, a natural view that also found its entrance into works by many other artists such as Vervan Edwards, Richard Jack, and Pat Pearce as well as Tapfuma Gutsa. Additionally, both Tapfuma Gutsa (2022) and Voti Thebe (cited in Court 1992, 46)³⁹ recalled that the Pachipamwe workshops did not provide sufficient materials for sculptures and this gave them the urge to improvise with anything that could be found. Court (1992, 42–44) also observed the various sources and kinds of materials that characterised Pachipamwe II, especially in the work of talented improvisers such as Tapfuma Gutsa and Voti Thebe, who were primed to source from the surrounding environment.

The lack of materials⁴⁰ support and the semi-isolation of the working place led to their work's proximity to the immediate surroundings, both materially and thematically. This proximity somehow characterises the found materials used by many Zimbabwean artists, which will be further unpacked in this thesis. Most of Gutsa's work from the Pachipamwe

39 Voti Thebe stated that "'Pachipamwe' was great in spite of not getting all the materials we would have needed. I personally had to make use of the found objects" in his 1989 poem and notes on Pachipamwe workshop. This is cited in Court's (1992) article. Elsbeth Court has also provided me her personal archives on Pachipamwe workshop which includes a copy of this poem.

40 The scarcity of art resources in a broader context in Zimbabwe and its connection with the wide use of found items will be discussed later in Section 2.3 in this chapter.

workshops were assemblages of one kind or another (Gutsa 2022). *Matopos* from Pachipamwe II, which was later shown in Venice Biennale in 1990, was created from sandstone, serpentine, wood, thorn, reed, animal skin and rope found around Cyrene school. As indicated in the title, this piece also imitates the immediate environment of Motopo Hill landscape, specifically the balancing rocks in the area. Gutsa's improvisational and experimental exploration with proximate materials was also demonstrated in his works in other Pachipamwe workshops, Triangle workshops in other countries, as well as in his later works such as the recent series created from *matamba* fruits that he picked near his studio in Murewa.

Derek Huggins (1994, 4), the late Harare-based gallerist and writer publishing regularly in *Gallery* magazine, also highlighted the “experimental accent” of the workshop when he visited Shurugwe at the end of the Pachipamwe gathering in 1994. Huggins (1994, 5) describes “the so-called Shona sculpture, a contemporary movement commencing in the late 50s on which the emphasis, both at home and abroad, has been for 35 years, and which has become synonymous with Zimbabwean art. Here clearly, the revolution against that continues and the break-away mood is to mix media”. He also identifies Gutsa as one of the few catalysts in changing the art scene in Zimbabwe in the decade after independence (Huggins 1994, 6).

Although Pachipamwe did not continue after the last workshop in 1994, it has had a long-lasting influence on many of the participants. Berry Bickle (in Murray and Picton 2005, 24) claimed that the workshop encapsulated her departure from objective painting to mixed media. Tapfuma Gutsa still returns to some ideas from his experiences when he participated the international workshops. For example, *How About India* (2001), his work at the Khoj International Workshop in India, was about the holiness of the Banyan tree in India, and the materials included buffalo horn and skin he found around their working place. The visual composition and element in this work was shared by the work *Muchakata: Sacred Tree* from his 2012 Mulonga project, which touched the similar concern about the sanctity of trees near Zambezi river where the Tonga people live. The Triangle network has also been active,⁴¹ and the Pachipamwe workshops have inspired many later art activities in Zimbabwe such as the Batapata Workshop (Scherer 2013, 205).

41 More information on the activities associated with Triangle network can be found from the website <https://www.trianglenetwork.org>.

In the opening of their book *African Art and Agency in the Workshop*, Sidney Littlefield Kasfir and Till Förster point out that workshops are one of the basic institutions of production of African art and material culture. Christine Scherer (2013), a contributor of this book, echoes their argument and analyses how the interactions among artists at the Tengenenge workshop leads to the emergence of a shared style of stone sculpture in Zimbabwe. It could be argued that workshops play a significant role in opening space for the use of found materials in Zimbabwe, from the first Pachipamwe workshop in 1988 to the Batapata workshops in early 2000s and the Found Objects Clinic workshop in 2012, as discussed below. Thus, in order to trace the clue of found materials in art in post-independent Zimbabwe, it is important to look at the Pachipamwe workshops in which the pioneer artist Tapfuma Gutsa was deeply involved from the very beginning.

2.2.2 Keston Beaton: disenchanting art materials

The late artist Keston Beaton (1963–2005), who participated in several versions of the Triangle workshops, is another key figure in the evolution of using found materials in Zimbabwe. Many artists of younger generations consider Keston Beaton as their predecessor and inspiration (Mapondera 2019; Hwati in Preece 2022; Gwetai 2019; Maxim 2021). Artist Tafadwa Gwetai (2019) regards Beaton as a significant influencer with his sculptural energy living on in many established and upcoming artists. Chikonzero Chazunguza (2021) also identified Beaton as one of the pioneering artists who played around with found materials, but little has been written about his work other than a handful of reviews of exhibitions in which Beaton participated and a feature on his series of sculptures published in *Gallery* magazine (Huggins 1995; Wright 1998; Murray 1999).

Beaton was born to an immigrant family from Malawi in Harare in 1963. After graduating from Mabvuku Secondary School, Beaton attended the BAT (British American Tobacco) Workshop School, now the National Gallery School of Visual Arts and Design, where he spent 18 months studying art. In the late 1980s, he joined Tafuma Gutsa's Utonga Studio in Tarara, Harare. In the beginning, Beaton tried to sculpt stone but "his experimental nature could not fit in with the established current of stone sculpture in Zimbabwe" (Murray 1999, 15). He finally found his language of expression when he encountered British artist Ann Carrington, who was in an exchange residency in Harare at that time and was working with materials such as tin cans, bottle tops, and other metals. Tapfuma Gutsa (2021) still holds the memory of Beaton's transition into found materials.

When Keston came, he wanted to do stone sculpture. He just couldn't do it. So he started with gathering things and trying to make stuff. Then the real break came when a young artist came from England, Ann Carrington, and she was working with found things ... from bean cans, fish cans and stuff like that. And she started joining. I remember one particular piece when she made the fish. And that was a defining moment for Keston. And then he started, he just went wild, in a studio which was predominantly a stone studio.

It is intriguing how ideas travel and circulate in the field of contemporary art. In an interview,⁴² Carrington stated that her journey to Zimbabwe was prompted by African artists whose sculptures were made from discarded materials. She saw these works in an exhibition in London and, inspired by the work, planned to visit Africa. Staying in Zimbabwe on a grant-funded trip in 1992, she examined many forms of recycling in art and craft and created her work in response. It was in this setting that Keston Beaton first interacted with her and was able to draw inspiration from her. Some artists of the younger generation after Beaton also acknowledged the influence of Carrington as discussed in the next section.

The “defining moment” took Beaton to the path less travelled by Zimbabwean artists at that time and made found materials his intricate visual language. His “wild” exploration leaves a significant mark in the art history of Zimbabwe. Since the early 1990s, he had frequently exhibited at Gallery Delta in Harare and the NGZ. Within one year in 1995, he participated in several international exhibitions such as *Africa95* in the UK, the first Johannesburg Biennale, the *Persons and Pictures: Modernist Eye in Africa* exhibition in South Africa and the above-mentioned *Genesis* in Germany⁴³. Beaton also took part in different versions of the Triangle workshop in the southern African region, including the Pachipamwe workshop in Zimbabwe, the Tulipamwe workshop in Namibia and the Thapong

42 Interviewed was conducted by Tim Robson in 2021, on Carrington's exhibition titled *Ka-Ching!* at Spink, London. Full recording of the interview at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5IouCWQEAZQ>.

43 *Africa95* spanned across multiple months in the final quarter of 1995, featuring activities held at more than sixty arts institutions throughout the UK. It received patronage from Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, President Nelson Mandela of South Africa, and President Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal. For more information, see <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/39aad604-c16d-3a7e-ab01-687e3722b76f>. The inaugural Johannesburg Biennale, titled *Africus*, took place from February 28th to April 30th, 1995. Curated by Lorna Ferguson, Christopher Till, and Bongi Dhlomo, it featured 63 national pavilions and 20 South African exhibitions. For more information, see <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/1st-johannesburg-biennale>. The *Persons and Pictures: Modernist Eye in Africa* exhibition was taking place at Newtown Art Galleries in Johannesburg from 27 September to 10 November 1995.

Workshop in Botswana. His work was also presented in the 2005 exhibition *Transitions* which featured artists who participated in Triangle international workshops in Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Mozambique from 1960 to 2004 (Murray and Picton 2005).

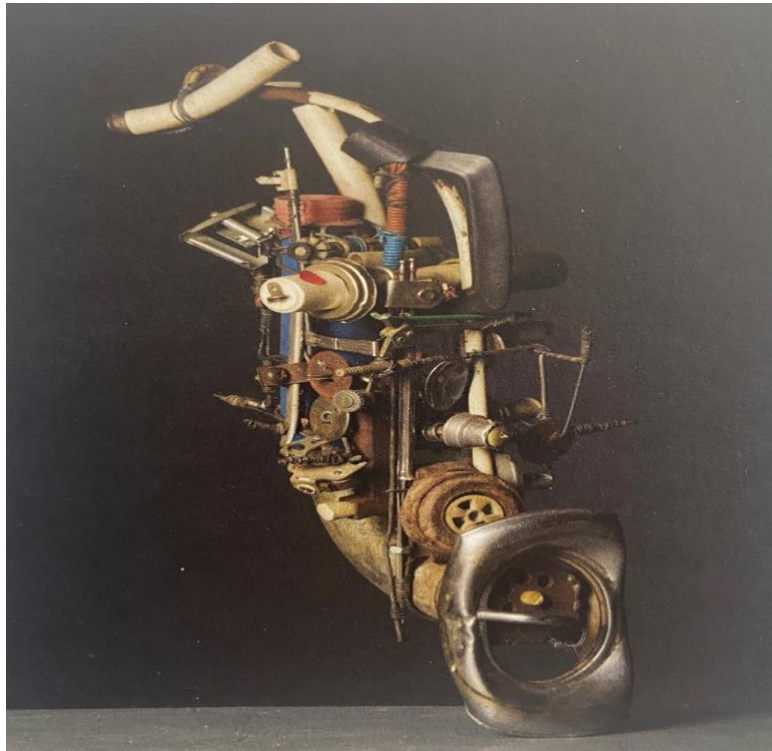


Fig 2.4 Keston Beaton, *Horn I*, 1993, mixed media.

Source: reproduced from the book *Mawonero / Umbono: Insights on Art in Zimbabwe* (Mabasa, 2015)

Keston Beaton was particularly known for his series of sculptures of musical instruments – harp, mbira, guitar, horn, guitar, to name a few – made from found materials. *Horn I* (1993) is Beaton’s work in the collection of the NGZ (Fig. 2.4). Georgina Maxim (2021) recalled how Keston Beaton “walked with head down” to find materials for his work and “each little piece was picked up well-thought of and intentionally”. As seen in the image, it resembles a wind instrument, with a mouthpiece connected to a bell through a long curve. Attached to the curved bell tube are a variety of used small items, creating the illusion that the horn’s working components and process are exposed when it is blown. Perhaps due to Beaton’s background in watchmaking and repairs, the tiny objects he employed and the way they were assembled convey a sense of precision and delicacy. Even if the horn could not be played, the

cobalt blue in the heart of the tube quietly evokes the imagination of a melancholy and profound sound. Barbara Murray's (1999, 13) article *Listening to Sculpture*, published in *Gallery* magazine, provides a close aesthetic analysis of Beaton's instrument series with regard to the materials, compositions, colours and other formal features:

They do not function in any literal sense but their forms allude to various types of musical instrument ... Their shapes and structures play on this allusion while various elements create visual correspondence with sounds ... The colours too are visual references to sounds ... These mix in the imagination to suggest varying contemporary compositions and echoes of melodies: combinations of traditional, European, urban, folk, modern and African. These objects are musical instruments, never seen before. They evoke a new and very contemporary music.



Fig 2.5 Keston Beaton. *Harp for the King*, 1993, mixed media.

Source: <https://www.kunstforum.de/artikel/genesis/>

Beaton had several works which refer to King David's harp (lyre) in the Bible. For example, *Harp for the King* (1993). In this work (Fig. 2.5), Beaton used wood and rusty

metal to create the frame of a harp. The strings were made of chains, wires and plastic, while the “soundbox” was mostly cylindrical and circular metal components. His choice of material was “sound” oriented towards the materialisation of instruments. With the mundane objects in decay collected from the specific context of 1990s Zimbabwe, Beaton reconstructed his version of the biblical and holy instrument with which people “sing praises to the lord”.⁴⁴ Paying close attention, one can notice that most of Beaton’s works were made from materials sourced from urban landscapes and everyday life. Metal fragments, plastic, rubber, glass, cardboard, wood, and stone, as well as used daily objects such as kettle, corkscrew, bits of furniture and other consumer waste. In the review on the exhibition *Genesis* (1995) taking place at Gallery Münsterland in Emsdetten, Beaton’s work was located in the “modern, developing industrial world of Zimbabwe”.⁴⁵ Förster (2013a, 38) also highlights the creative “recollection” of Beaton, among other artists in African cities, whose practices shift contexts and give new meanings to collected urban trash by transforming them into artworks.

Situated within the context of Zimbabwe’s art history, Beaton’s artistic practices become crucially significant. After Tapfuma Gutsa broke from the stone sculpture convention and opened up spaces for mixed media, Beaton pushed further in the disenchantment of art making and art materials. Shifting from the polished surface of stone sculpture and its associated narrative about the spirit of stones, the creative process of mutation and assembling is visible in Beaton’s work. As can be seen in most of his works, the materials were often connected with wire and string in their very raw form. In this sense, his instruments and sculptures could also be interpreted as praise of the mundane, the urban daily and creativity. Beaton left a far-reaching influence on many Zimbabwean artists. His use of materials, his ways of art making, his aesthetics and even his obsession with musical instruments, as Gwetai says, live on in many artists after him: this will be further unpacked in the following sections.

It’s almost the same as music ... If you are an artist, you are trying to do the same thing as being a musician ... You want it to be a sculpture. You want to sound differently ... but in a visual way.

44 ‘Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody!’ (Psalm 98:5, ESV)

‘I will sing a new song to you, O God.
upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to you.’ (Psalm 144:9, ESV)

45 <https://www.kunstforum.de/artikel/genesis/>

I want to get exposed, not frustrated. People have lived with slowness and there is no way you can rush it ... Yes, recognition ... But I don't panic. I don't shake or feel insecure because I feel there's recognition somewhere, some day. (Beaton cited in Whaley 1996, 6).

2.3 Redefinitions: a movement of redefining art materials under crisis

Focusing on a selected group of trailblazing artists and art events, the first two sections give a clue about the present phenomena of employing found materials from the perspective of art history in Zimbabwe. Many artists link the current art trend of collecting art materials from urban spaces to the socio-economic crises taking place in the early years of this century (Takadiwa 2018; Mapondera 2019; Chazunguza 2021; Nyandoro 2021). Note that these two interpretations of historicity do not compete with one another. Although the social component was an immediate and substantial contributor, earlier work in art has laid the groundwork that made it possible for this new art movement to emerge. This section examines the relations between the source of art materials and the social factors, highlighting artists' agency in this process.

2.3.1 Zimbabwean crises and the new art material turn

To begin with, it is necessary to give a brief introduction to the dynamics and dimensions of the crisis/crises. With "Zimbabwean Crisis" as a keyword, one can find dozens of explanations from search engines. While many scholars have complicated the definition of the term, it has been commonly used to describe the circumstances of economic and political upheavals in Zimbabwe from approximately the late 1990s to the first decade of the twenty-first century, with Zimbabwe's Fast-Track Land Reform Programme circa 2001 as a landmark event. Some scholars disagreed with framing the term in singular terms as the political confrontation triggered a cascade of other crises, which followed in its aftermath. To view the situation as a mono-crisis, as Chiumbu and Musemwa (2012 ix) point out, obfuscates the multifaceted nature of the problems and does not allow enough space to get the diverse everyday experiences and resilience of the ordinary people. They further explain that the majority of the constituent crises engendered by the political maelstrom were associated with resource scarcities, such as water, health care, monetary, fuel, electricity, food and so on (Chiumbu and Musemwa 2012 x). In his book *Life-writing from the Margins in Zimbabwe: Versions and Subversions of Crisis* (2019), Oliver Nyambi, a scholar in African literature and

culture, highlights the significance of understanding individuals' self-writings in the crisis. Nyambi (2019, 1-2) conceptualises self-writing as “an aesthetic process of verbalising both personal and personalised experience in affective ways”, which also becomes a “political manifestation of reflexive discursivity”. As elucidated in this chapter and Chapter 4, individual experiences of crises are also evident in artists' expressions and practices. Besides the descriptions and the definitions, scholars also differ on the causes of the crises in Zimbabwe. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003, 99) critiques the state's dominant nationalist position and disagrees with its explanation of external forces which “is officially depicted as a front for Western interests”. Some other scholars, who are classified as “Nationalist Left”, consider the crises as a result of imperialism, neo-liberalism and peripheral capitalism (Moyo and Yeros cited in Chiumbu and Musemwa 2012, xii).

For ordinary Zimbabweans, it was regarded as “a decade of suffering” (Coltart 2008) and “the situation is unbearable” (Ntali 2018). Amidst periods of turmoil, individuals faced the risk of losing their livelihoods, which were essential for their financial stability and their sense of belonging in the wider society (Chiumbu and Musemwa 2012, xvi). Due to a high unemployment rate of around 80–85 per cent among the adult population, the informal sector emerged as the main source of income for the majority of urban dwellers (Chiumbu and Musemwa 2012, xvii). The majority of the goods that were sold and marketed in the informal sector, ranging from toiletries to basic staples, were imported.

The 2000s also witnessed the urban crisis in Harare, with infrastructure decay, industrial failure, economic informality, haphazard wetland growth and land usage, health care breakdown, inappropriate waste disposal, and other related issues. The government's Operation Murambatsvina, which aimed to demolish illegal and informal settlements, led to hundreds of thousands of poor urban dwellers losing their homes and livelihoods (Potts 2006). The government's campaign created ruins and turmoil and exacerbated the urban crisis of Harare. In examining urban transitions in the long history of postcolonial Harare, scholar Beacon Mbiba (2017) uses *Jambanja*, a Shona word which means ‘impunity’, to describe both the government's land and urban policies, as well as the daily practices of informality in the city. Due to the *Jambanja* effect, Harare's urban environment underwent a transformation from a “European settler-colonial ‘sunshine city’ to a more chaotic, noisier and dirtier ‘zhing-zhong’ African city” (Mbiba 2017). The urban spaces were characterised by informality:

Whole zones from edges of Magaba, charter Road and Kopje in the southwest of the city to Samora Machel in the north and on either side of Robert Mugabe all the

way to Fourth Street Road Port (to the east), the city has become informal with trading on the streets. New enclaves of money-making have emerged where young entrepreneurs take advantage of the collapse of the city governance and are corrupting it as they go along. (Mbiba 2017, 390)

Young people are active in the transitioning urban spaces. According to Pilosof (2021), around 68 per cent of the population in Zimbabwe is under the age of 35 years old, which is also the age range of the majority of the artists discussed in this thesis. Those who were born in post-independent Zimbabwe are referred to as “born free”. The first generation of “born free”, including the above-mentioned students of art in Harare, came of age around the time Zimbabwe’s crises deteriorated in the late 1990s and continue to this day. However, as argued in *Fending for Ourselves: Youth in Zimbabwe, 1980–2020*, which covers a range of themes such as urban life, education and work, while these issues affecting youth over the past decades might not be desirable, it is also important to stress “the agency and resilience of Zimbabwe’s young population, and how they have found ways to navigate the political, social, and economic terrains they occupy” (Pilosof 2021, 3). Following this insight, my research explores the art material turn in Zimbabwe which has occurred since the early 2000s and the relationship between social conditions and the artists’ practices unfolded in different chapters.

How did the crises affect young artists who were at their early stage of career or as students? First of all, the decade of hardship has become their shared memories and life experiences. In my personal conversations with several Zimbabwean artists, there were many common issues mentioned by them regarding life in Harare since the early 2000s, such as the food crisis, fuel shortage and the general chaos in everyday life. For example, Moffat Takadiwa (2018) witnessed the closing down of shops and the increasing number of vendors occupying the street, as well as the littered rubbish in the urban spaces of Harare. Takudzwa Leeryo (2019) recalled the huge outbreak of cholera following the water crisis which also affected him. Wallen Mapondera (2019) highlights the crises created by “Operation Murambatsvina”, a state operation to remove illegal housing structures and business places. In this situation, those who were studying art in Harare in the early 2000s experienced the lack of art materials provided by their institutions, such as pencils, brushes and canvas, which were crucial in their training courses for basic art skills. They were instrumental in promoting the utilisation of found materials that were collected from the urban areas of Harare.

It is intriguing that the accessibility of art materials as a result of socio-economic conditions has been constantly used as a deciding factor for the choices of art materials in Zimbabwe. In her account of the stone sculpture movement, Doreen Sibanda, the former director at the NGZ, unpacks the main drivers of the movement's growth and development. Speaking about the international sanctions imposed on the Rhodesia colony, Sibanda (2015, 43) notes that the sanctions led to the difficulty in sourcing conventional art materials which "contributed to the growing shift towards stone sculpture as a material that was available in abundance". Artist and curator Hayden Proud (in Bumhira et al. 2020, 360) also recalled his personal memories about the scarcity of art materials such as oil and paper after the Rhodesian Government's Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965. And how art materials remained scarce and expensive after Zimbabwe's independence. As a witness of the Pachipamwe II workshop, Court (1992, 42) comments on the use of materials by Zimbabwean artists and contends that:

In a developing nation, the scarcity of commercial art supplies is an ongoing challenge; few materials are manufactured and even fewer are imported. In this situation (particularly among Zimbabweans), a measure of an artist's acumen is the ability to improvise ... It is significant, but not surprising in such a determinedly self-reliant country, that established artists chose to work primarily in natural and found materials.

Even though they are located in different historical circumstances, these observations highlight the material restrictions in different periods in Zimbabwe and the relationship between this reality and the selection of art materials. Yet there is also a danger in emphasising the lack of art resources as the main driver and the artists' choice as merely a reaction to the shortage of some art materials. The notion of conventional art material is often associated with west-driven classification of art genres which has shaped our understanding of materials, and even of art itself. However, the conventions could differ in specific contexts. In the context of post-independent Zimbabwe, stones such as serpentine, which were commonly used by "Shona Sculpture" artists, had already become conventional art materials and were more readily available in the local environment compared to imported items such as paint, brushes, or canvas. Yet, the young artists in Harare did not turn to stone in the early 2000s. It should be emphasised that the artists' material turn is a result of many conditions rather than just the shortage of conventional art materials as this proposition might shadow

the artists' intention and agency in the process of selecting art mediums, whether towards individual artistic exploration, transformation in the dominant art paradigm or new visual language that society could better grasp. It is vital to transfer more weight to the work and practices of the artists to comprehend the occurrence of the phenomenal use of found materials in Zimbabwe.

2.3.2 Redefinitions

Redefinitions is the title of a series of exhibitions at Gallery Delta which only presented artworks made from found materials. It was initiated by Gareth Nyandoro, Masimba Hwati, and the late Munyanradzi Mazarire, three artists of the first “born free” generation. Taking place in 2004, 2009 and 2011 respectively, *Redefinitions I, II* and *III* were the three men's shows with Tapfuma Gutsa as the guest artist participating in the second rendition.

Redefinitions IV (2013) featured more artists including Antony Chidyanmatiyo, Wallen Mapondera, Clive Mukucha, Annie Mutema, Arlington Muzondo, Victor Nyakauru and Johnson Zuze, many of whom have become foremost Zimbabwean artists working with found materials and are included in this study. This exhibition series not only marks the dawn of using found materials in Zimbabwean art but also captures the nature of this trend — an art movement redefining art materials and vocabularies.

Hwati, Mazarire and Nyandoro were among the only five students in the fine art class at Harare Polytechnic College from 2001 to 2003, a time when the socio-economic crises were worsening in Zimbabwe. Their course was structured with a basic design in the first year, followed by other subjects such as painting and print-making, among which the student would choose one to specialise in the second year. Nyandoro (2021) recalled how drawing, a subject throughout the duration of fine art class, was changed from A4 paper format to a bigger canvas with a life model when he moved from the college's branch in Masvingo to Harare in 2002. However, soon there were no materials for their courses such as pencils, brushes and canvas. In one class, the lecturer, Chikonzero Chazunguza (2021), compelled the students to submit their assignments with whatever materials they could find and use from the college and the street. Chazunguza (2021) recalled the initial improvisations in the vacuum:

College used to supply materials like paper, pencils, and paint. And because those things were there, it wasn't easy also to tell students to improvise. You can tell

them to improvise. But they will improvise within a particular realm. They'll improvise with the paint, improvise with the paper, and improvise with the canvas. So the idea of improvising still has its own limits. It has a framework. But the scarcity of all those now created a vacuum ... So I demanded I wanted to see some work. There was lots of broken furniture, things had really gone down. So another resource, just like you get mushrooms coming out when everything is rotten, right? There was another resource coming out, which didn't really look like a resource ... And it was from that very day that things really shifted. Because of the pressure, there was an appreciation now of using other things to create work ... I think that pressure and that scarcity opened up the resistance "software" that they had already had.

With this urgency, they started collecting and improvising with found materials. Hwati, for example, turned to the remaining stock of clay in the department, combining ceramics, and terracotta with other collected materials and everyday objects such as discarded shoes. This "rudimentary use of found objects from the college dump" (Hwati 2011b) evolved into the three artists' *Redefinitions* exhibition which took place at the Gallery Delta in 2004. It was shown in the amphitheatre in the gallery's backyard instead of in the main space, where another exhibition of paintings and sculptures by Richard Witikani and John Gusnyu was opened on the same day (15 June 2004). However, *Redefinitions* eventually attracted more interest. Nyandoro (2021) asserted that,

They are raw. At that time people were not expecting to see that also in the gallery in the sense of the white cube like Gallery Delta. This is why they didn't want to try us first time inside the gallery but outside the gallery ... I think that's the rawness.

This exhibition did not have a catalogue or a flyer and was only listed as "Redefinitions in the Amphitheatre" in the document of exhibitions at Gallery Delta since 1975. It was ratified as the first exhibition of the series and considered the herald of the new wave of utilising found materials in Zimbabwean art by some artists (Mapondera 2019, 26). Yet it was not only a shift in materials. As stated by Hwati, Mazarire and Nyandoro (2009), *Redefinitions I* was to redefine conventions and standards and *Redefinitions II* to refine visual vocabulary with two underlying principles: "the energy of objects and the law of variations".

The energy of objects, according to Masimba Hwati (2013), includes innate energy (such as industrial or chemical, implied energy (personal) and imparted energy (association with a public figure/event). Artworks with found materials would trigger the common understanding and personal thoughts of the original objects and of their new artistic mutations and variations. As seen in the image (Fig. 2.6), in the *Redefinitions II* exhibition, the three artists had developed recognisable individual visual languages and styles, with materials such as shoes, terracotta, wood, scrap metal, wire and so on. The renowned vanguardist Tapfuma Gutsa also participated in this second version, further situating this trend in the history of art explorations in contemporary Zimbabwe.



Fig 2.6 Image from the brochure of *Redefinitions II*, 2009

Source: Archives of Gallery Delta

Redefinitions III in 2011 and the following expanded version in 2013 clearly defined the series exhibition and the art trend of using found materials as a movement. *Redefinitions III* was accompanied by a manifesto written by Masimba Hwati, which is crucial in understanding the movement and needs to be read closely. As seen in the reproduced image of the text (Fig. 2.7), the manifesto opened with a definitive statement that “‘Redefinitions’ is a movement that grew out of necessity and reaction”. It was followed by a brief introduction of the movement’s origin, the three artists’ involvement from the very beginning, and the specific period of time as mentioned above. These are the essential components of the artistic

movement. Hwati then recounted their artistic activities and approach against the backdrop of economic decline and living hardships over the years, and elucidated the movement's focus on the art medium and commitment to new ways of artistic expression.

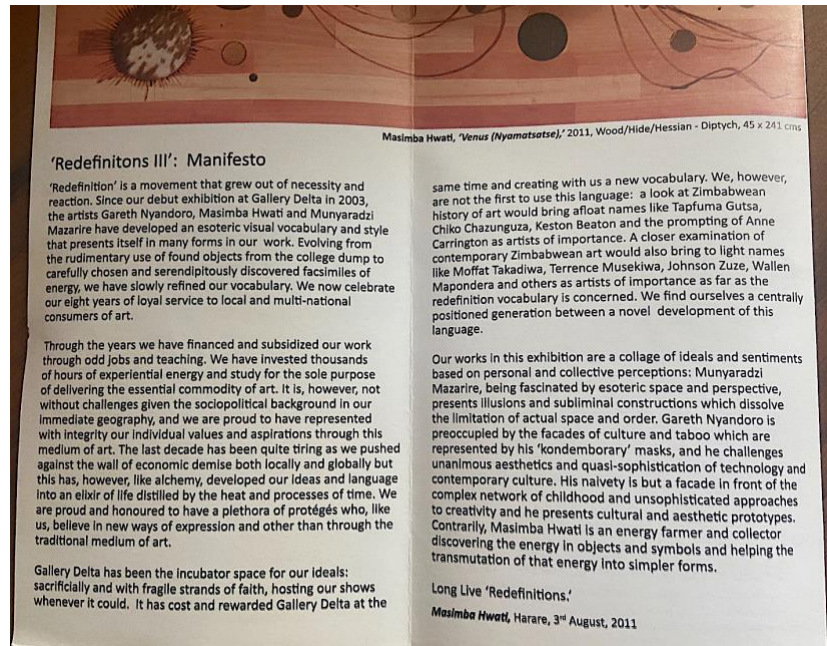


Fig 2.7 Image from the brochure of *Redefinitions III*, 2011

Source: Archives of Gallery Delta

Most significantly, after noting the incubator space of their ideas, Hwati anchored the movement in a local genealogy and art history of Zimbabwe by tracing the prior artists who pushed the frontier for using found materials. As he stated, “We, however, are not the first to use this language: a look at Zimbabwean history of art would bring afloat names like Tapfuma Gutsa, Chiko Chazunguza, Keston Beaton and the prompting of Anne Carrington as artists of importance.” It is intriguing that the British artist Ann Carrington was acknowledged as a source of inspiration in this manifesto, which also positioned the movement in a broader context beyond the national border. As noted previously, Carrington made her move to Zimbabwe because she was fascinated by the sculptures made from found materials by African artists. This once again reaffirmed the interrelated space of the global art world and, so we should understand this very new wave with the crossing of ideas and the travelling of artists. Hwati, Nyandoro and Mazarire's contemporaries, such as Moffat Takadiwa, Terrence Musekiwa, Johnson Zuze, Wallen Mapondera, and others, were then named in the manifesto as artists of importance who also joined this wave of redefining the

art lexicon. By referencing the artistic practices from both the diachronic and synchronic perspectives in the art of Zimbabwe, Hwati provides a historical outline and current development of the art movement and identifies themselves and their peers as “a centrally positioned generation between a novel development of this language”.

Redefinitions IV, which featured an expanded list of artists, demonstrates the continuation of this artistic movement. As articulated in the artist’s statement, “The movement of ‘found materials’ is a sub-culture that is projected from the *zeitgeist* that envelops society”. The *zeitgeist* in the past two decades in Zimbabwe is partly captured by the title of the exhibition. Wallen Mapondera (2019, 10) also perceived the use of found materials as part of people’s creative reactions, adaptations and improvisations to different life challenges in this period. Rather than being solely a passive reaction to the shortage of certain art materials, it is a movement of artistic inquiry for visual languages and expressions that speak to its time, taking inspiration from the art field as well as the social conditions of the moment.

The movement of found materials, Includes the *Redefinitions* exhibition series and many other relevant events which have taken place since the 2000s, emancipates the convention and any confined definition of art materials in Zimbabwe. More artists have joined them to “redefine conventions and standards” (Hwati, Mazarire and Nyandoro 2009) under new limits, pushing the developments of this art movement to different directions in themes, forms and ways of art-making. Working at a time of crisis, these artists turned their conditions into a portal of possibility and redefined art materials from limit towards unlimitedness. Artist Zacharaha Magasa (2021) says, “I believe anything can make art as long as it has a connection with you and as long as you understand how the narrative is going with that material.” Similarly, one of the three artists who initiated the *Redefinitions* movement, Gareth Nyandoro (2021) contends,

If you look at the kids, they find an object you know, they realise something in it and in such a way that they want to take that and attach it to make that thing function for them. For myself, this is where it started, because you find something and try to make use of it and bring life to it ... When you talk of found material, I feel that there isn’t any specific material which is designed to make art. If I pick up a pencil, or buy it in the shop, it’s not specifically for art, so as paper. So I feel that, everything is all found and it’s all found material. You conveyed it to what you want to use it for.

2.4. Institutionalisation of found materials in Harare

We start to discuss the materials that they have picked up. What is it that you find within these materials? What is the historical background of the material that you're using? And how do you think you're going to work with these materials? And how are you going to cover the joinery? ... Is the material you are using going to last? ... Why is it that you want to use these materials? ... So it builds their creativity and they build their confidence in their environment and how they can work with their environment.

— Doris Kamupira (2021)

In the 2000s, when the use of found materials took shape as a movement, the main established public and commercial art institutions in Harare were the NGZ and Gallery Delta, which were later joined by First Floor Gallery which was founded in 2009. Through exhibiting, teaching, evaluating, promoting and marketing, these spaces contributed to the institutionalisation of using found materials within what Howard Becker (2008) called “art worlds”, which involves a cooperative network of art production and consumption.

As mentioned above, Gallery Delta hosted the early formative events of the found materials movement, especially the *Redefinitions* exhibition series. Masimba Hwati (2011) credited in the *Redefinitions* manifesto that: “Gallery Delta has been the incubator space for our ideals: sacrificially and with fragile strands of faith, hosting our shows whenever it could. It has cost and rewarded Gallery Delta at the same time and creating with us a new vocabulary”. Gallery Delta was established in 1975 to create an art space promoting and exhibiting other art forms beyond the dominant stone sculpture, especially painting and graphic work. In the mid to late 2000s, although painting was still one of the dominant genres showing at the Gallery, more and more artists who worked with found materials also participated in their exhibitions, such as the regular *Artists in the Stream: Annual Young Artists Exhibition* and the *Annual Summer Exhibitions*.

After *Redefinitions* II (2009), which took place within the indoor gallery, artworks created from found materials appeared more frequently in their exhibitions and competitions. In *WALLS Competition and Exhibition* in 2009, in addition to the conventional “painting prize” and “graphic prize”, the gallery also awarded a “Multi-Media prize”, of which the winners were Masimba Hwati, Moffat Takadiwa and Johnson Zuze, who all work with found materials. The three *Redefinitions* artists Masimba Hwati, Gareth Nyandoro and Munyanradzi

Mazarire all had solo exhibitions at the gallery, for example, Hwati's *Facsimiles of Energy* (2011) and *Quantumkogik* (2014), and Mazarire's *Elaborations* (2015). Other artists covered in this research, such as Johnson Zuze, also had debut solo exhibitions at Gallery Delta. Most of their works in these exhibitions, if not all, were created from found materials.

From 16 to 18 November 2011, the *Found Object Clinic* workshop was held at Gallery Delta's adjoining amphitheatre where the *Redefinitions I* exhibition took place. The workshop was conducted by Masimba Hwati, "a found object exponent" and tutor at the Harare Polytechnic, to investigate "the energy of objects, their amalgamation and professional finish" (workshop brochure). Besides Hwati and Mazarire, several participants of the clinic later became prominent artists working with found materials, such as Moffat Takadiwa, Johnson Zuze and Clive Mukucha. Admire Matsvisi⁴⁶ who was taking care of the gallery space and was responsible for installing exhibitions, also participated in the workshop informally and sold the only three artworks he ever created in his life. As seen in the image reproduced from Gallery Delta's archive (Fig. 2.8), artists sat along the semicircular auditorium of the semi-open theatre, concentrating on the work in their hands. While one artist carefully examined the composition of his work, some others were weaving or stitching together a variety of components. On the floor were scattered fragments and scraps of material.



Fig 2.8 *Found Object Clinic* workshop, Image reproduced from the workshop brochure, 2012

Source: Archive of Gallery Delta

46 From my personal conversation with Admire Matsvisi when I visited Gallery Delta in April 2021.

Within this same space from the 2004 *Redefinitions I* exhibition to 2011 *Found Object Clinic* workshop, the once suspicious rawness of the visual language entered the scope of embraced “standard”. As written in the booklet, the workshop was “an absorbing process for the participants who created amazing works of high standard” and “an improvement in the standard of ‘Found Objects’ submitted was evident” in the *Artists in the Stream III: the Annual Young Artists’ exhibition 2012*. Taking place slightly after the publishing of the manifesto at *Redefinition III*, this event, through three days tutoring and co-working, further opened space for the evolving of this visual language as well as community-building of the ongoing movement.

It is noteworthy that, in Gallery Delta’s documents these works with found materials were usually presented as a distinct art genre, with terms including “3-Dimensional works”, “3-dimensional found object works”, “multimedia 3-dimensional objects/works” and “found objects sculptures”. These terms denoted a departure from other 3-dimensional works such as the single-media stone sculpture, ceramic work, welding metal works and Tapfuma Gutsa’s stone and wood mixed-media work, which were generally termed as “sculpture” or specifically “ceramics/pottery”. For example, in *Artists in The Stream V: The Annual Young Artist’s Exhibition (2014)*, “works were selected from thirty-three artists in the categories of painting, drawings and graphics, sculptures and multi-media 3-dimensional objects”. Although these terms vary slightly, their use in invitations, handouts and other accompaniments of exhibitions and competitions provided a reference to the specific art trend and thus stressed the shaping of this visual language towards a locally embedded art category.

As a commercial art gallery, Galley Delta, as well as First Floor Gallery Harare, also contributes to the commodification of these artworks, which is an integral part of the institutionalised system in the contemporary art world. The Harare-based European embassies and cultural organisations⁴⁷ and their related overseas connections were Gallery Delta’s sponsors and clients who would attend and at times open the shows at the gallery. The gallery’s exhibition hangouts often included a price list. Artists got exposure and also opportunities to sell their work through these shows to Harare-based clients and their related international networks.

With a focus on emerging artists, First Floor Gallery Harare (FFGH) was established by Valerie Kabov, Marcus Gora and artist Moffat Takadiwa. A number of the artists that FFGH

⁴⁷ For example, Embassy of Switzerland, European Union, Embassy of The Federal Republic of Germany and Hivos.

represents and once worked with use found materials in their work. For example, Jurio Rizhi, Zacharaha Magasa, Anne Zanele Mutema and Moffat Takadiwa himself. As shown on their website⁴⁸, FFGH conducted more group exhibitions and public events from their establishment in 2009 to 2015. Since 2016, the gallery has prioritised solo exhibitions with over five solos even during the years under COVID-19 pandemic. Artists Takunda Regis Billiat and Julio Rizhi each had three exhibitions from 2016 to 2022, while Zacharaha Magasa has had a solo show at the gallery each year since his return to the art scene in Zimbabwe in 2020. These exhibitions are often accompanied by a short interpretation essay written by Valerie Kabov, images of the artworks and photographs of the openings. These exhibitions with their accompaniments create a venue of visibilities and conversations for individual artists, highlighting their body of work in a certain period, personal style and evolving of visual languages. In terms of marketing and promoting, FFGH takes a more prevalent approach in the institutionalised contemporary art mechanism. The gallery has been active in international art fairs, especially those focusing on art from the continent, such as FNB Art Joburg, Investec Cape Town Art Fair, AKAA Art Fair, and so on.

As the largest art institution located in the CBD of Harare, the NGZ further contributes to the canonisation of found materials as a visual language in Zimbabwe through exhibitions and education. Since its opening under colonial rule, it has been active throughout different chapters of its history and remains as a significant infrastructure for the development of art in post-independent Zimbabwe. Artists' participation in the gallery's events created visibilities for their work and also presented specific meaning associated with the national art institution, especially before the flourishing of other independent art spaces as discussed in Chapter 5. The exhibitions at the National Gallery emphasise curatorial propositions based on a concept, theme, project or other curatorial framework. A very often cited yet under-documented event taking place at the peak of the found materials movement at the Gallery was the *Live 'N' Direct* (2010) exhibition.

Zimbabwe has gone through a lot of painful times in the past ten years that have left indelible marks on the general public ... Burning issues of Democracy flared up in sometimes-unseemly ways for a nation known for its restraint and orderliness bringing Zimbabwe to the brink of social disorder. The Land issue is tied up the pluralist one [sic]; the situation was further compounded by the

48 <https://www.firstfloorgalleryharare.com>

economic meltdown and astronomic inflation ... Every sector has suffered including the artist community due to the absence of visitors from abroad and scarcity of viable galleries. It is a struggle to source paint and canvas for the painter as well as for sculptors looking for specialised tools but artists have persevered. The most remarkable thing is that new ways of seeing and conceiving have opened new doors in different media. Something is happening out there that needs a platform for dialogue through the medium of Art. (Gutsa 2010, 2)

Curated by the then Chief Curator Tapfuma Gutsa, *Live 'N' Direct* was a massive exhibition presenting artwork by over 100 contemporary Zimbabwean artists selected from hundreds of submissions following an open call. Artworks in this exhibition echo Gutsa's call for expressions on "the very core of what it feels to be Zimbabwean in real-time: Now" (Gutsa 2010, 2), representing, reacting to and engaging with the conditions in Zimbabwe as diagnosed by in the curatorial statement above. For example, Moffat Takadiwa's *Silhouetted Words* is a piece created with terracotta and wood. As seen in the image (Fig. 2.9), the triptych presents three figures on board with "silhouetted words" on their bodies: "poverty", "indipendence" [sic], and "suncions" [sic]. The artist intentionally gave the wrong spelling of the English words to create his own Shoglish or at times in the way they were spoken in the streets (Takadiwa 2023), as if people's understanding of "independence" and "sanctions" were different from its dominant paradigm. Yet the figures put their hands up, surrendering to their living conditions indicated in the words. The composition is also a reference to crucifixion in the Bible as an indication of people's suffering (Takadiwa 2023).

The decade's art movement was evident in this exhibition with dozens of participating artists using found materials. However, besides a digital catalogue with a small selection of images and a list of participating artists and their works, the gallery does not hold other archives of the exhibition. One of the participating artists, Valerie Shaw (2021, 305), recalled the ongoing presence of policemen at the exhibition and that, "some world class, powerful and meaningful work, mainly using recycled material and discards did not get the exposure it deserved". This authority watching somehow demonstrated the exhibition's pondering on the time and social condition in which artists created their work.



Fig 2.9 Moffat Takadiwa, *Silhouetted Words*, 2010, found materials

Source: National Gallery of Zimbabwe

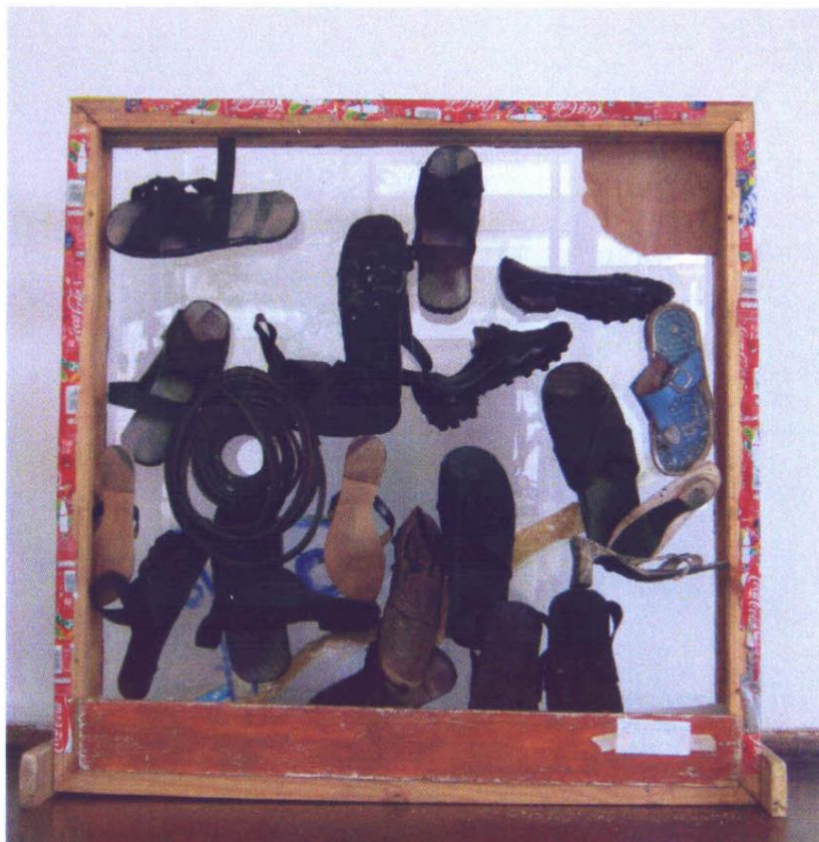


Fig 2.10 Gareth Nyandoro, *National Recylenziliation*, 2010, found materials.

Source: National Gallery of Zimbabwe

The exhibition also awarded art prizes “in the spirit of National reconciliation”.⁴⁹ The first prize went to artist Gareth Nyandoro’s artwork *National Recylenziliation*. As seen in the image (Fig. 2.10), with a wood frame decorated with flattened Coca-Cola cans, the piece resembles a storefront window. However, instead of delicate garments and dazzling merchandise, in the window are displays of worn-out slippers and sandals, old shoes, strips of rubber, and rolled-up tubes. All objects appear to be suspended and floating disorderly in the window, which can be viewed from both sides. It is visually out of time, yet it is in “the real time: now”. The piece is the artist’s capture of the “downtown shopping window all the way to Mbare through Flyover, past Magaba, Siyasoo” (Nyandoro, 2023). Shaw (2021, 306) reads the work as a direct visual comment on “a direct comment on the period, 2007–2008 when Bata Zimbabwe stores, renowned for their economical and very popular shoes, had in fact run out of shoes”. *National Recylenziliation* was a symbolic display of the social-economic conditions of the nation and also a meta-representation of the found materials movement itself, a visual exploration that started with recycling and repurposing materials. Thus the art prize awarded by the Gallery and the inclusion of massive works of found materials in the exhibition was a recognition of its relevance with time in terms of both its symbolic meaning and its artistic language.

The NGZ has organised the National Pavilion in the international gala event Venice Biennale since 2011. As the Gallery’s director Chikukwa (2020, 2) asserts, “the national pavilion gave us a voice within the global community”. The gallery selected several artists who work with found materials to represent Zimbabwean art and participate in the Venice Biennale, such as Gareth Nyandoro, Georgina Maxim, Wallen Mapondera and so on. This biennial exhibition, together with many other events at the National Gallery, as well as at other art institutions such as Gallery Delta and FFGH mentioned above, brought these artists’ work to the broader audience in the global art scene.

While the artists often source found materials from the local urban spaces and create works about urban life, these art spaces, activities and events provide opportunities and platforms for the worlding of their artworks. More specifically, embedded in local realities, their artistic practices are part of the local art scene while they also participate and interact with the global art world through institutional complexes. In this sense, Harare is also an “Art World City”, a concept and paradigm proposed by Joanna Grabski (2017, 3) to account for “the imbrication of the creative economy and the urban environment as well as the interplay

49 It refers to reconciling the ruling party and the opposition parties in the context.

of local and global dynamics shaping Dakar's art world". Grabski (2017, 3) conceptualises "art world city," as "a multiscalar, urban site for artistic production, mediation, and transaction". As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, although Art World City is not adopted as the overall framework, this research pulls substantially on the analytical framework to analyse the urban artistic practices in Harare and provides a paradigm for understanding the artistic network in Harare and other African cities⁵⁰.

As a state-driven art establishment, NGZ has an art school, which is also the nation's major art educational institute. The NGSVAD, the NGZ's educational facility, was formally registered with the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education and officially opened in October 2012. The campus is located in the high-density neighbourhood Mbare, formerly known as Visual Arts Studios and the British American Tobacco (BAT) Workshop School. The origins of the gallery's teaching institute can be traced to the Workshop School of the National Gallery of Rhodesia, formed by Frank McEwen to instruct and promote stone sculptors during colonial control. After the independence of Zimbabwe, the BAT Workshop School was established in 1981 and was supported by the British American Tobacco company until the early years of this century, when the BAT Workshop School expanded its focus from stone carving to more art genres. According to artist Doris Kamupira (2021) who was once a BAT student and is now a lecturer at NGSVAD, during the time when she was studying at BAT, the emphasis was on drawing and painting, which then developed into a "BAT style" of impressionist painting. In the early 2000s, when Kamupira was assisting the instructors at the school, there was an urge to break away from the dominant painting paradigm. The lecturers encouraged students to experiment with their visual languages, providing specific suggestions such as freeing the ways of holding a paintbrush (Kamupira 2021). This transformation within the school occurred at the same time as the found materials movement.

In 2006 when artist Wallen Mapondera was studying at the Workshop School, the lecturers had already started instructing students to utilise found materials, and today, this medium has become part of their modules. NGSVAD offers two programs, the two-year Certificate of Completion and the three or four years' National Diploma in Fine Art. In the second term of the two-year certificate programme, after being introduced to fundamental art techniques such as painting and drawing in the first term, students are instructed to work with

⁵⁰ As mentioned in Chapter 1, this aspect of becoming an Art World City or the "worlding" of Harare, as well as other African cities, should be further analysed beyond the scope of this thesis.

mixed media, specifically found materials (Kamupira 2021). The use of found materials then becomes part of their courses throughout the programme.

According to Kamupira (2021), the students would be asked to bring different found items to school, and in the classes, they should explain the significance of the materials and the meaning of mixing different materials. That is to say, the students are required to be conscious of the features and history of the objects so that they can imagine the final artwork accordingly with both material and conceptual considerations. The foundation courses in the second term also include the conservation and preservation of the artworks. Through this course, the students learn to balance, not to restrict, their selection and use of art material by thinking about its afterlife in relation to its physical features, such as its durability. By doing so, students can be more informed about the materiality of their artwork. In addition to art histories, the lecturers also engage with the contemporary in their theoretical courses. For example, Doris Kamupira (2021) mentioned that they regularly take their students to exhibitions in the city and also introduce them to the broader art world through videos. In this way, students can get inspiration from and also locate their practices in the relevant context of the broader art world.

We also do provide videos, like we have Ibrahim Mahama, Romuald Hazoumè, artists who are using found objects. So we introduce them. Look, he is using the coco bean jute sacks but he is telling the history of the coco bean and what it was used for and why he was using it and the meaning to his people and what he want to do with the materials he is using. So these videos and these visits and all, they also help them to have a good understanding and to construct the ideas.

By including found materials as part of NGSVAD's teaching modules, the National Gallery further enhanced the legibility and formulation of this visual language within the canons of art in Zimbabwe. Yet, it is beyond instruction in technique. During the lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic, students could not access the materials at school for their drawing and painting classes. Kamupira (2021) recalled how they encouraged students to improvise and create their own pigments with any materials available in their living spaces. Commenting on the necessity of working with found materials, Kumupira (2021) states that, "it builds their creativity and it builds their confidence in their environment and how they can work with their environment". This situation in a global crisis coincided with the time when this movement started in the early 2000s. It could be argued that, in this very recent history of

Zimbabwean art, instead of merely a choice of art materials, working with found materials has become “artistic thinking”, through which artists navigate prevailing conditions of uncertainty (Gurney 2022, 161). This will be further unpacked from different aspects in the following discussions.

Conclusion

This chapter traces the evolution of found materials in Zimbabwe from the 1980s, identifying the *Redefinitions* exhibition series as a milestone in this process. The local genealogy is rooted in Zimbabwe’s artistic context and social realities while interacting with the broader context of the regional and global art world. This chapter highlights artists’ dialogues with and participation in the broader art community, consciously positioning themselves within a larger framework of artistic exchange and discourse. This further argues against simplifying the phenomenon in Zimbabwe as a mere footnote to Western avant-garde art. It is important to note that this chapter selects and examines only a few key artists and events. Further research is needed to delve into the contribution of other artists, especially those who were highly active in the 1980s and 1990s.

The investigation of found materials in this chapter extends beyond the reductive view of attributing this phenomenon merely to material scarcity. It emphasises the agency of artists in this process, especially their exploration and experimentation of materials. Tapfuma Gutsa’s conceptual installations with mixed media and Keston Beaton’s fascination with everyday objects were driven by their proactive innovation in artistic languages rather than the lack of conventional art materials in the context of Zimbabwe. While the movement at the beginning of this century was catalysed by social realities, the chapter emphasises how artists transformed crises into opportunities for reimagining and redefining the convention of art material. This artistic movement, which emerged and continued to develop in Harare, laid the foundation for multidimensional interactions between artistic practices involving found materials and urban spaces. This aspect will be further explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 Found Materials, Process and the Social Life of Things in Harare

Introduction

The preceding chapter traces the evolution of found materials in Zimbabwe from a historical perspective, examining the interconnections between the *Redefinitions* movement and the transformation of Harare city. This association laid the foundation for the characteristics of artistic practices involving found materials, particularly their close ties to urban spaces. These art materials manifest the materiality of both the urban environment and the artworks, serving as tangible interfaces between the two. The flow of the material between the realm of the city and the realm of art is accomplished through the artistic practices in the urban spaces. This chapter therefore shifts its focus to these materials themselves, unfolding the process of artists' creative processes involving the materials and analysing their relationships with urban spaces.

This chapter opens with a theoretical framework which underscores the importance of materiality in the analysis of artworks. Artworks are considered as art-working process. Thus, the chapter employs the social life of things (Appadurai 1986) as an approach, analysing art materials, the creative process, and the interactions between artists and materials. This chapter provides a descriptive overview of found materials used by artists in Harare, particularly those closely linked to urban spaces. Subsequently, the discussion delves into a specific category of materials, namely trash, exploring the historical and political implications associated with this material and the term itself. It also examines Moffat Takadiwa's artworks which are mostly created from the waste of consumer products. The final section of this chapter investigates artists' labour involved in the process, encompassing material collection, processing, and collective labour. It also underscores the artistic engagement with urban spaces within this procedural context.

3.1 Materiality, agency and the social life of things

The "energy of objects" is their ability to provoke memories and ideas through visual interactions. This essence, in my opinion, is that all matter has the ability to attract, store and transmit subjective kinds of energies which are recognisable to the cognitive and the emotive parts of the human kind. My vision is to capture

important energies and redirect or distribute them so that my work will be the result of the transmutation of energy. My works function as energy catchers or records of the energy processes but importantly as facsimiles of different energies in my ideological vicinity. I hope to provide a kaleidoscope through which people can see the variations in the different types of the energy processes occurring through my eyes.

— Masimba Hwati (2011)

The materiality of art basically refers to the physical substance of artwork and the process in which such quality is achieved. It involves art materials which are its foundation, the art-making process, and the tangible being of the final artworks. Art historian Michael Yonan (2012) points out the suppression of materiality in art-historical writing, especially in Anglo-American discourses. According to Yonan (2011, 239), while “visuality and materiality tend to operate in tandem”, the field of art history has historically placed greater importance on the visual aspects of art above its materiality, so neglecting the latter as a crucial component in interpretation. The widely adopted term “visual art” in this field demonstrates Yonan’s assertion. Art historian Petra Lange-Berndt (2015, 12) also points out that materiality as a contested concept is often sidelined in critical academic writing in the realm of contemporary art. During the 1980s, the “material turn” in various academic disciplines, especially humanities and social sciences, heightened focus on materiality in shaping social, cultural and historical phenomena. In line with this interdisciplinary shift, art historians also attended to inquiries about art’s material reality and multivalent significance (Cacchione and Lin 2021, 18–19). Scholars argue that materiality plays an indispensable and participatory role in artistic meaning and value, and should also be viewed as the rightful focus of art historical study (Yonan 2011).

In the idealist view indebted to the Platonic perception of art, material was located as secondary, potential or indeterminate to artistic creativity. This philosophical polarity led to a division on viewing material that, while it was obvious that material constitutes the tangible quality of art, this philosophy underlies the art historians’ training without them recognising materials (Didi-Huberman 2015, 42). As art historian Monika Wagner (2015, 28) points out, in Western art history, material is often considered the carrier of messages and belongs to “the lower sphere of everyday life and had to be made to disappear in the process of artistic creation”. Lange-Berndt (2015, 13) also observes that art material is viewed as “a springboard for leaping into abstraction and visuality” and only “the indicator of something

else”. This form/material dualism and its gendered implications, which inscribed femininity in material as subjugated to forms by a male-conceived creator, were challenged by feminist critique (Butler 2015, 120; Wagner 2015, 29). More recently, material as a category is gaining more critical investigation in art historical writing. As Christine Mehring (2019, 59) points out, materials distinguish modern art more than other elements in the context across the canon of Western twentieth-century art and into more recent global contemporary practices. While earlier Western artists worked with materials of “more-or-less established traditions within the history of art-making”, such as bronze, wood and stone, modern artists began to experiment with unprecedented materials, to the extent that “modern art equaled nontraditional materials” (Mehring 2019, 60). Mehring (2019, 66) also suggests that European artists’ consciousness and reflections on art materials should be understood “in a broader context of art produced on the peripheries”.

As analysed in Chapter 2, Zimbabwean artists’ found material movement was motivated by both artistic innovations and social conditions. Despite the divergence of this lineage from Chinese Material Art, Wu Hung’s conceptualisation rooted in materials and his analysis of the negotiations on visibility and materiality between Material Art and canonised genres provides an inspirational framework for comprehending the use of found materials in Zimbabwean art. Throughout the history of China, as noticed by Orianna Cacchione and Wei-Cheng Lin (2021, 18), materials have factored considerably in the development and significance of art from jade, bronze and glassware, to timber, inkstone, and so on. These materials have informed and found their entry into works by contemporary artists. However, although materials themselves contribute to the creation and meaning of artwork, scholarly works on materiality in Chinese art history mostly engage with the finished artwork rather than the materials from which they are created (Cacchione and Lin 2021, 19). Thus, Wu Hung’s historical position of Material Art in China shifts the dominant reading of contemporary Chinese art relying on political ideology and cultural exchange, especially in American and European scholarship. By defining a significant yet unexamined component in contemporary Chinese art, his work also enriches and inspires the scholarship on materiality in art globally.

In addition to the inquiry into the significance of art material, an examination of art’s materiality also encompasses its process, which includes the treatment and function of the materials. In light of this perspective, it is important to highlight the following aspects related to the shift of focus to materials. Firstly, the analysis of artwork would inherently include the analysis of its process of becoming, or the realisation of its material being. In other words, rather than merely seeing art as a visual object, a processual point of view is adopted in the

perception of art. The process refers to the transformation from art materials to artwork from one angle and to the process of artists' creative labour from the other angle. In Gell's words, artwork is viewed as "a system of actions" (Gell 1998, 6), referring to the practical mediatory role of art objects to account for its production and circulation in the social-relational network. In Wu Hung's (2019) account of "Material Art", the categorisation of process includes the "performative process" in which transformation takes place within the duration of displaying the artwork, the "preparatory process" which is associated with efforts in collecting materials from specific social context, and certain art-making processes that are significant to the meaning of the artwork. This chapter touches on these three processes, particularly the preparatory process and art-making process, highlighting found material's fundamental and participatory role.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that in these processes, the agency is performed by both human and non-human actors, namely the artists and the materials, as they interact within social-relational as well as spatial contexts. The study of cultural and social history has placed significant emphasis on agency; however, this focus has predominantly been from an anthropocentric perspective, characterised by conceptual distinctions between natural and the social, human and non-human, and immaterial and material (Bennett and Joyce 2010, 6). Such views have been shifted due to the crucial intellectual work by scholars such as Alfred Gell (1998), Bruno Latour (2005) and Daniel Miller (2005), whose discussions on non-human agency provide influential additions to the theories of materiality and material culture. Note that their works vary on the dualism of subject and object, and on the agency of materials in relation to human agency. In Miller's formulations, "material things become effective in shaping social relations and conduct only through the mediating agency of human consciousness" (Bennett and Joyce 2010, 5). While Gell posits that art object achieves its effect as a distributed agency of a person, Latour argues for the independent agency of materials that are autonomous from human actors (Miller 2005, 11–13).

Although focusing on objects of science, Latour's (2005, 5) emphasis on the agency of the non-human world and his propositions of "social" as a network of associations between heterogeneous elements, is inspiring for understanding the context in which artwork and working process are situated. The material thing, in Elizabeth Grosz's (2015, 147) words, "is our provocation to action and is itself the result of our action". The understanding of things should be pushed beyond merely as "the other" and that "against which we measured ourselves and our limited, the mirror of what we are not" (Grosz 2015, 147). Rather, we should approach things through our interrelation with them as they elicit responses in both

other things and humans. Thus, agency, as Bennett and Joyce (2010, 9) point out, is always relational, meaning that it only occurs when agents exist in a network. Such relational materiality “recognises the reciprocity between artefacts [sic] and people and acknowledges that the formation of any knowledge about the material world is dependent on that network” (Holling cited in Cacchione and Lin 2021, 21).

Drawing from such insight, this thesis considers the agency of art materials in the artistic processes mentioned above and examines the way in which the agency of the human and non-human actors is linked and entangled, with an approach to “follow the actors themselves” (Latour 2005, 12) in the social-relational associations of their collective existence. At the basic level, the physical attributions of art materials have an impact on the way artists engage with them. Focusing specifically on wax, Didi-Huberman (2015, 49) contends that plasticity could not be reduced to canonical passivity and material proves more disturbing as it “possesses a viscosity, a kind of activity or intrinsic power, which is a power of metamorphosis, of polymorphosis, of insensibility to contradiction”. The creative process involves a continuous interplay of cooperation, resistance, navigation and negotiation between artists and the materials. In the context of this research, for example, while Gina Maxim could stitch the clothes and fabrics using needles, Moffat Takadiwa has to drill the used toothbrushes to create holes for connecting and assembling them with fishlines. Tapfuma Gutsa, who currently uses *matamba* fruits as his primary art materials, has to find ways of storing, preserving, framing and colouring them. It is for a similar reason that the National Gallery’s affiliated art school requires students to ponder on the preservation and durability of their found materials as mentioned in Chapter 1. This could also be understood in relation to what Masimba Hwati (2013) called “innate energy” which indicates the general form of energy, either industrial or chemical, attached to an object. Art material’s innate energy might exist in its own presence, but it only exercises its agency in its interrelations and engagements with the artist.

Exiting in the social context, art material is also imbued with social agency. In addition to chemical energy and personal energy associated with one’s experiences, Masimba Hwati (2013) identifies the third type of energy that he termed “imparted energy”, which is “a unanimous type of value ascribed to objects because of their association with certain people”. Certainly, the “people” in this context can be expanded to events, places, or even cultural products. As Grosz (2015, 147) puts it: “The thing is born in time as well as space”. Such material agency in Zimbabwean artists’ work created from found materials could be

exemplified with Wallen Mapondera's work *Pahukama* (2018)⁵¹, an installation with a road sign bearing Robert Mugabe's name as its main component (Fig. 3.1).



Fig 3.1 Wallen Mapondera and Stary Mwaba, *Pahukama*, 2018, road sign, nail markings, enamel on board. (Installation), dimensions variable

Photo by Lifang Zhang

The road sign was obtained by Wallen Mapondera during a bloodless coup that took place in Harare in November 2017. The military force of Zimbabwe instigated this coup, inviting people to engage in peaceful demonstrations on the streets with the objective of removing President Robert Mugabe from power. As Mapondera (2019, 35) points out, this road sign contains multifaceted historical significance that is associated with the figure Robert Mugabe as well as the physical road and the accompanying signage. Robert Mugabe, who held the position of president for 30 years since 1987, was an iconic figure of liberation struggle in Zimbabwe and in the broader pan-African context. For this reason, several roads in major cities in Zimbabwe, as well as in neighbouring countries such as Namibia, have been named after him. However, he was also responsible for the implementation of the tragic events

51 The inaugural presentation of this artwork occurred as a collaboration between Wallen Mapondera and Zambian artist Stary Mwaba, as part of the *Converge* exhibition held in June 2018 at the Raw Spot Gallery, Rhodes University. Stary Mwaba's contribution consists of portraits on board of ordinary people from his research. The exhibition was curated by Ruth Simbao and Brunn Kramer. Through this installation, Mapondera and Mwaba endeavoured to articulate a mutual understanding rooted in the intertwined historical narratives of Zimbabwe and Zambia. For more information about the work, please see Mapondera (2019) and Muvhuti (2022).

including the urban cleanup movement Operation Murambatsvina as mentioned earlier. He and his ruling party were also criticised as a contributing factor of the ongoing daily hardships and suffering experienced by Zimbabwe people. During the grievous social-economic crisis under Mugabe's leadership, this very road in Harare witnessed the struggle and survival of numerous homeless kids and "illegal"⁵² vendors. It had also witnessed the coup in 2017 and, as described by Mapondera (2019, 38), the battered road sign "had been stoned, dragged against tar and hit with various weapons on a range of surfaces. It was in the hands of a lot of different people who were angry with the Mugabe's leadership so they were showing their anger through hitting the road sign". Associated with these socio-political histories, the road sign entails "super agency" (Wu 2019, 15) and is able to evoke personal and public memories across different generations of Zimbabweans.

This example of Mapondera's *Pahukama* brings forth another dimension of material agency, namely the notion of the "social life of things", which originated from scholarship in the field of consumption. The book *The Social Life of Things*, edited by Arjun Appadurai (1986), is an influential work regarding the theory of objects, and Appadurai's introduction and Igor Kopytoff's contribution are particularly noteworthy. As Miller (2005, 7) comments, this work "plotted a trajectory for things in their ability to move in and out of different conditions of identification and alienation". Kopytoff (1986) considers commoditisation as a process of becoming, rather than as a binary distinction between being a commodity or not, and argues that this process reveals different biographical profiles of things. Following such insight, many scholars employed the theories of things and have made significant contributions, especially in the field of material culture. Gosden and Marshall (1999, 170) point out, "Not only do objects change through their existence, but they often have the capability of accumulating histories, so that the present significance of an object derives from the persons and events to which it is connected". Jane Bennett (2010: viii) theorises such non-human vitality as "capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own". In Grosz's (2015, 146) account, the thing has a history and "a 'life' of its own, characteristics of its own, which we must incorporate into our activities in order to be effective, rather than simply understand, regulate and neutralise from outside".

52 Vendors were prohibited to trade on this major road.

In line with understanding artwork with a processual perspective as mentioned above, this chapter adopts a social life of things as both subject matter and methodology to unfold the process. Cacchione and Lin (2021, 20) contend that, by examining the role of materiality in Chinese art across time, one can observe how histories, stories, and agency are directly embedded in materials and are activated through their use. They further highlight that “materials carry with them not only the long histories of the varied ways artists and artisans have worked with them across time and culture, but also the ways in which they bear witness or document historical events”. Concerning the use of found materials in the context of Africa, some scholars have drawn attention to the materiality of artworks and the multidimensional transformation of objects. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Kearney (2016) investigates the transformation of objects from every life into the context of art with a focus on a selection of South African artists. In elucidating the work of the distinguished Ghanaian artist El Anatsui, recognised for his creation of wall hangings fashioned from aluminium bottle tops, Binder (2008, 24) underscores the “transformation of material and the significance of this change in relation to local and global political and societal conditions”. In examining the oeuvre of Ugandan artist Sanaa Gateja, Dorah Kasozi (2019, 48) delineates the trajectory of the principal medium employed, specifically paper beads, within the social-spatial contexts of Uganda, contending that this procedural aspect imparts significance to the artwork through “the tactility and mobility of the materials and their register in daily life”.

The approach in this chapter echoes these scholarly works. The social life of the material in art plots from its status in the non-art spheres, becoming materials, and to the materialisation of an art object. Such processes would activate “material relations”, as the material is “an intertwining matter through which impressions are conveyed to the senses, a medium is a living environment of expression, transmission, and storage” (Bruno 2014, 4). This reading of material fosters novel modes and methods of connection and relatedness, linking the object, the medium, the environment and the subject in a wide relational network (Cacchione and Lin 2021, 21). Thus, the methodology of the social life of things, as concluded by Cacchione and Lin (2021, 19), necessitates the consideration of the role, agency, potentiality and constraints exerted by materials have on artists and artworks, informing not merely the final artwork but also the process significantly.

It is intriguing that, shifting the focus to materiality, which is seemingly the basic and measurable substance of artworks, leads to the uncovering of contexts and activating of relations along the social life of materials. To trace the social life of the object is thus to de-objectify it, tracing its trajectories in different social-relational settings in which the artists

interact with the objects. This proposition also finds alignment with Lange-Berndt's (2015, 13) methodological concept of "material complicity", which means to "give agency to the material, to follow the material and to act with the material". According to Lange-Berndt (2015, 15), complicity with materials exhibits a political agenda given that material has been defined as a subaltern category in the Western post-Enlightenment intellectual tradition. To act with materials and to be complicit means to examine transpersonal societal issues, power dynamics and matters of concern, rather than merely aesthetic quality or symbolic meanings. Furthermore, it also requires involvement with multiple disciplines beyond the boundary of art history in order to elucidate the meanings of materials in relation to their non-art connotations (Lange-Berndt 2015, 16).

It should be noticed that, in the context of this research, the artistic process and the social life of the materials are located in the urban spaces of Harare. As these materials are collected and processed in the city, they not only compose the fundamental part of the materiality of art but also the materiality of the city. The physical sites of art-making, especially the art spaces and facilities further discussed in the following chapter, also form parts of the city's materiality. Thus, in this thesis, to trace the social life of things means to follow the trajectories of the materials transiting through and transforming in the urban spaces of Harare.

3.2 Found materials and the proximity to urban life

We also noticed that the materials are related to particular areas we are working on. The type of materials you can pick up here in Chitungwiza are different from the type of materials if you go to Borrowdale, the dumpsite there ... So even if they are to be found a hundred years later, they will still reflect the social life at that time.

— Johnson Zuze and Ngonidzashe Tsiga (2021)

I started to use plastic from the very beginning when I made my own work...I grew up in Mbare. Each and every day, I would see tons of plastic in the garbage. In our daily lives and in our homes, I can see almost all the stuff that we use are sort of plastic things, cups, plates and all that stuff. So I think the link with plastic is something that I see every day. It talks to me every day, reminding me of our environment, reminding me what I'm doing now.

Before further discussion, it is necessary to provide a descriptive contour and embody the found materials in this thesis, which includes two main questions: what entails the found materials? Where and how do artists source these materials? It is anticipated that artists may alter their primary materials at distinct periods or employ many materials concurrently across different series of artworks. The chapter's scope is derived from my fieldwork undertaken in Harare, as well as specific collections of artworks created by a selection of artists who I interviewed and studied.

Artists situated in Harare actively employ a diverse range of materials in their artistic practices, such as fabric remnants, discarded consumer items, worn-out tyres, household objects, weathered tents, scrap metal, garments, used containers, fruit, natural clay, and so on. This excerpt offers a limited overview of the found materials employed by Zimbabwean artists. Regarding chemical attribution, the materials encompass a diverse array, from cotton to rubber, paper to iron, and polythene to organic entities such as plant life. Certain materials possess the property of malleability, allowing them to be easily shaped or moulded, while other materials can be maintained in their original configurations without undergoing any considerable alterations. Some objects have the ability to withstand the passage of time, whereas others are prone to decay rapidly. Some objects require fragmentation in order to facilitate reorganisation, whereas others necessitate assembling numerous bits together. The scale also has a range that extends from shoe size to a length of a dozen metres, which has the capacity to provide shelter for an individual's dwelling. Regarding colour, many objects retain their inherent hues, while some require mixing with paint, and yet others exhibit resistance to pigments.

What should be noticed is the materials' proximity to urban lives and environments in Harare. To begin with, most materials are obtained from the urban spaces in the city. The prevailing practice for artists in Harare is to source materials from their nearby environments. As mentioned previously, the early proponents and participants of the *Redefinitions* movement, such as Gareth Nyandoro and Masimba Hwati, looked for art materials from streets rich in abandoned objects and garbage during the social-economic crisis in Zimbabwe since the early 2000s. A large number of their peers, as well as artists from younger generations, tend to take a similar approach by obtaining materials from places in close proximity to their residence areas and studios. Dumpsites, recycling centres, marketplaces,

and streets with vendor stands are the prominent sources of found materials. These spaces are associated with the urban transition as well as the lived experiences of the citizens in Harare.

Artist Clive Mukucha graduated with a painting background from the NGSVAD in 2009, and was among the participants of the *Redefinitions IV* exhibition in 2013. Mukucha has interacted with a variety of everyday objects, such as plastic containers, pipes, wooden pieces, metal sheets, and synthetic materials, among others. He obtained most of his materials from locations inside Chitungwiza, his current place of residence, including streets, dumpsites, and garages, as well as the Chikwanh industrial area and commercial zones. As he said, “The materials just come from like almost everywhere. When I’m walking, if I find something interesting, I pick it” (Mukucha 2021). Metal scrap is a prominent material used by Mukucha, and is acquired from a nearby metal depot close to his studio space.⁵³ “So I go there and sometimes I buy. Sometimes I collect from their residues when they break things and from those things which they don’t like” (Mukucha 2021). Mukucha creates his signature dog tags with these metal fragments, which symbolise matters pertaining to warfare and state apparatus in his work. As seen in the image, the work *Insurgence – Hondo mu Mozambique* (Fig. 3.2) incorporates a collection of carefully assembled dog tags with colours drawn from the national flag of Mozambique. This deliberate choice is used as a reference to the civil conflicts in the country. These dog tags can also be observed in several other works by Mukucha addressing the issues of war, conflict and state violence. Instead of delving into the history of each found object, Mukucha places a greater emphasis on the energy and meaning imbued within the finished artwork derived from his creative process.

⁵³ In 2021 when I visited Mukucha, his studio was in the backyard of his parents’ house where he also stayed. He then moved to a new location and started a collective studio called Black Sheep.



Fig 3.2 Clive Mukucha, *Insurgence – Hondo mu Mozambique*, 2019, 170x100x35cm.

Image courtesy of the artist



Fig 3.3 Clive Mukucha, *Portrait I*, 2012, found materials, 71x21x10 cm.

Source: Gallery Delta

It is important to note that artists employ these found materials not merely as visual components, but also as a means of continuing to redefine and explore the convention of art materials. This can be observed, for example, in Mukucha's early pieces which are inspired by the mask traditions prevalent across the continent. For example, *Portrait I* (Fig. 3.3), first exhibited in *Redefinitions IV* in 2013, presents a composite head profile assembled from plastic containers, metal keys, umbrella handles, bits of rubber, and strings. Mukucha (2021) expressed curiosity over the resemblances he noted between the materiality of traditional mask works and contemporary artwork, which he refers to as "the continuation of doing art". While he and his contemporaries use materials found in their surroundings, their forefathers "were using found objects of their time, wood, bone, hides, shields, and putting them together" (Mukucha 2021). For Mukucha, at its minimal, using these modern materials is a way of archiving day-to-day existence and communicating information with the future generation pertaining to the material of current time, in terms of both art and the general mundane life. As Lange-Berndt (2015, 15) asks, "what revolutionary potential the contemporary materials produced by society might bear in the realm of art".

Johnson Zuze, who is known for his animal sculptures created from everyday objects, also resides in Chitungwiza and collects art materials from the neighbourhoods. In 2009, Zuze (2021) transitioned to sculptural work with found materials, marking a departure from the medium of comics. This shift was catalysed by the significant event of a fire that resulted in damage to his house. Zuze collected the remnants and residues from the ruins and created his first sculptural piece. Made from salvaged metal objects including spoons and wires that survived the fire, *The Beautiful Struggle* (Fig. 3.4) expresses Zuze's personal experiences within a time of both desolation and rejuvenation. Since then, he has been engaged in the use of found materials sourced from urban waste. Possibly due to the fire and the influence of his father who used to create home craft with wires, Zuze mostly chooses materials that possess a prolonged decomposition period, such as wires, glass bottles and ceramic fragments.

Zuze often employs wires to structure the form of his artworks. What should be noticed is that these wires sourced from Chitungwiza carry significant implications regarding the transformation of the built environment in this urban locality (Fig. 3.5). As further elaborated in Chapter 5 pertaining to the colonial history of Harare city, Chitungwiza emerged as a result of the combination of three different townships, the oldest of which was established in the early 1950s to accommodate migrant workers for the metropolitan Salisbury. The early units inside Zuze's residential district, which were constructed under Rhodesian rules, featured a limited floor plan consisting of only two rooms: a single bedroom and a combined kitchen

and dining room. These properties were mostly enclosed with wire fencing. Following the nation's independence in 1980, and particularly throughout the 1990s, there was a notable influx of inhabitants into this region, resulting in the expansion of the modest dwellings. The fence wires were dismantled and then scattered over different places across the area, remaining for years and decades. Zuze collects the wires in the neighbourhood and occasionally purchases from certain households. While the artist does not explicitly engage with this historical context in his sculptural works, the material itself manifests the personal and urban conditions that shape his practices. In a similar light, Wallen Mapondera's found materials, some of which were obtained during significant social-political events in the city, such as the previously mentioned coup, also hold relevance and significance to the urban histories of Harare.



Fig 3.4 Johnson Zuze, *The Beautiful Struggle*, 2009

Source: <https://wineandwilddogs.art/2021/05/24/beautiful-struggle-and-burnt-offerings/>



Fig 3.5 The old wire fencing at Johnson Zuze's neighbourhood, Chitungwiza, Harare, 2021.

Photo by Lifang Zhang

Many artists also source and use materials that are associated with their specific experiences in urban spaces. One instance is artist Zacharaha Masaga, who began his exploration of found materials during the late 2000s. In 2011, when he relocated to South Africa he had to rely on the creation of metal sculptures as a means of sustenance. Upon his return to Harare, he started working with used tyres as his predominant material to communicate his experiences of migration. Magasa is a descendant of the Ngoni people in Malawi, an ethnic group that originated from South Africa and started their migration north including to Malawi in the early nineteenth century. Magasa's grandfather migrated to Rhodesia's Salisbury and resided in Mbare, then Harari township. Magasa spent his formative years in Mbare before embarking on a journey to South Africa and then, in 2019, relocated with his family to Domboshawa, a peri-urban region in the northern vicinity of Harare. This deep history of migration began to reveal its presence to Magasa when he became an apparent foreigner in South Africa. Subsequently, Magasa also found himself a stranger to the intimate community in Domboshawa. He mocked himself, "Ngoni tribe came from South Africa, but when I go to South Africa I'm a foreigner. Here in Zimbabwe, I'm a foreigner. If I go to Malawi, I'm also a foreigner" (Magasa 2021).

During Magasa's stay in Durban, he encountered people who were involved in the acquisition of used tyres and smuggling them into Zimbabwe for different purposes. "It was

like a hammer. When I go back to Zimbabwe, I want to go and use this material. Because the way it's coming to Zimbabwe is the same way that many people are going to South Africa". This revelatory moment also prompted him to link his observations of the "complaints that Zimbabweans received in South Africa" to the used tyres in Zimbabwe, as "they are doing all the dirty work, receiving the bad smoke and toxic air and everything" (Magasa 2021). Relocating to Domboshawa after a few years of life as an immigrant in South Africa, Magasa started to contemplate his positionality within the new environment he inhabits and to experiment with old tyres in his work to address such experiences. He often collected materials from the garages and tyre stores in the neighbourhood. Most of the used tyres are made and transported from South Africa, while some are from other countries such as China and Germany. Magasa showed me one such place near his studio, the NK Tyre Fitness Center, a small tyre shop that offers a range of supplementary services such as car wash, aluminium welding, mechanical work and computer car diagnostics (Fig. 3.6). Moving around in this area, one would notice many informal repair stands lining the roadside and children rolling and playing with old tyres. Magasa not only sources materials from Domboshawa but also gets inspiration for his visual formation from this place. Among his first series of works created from used tyres, *Pilgrim's Progress part 6* (Fig. 3.7) was drawn from the landscape view of balancing rock near his studio. Through such imagery affinity, Magasa situates his experience within this urban locality and, as indicated in the title, creates a new narrative about the endless journey of migration of people and things.



Fig 3.6 Zacharaha Magasa standing in front of NK Tyre Fitness Center, Harare, 2021.

Photo: Lifang Zhang



Fig 3.7 Zacharaha Magasa, *Pilgrim's Progress part 6* (in progress at the studio), 2021

Photo: Lifang Zhang

As a graduate of the NGSVAD with a metal sculpture background in 2010, artist Anne Zanele Mutema is known for her performative site-specific installations. Mutema's artistic trajectory notably shifted towards incorporating domestic objects, such as brooms, nets, fabric, and garment pieces, into her artworks prominently after 2019, marking her re-engagement with artistic pursuits after an eight-year immersion in building a family. A noteworthy example of Mutema's recent work is her installation titled *Systemic Necropolis* (2020). For this work, Mutema procured materials by exchanging old brooms with new ones from individuals in her community. The resulting installation showcases brooms resembling specimens enclosed in transparent plastics, intricately bound together by red strings. Upon entering the room filled with suspended brooms, audiences were encouraged to stoop down and traverse the space, conscientiously observing their movements and steps.

Mutsaviro (Shona word for a broom)⁵⁴, is used to clean one's domestic dust and debris. Conventionally, it is customary for the broom to be positioned upright behind the gate of one's home. As *mutsaviro* contains private messages about one's life, in Shona culture, it is considered risky to lend brooms to others or leave them outdoors (Mutema 2021). Thus, with

⁵⁴ The Shona words in this thesis, unless otherwise specified, are translated by the artists in my interview with them or by Barnabas Muvhuti and Fadzai Muchemwa, who assist me generously in understanding contexts relating to Shona language, culture and political issues in Zimbabwe.

brooms hanging upside down, *Systemic Necropolis* (Fig. 3.8), on the one hand, is the deconstructing of an event. It dismantles the familiar and comfortable space associated with conventional practices and thus raises questions about established norms and their impact on one's sense of security and familiarity. On the other hand, the work also presents a congregating of events, as the brooms also represent memories or time capsules containing traces of their previous owners (Mutema 2020). This “room that contained every moment”⁵⁵ is manifested through the use of *mutsaviro*, which accumulated the histories of many individuals and Mutema's artistic engagements with the domestic spaces in the city. Numerous artists also utilise intimate materials that pertain to the experiences of women within the public sphere of the urban environment which will be expounded upon subsequently.



Fig 3.8 Installation view of *Systemic Necropolis*, 2020, immersive installation, recycled brooms, string and clear plastic.

Source: First Floor Gallery, Harare

3.3 *Walk of Shame*: the politics of “trash” and a meta-representation of things on the move

I used to look for materials myself. I used to visit dumping sites myself. I used to visit the bins myself. I used to walk kilometres and kilometres. I used to enjoy that

⁵⁵ A line drawn from the poem *Secrets on the Way* by Swedish poet Tomas Gösta Tranströmer.

time. It was very good. So I would go around, looking, writing notes, whatever. I think that time my work was really taking its inspiration from what was in the garbage. I could easily notice changes in the trash. The trash, I can say, always changes and it truly reflects people who use them and their lives.

— Moffat Takadiwa (2018)

Among the found materials employed by artists, one category, or more precisely, a term, that requires further discussion is “trash”. Artists such as Johnson Zuze, Julio Rizhi, Moffat Takadiwa, Takunda Regis Billiat, and Tawanda Takura, predominantly get their materials from dumpsites in Chitungwiza and Mbare. Clive Mukucha and Wilfred Timire also collect discarded items from the streets. While Johnson Zuze’s practice is often labelled as creating “valuable art from waste”, Moffat Takadiwa (2018) considers himself a “spiritual garbage man”. In a broader context, Nigerian artist Dil Humphrey-Umezulike is known as “the junkman of Africa”,⁵⁶ and many Kenyan artists call their practices “junk art” (Swigert-Gacheru 2011, 129). While being commonly used, classifications like “junk art” have also been problematised by scholars, as mentioned in Chapter 1. This section contextualises and investigates the material and notion of “trash” and analyses Moffat Takadiwa’s installation *Walk of Shame* (Fig. 3.9)) in the context of urban Harare.

Trash, or waste, usually refers to things that are unwanted, unusable or discarded. There are many synonyms such as rubbish, junk, refuse, dirt, residue, detritus, garbage, rubble, ragtag, dregs, scrap, and so on. Each of these terms possesses its own linguistic roots and different indications. New vocabulary such as *e-waste* is also emerging to denote specific waste in place and time. However, the idea of trash is neither universal nor always evident (Newman 2023). Rather, the way it is perceived, produced or managed is continually being (re)defined, contingent upon distinct historical and cultural contexts. The anthropologist Mary Douglas (1984) has noted such variability in her seminar work *Purity and Danger* and asserts that the notion of dirt is based on a systematic ordering of matter. Dirt is the matter “out of space”, which implies two conditions: “a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order” (Douglas 1984, 36). Yet it could also be matter in place in other ordering patterns. Gillian Whiteley (2010, 5), an art historian and the author of *Junk: Art and the Politics of Trash*, points out:

56 See <https://africanah.org/dilomprizulike-dilomprizulike-the-junkman-from-africa/>.

So attempts to define trash lead back to a fundamental link to systems of value which are time and place specific. There is no material which is intrinsically trash. Indeed, it is a social and culturally constructed concept – the word, like its physical manifestation, is in a continually shifting state of conceptual, symbolic and material flux.

Hence, before delving into the examination of particular artworks incorporating discarded materials, it becomes imperative to elucidate the culturally and historically constructed nature of trash and its nuanced sociopolitical connotations within the colonial and postcolonial contexts. The violent colonial encounter created new ideas of waste in the colonies (Newell and Green 2018; Newman 2023). In the writing of European travellers, cleanliness was connected with the imperial civilisation, while the othered natives were associated with dirt, and related categories such as filth, waste and trash (Newell and Green 2018, 1). Such narratives legitimised the racial and spatial segregations in colonial city planning. In colonial Harare, settlers' areas were featured with sanitation facilities and a set of ordinances for waste management. In contrast, Africans' residential areas not only lacked such services but some households were close to landfills or were connected to sewer networks (Tsiko and Togarepi 2012:694). Consequently, residents had to burn and dispose waste in the nearby open spaces or roadsides. These situations underwent some ups and downs through the decades in post-independent Zimbabwe. However, since the economic crisis in the early 2000s, waste management has become a big challenge in Harare. High-density areas such as Mbare and Chitungwiza are most affected. As previously mentioned, it partly contributed to the sources of artists' materials.

The concepts of dirt and trash associated with value judgements and moral indications perpetuate in the postcolonial context, functioning as a mode of interpretation of urban spaces and relationships (Newell and Green 2018). Operation Murambatsvina started in Harare to “clean up” the informal settlements and small business premises not only generated demolition waste that comprised 30–50 per cent of national waste streams without any official management but also associated some urban citizens with dirt or reduced them to “trash” (Tsiko and Togarepi 2012, 696; Moore 2008, 35). Furthermore, trash cleaners and reclaimers are also associated with such social connotations and hierarchies. “Everyone contributes to the domestic rubbish tip and landfill sites but the processing of waste is generally left to those on the social and economic margins” (Whiteley 2010, 5). Not only do politics exist around trash, but trash itself also became a stage for politics. This could be

exemplified by the Set/Setal movement in 1989 and its legacy in Dakar. According to Rosalind Fredericks (2018, 2), as a response to the state's failure, youth strategically targeted the urban areas that were heavily burdened with waste, employing brooms and buckets as tools to remove litter and restore cleanliness physically and politically. Since then, "cleanliness and the labour of urban garbage management would take centre stage as a primary language of control and contestation surrounding urban citizenship", and Fredericks continues, "Dakar's garbagescape has become a central terrain over which the cultural and moral legitimacy of the Senegalese state has been fought" (Fredericks 2018, 9).

Trash also reflects current geopolitical and economic relations. Art historian Margareta Swigert-Gacheru (2011, 129) asserts that the junk art in Kenya demonstrates global flows, deriving in part from the "abundance of global debris, garbage and throw-away 'stuff' that gets dumped in the Third World, mostly from global cities". Urban waste is "a contradictory indicator of progress and modernity", resulting from industrialisation, urbanisation and excess production (Fredericks 2018, 20). While some parts of the world are characterised by abundance, places in poorer countries have become "a fortress of indestructible leftovers", filled with waste and scarcity at the same time (Whiteley 2010, 5). Cities such as Harare are the dump yard of e-waste and second-hand clothing imported from the rich countries with mass production. While trash refers to discarded materials, it is also used to denote products or things that are considered cheap, nasty, trivial or worthless (Whiteley 2010, 28).

On the one hand, trash is the unwanted and invaluable leftover of society. It is like dirt and has "no obvious need to be washed with soap and water" (Newell and Green 2018, 2). However, artists such as Julio Rizhi would first carefully soak and wash the collected materials with chemicals and water, in order to get rid of the dirt, smell and other slimy substances. It could be argued that the utilisation of trash in art is resisting and challenging a certain order based on classification and categorisation, by disentangling trash from its context and situating it to a different value system through the artistic working process as further unpacked below. "Washing" is a physical action in the process and also a metaphor for the ontological transformation of materials in different orders and value systems, changing from mundane objects to the state of art. On the other hand, as previously discussed, waste as found materials also possesses traces of urban life and stories of people. Scholars have observed that some urban residents would interpret urban decay as containing historical remnants and are opposed to their eradication through removal or regeneration measures (Newell and Green 2018, 3). Many artists in Harare, such as Anne Zanele Mutema, would deliberately keep the materials' dirt, shape and smell, the materiality of histories the

objects have accumulated. Thus, the use of “trash” in artistic practices must be interpreted in light of various social, cultural, and geographical contexts as well as artists’ lived and creative experiences.

Moffat Takadiwa has been continuously engaging with waste, both the material and the associated social and political discourses. Takadiwa (2018) started working with consumer waste in the late 2000s and he considered his practices as ‘archaeological work’, observing, collecting, meditating on and recording urban lives through the discarded objects. For the artist, debris of consumer products is associated with the very practices and lived experiences of ordinary people. This “imparted energy” (Hwati 2013) was connected with Takadiwa’s personal memory of growing up in the surroundings of daily commodities and groceries as his father was working in a supermarket.

For example, his *Smell of Harare* (2015) series works are created from the debris of cheap perfumes he sourced from the dumpsites and streets. Through these materials, he created a smellscape of Harare, commenting on the city’s consumer culture at a time when people were struggling with necessities. Takadiwa’s *Foreign Objects* (2015) series, created from different consumer residues, provides comments on the geopolitics in the global flow of commodities and waste and the nation’s economy based on importing.⁵⁷ Gradually, residues have become a metaphor for colonial legacies in Takadiwa’s work. For example, his exhibition *Say Hello to English*⁵⁸ (2017), staging a body of sculptures such as *The Rhodesian Narrative*, *Judging by Language* and *English Name*, grappled with colonial sentiment in culture and language. As the main materials of these artworks, deconstructed computer keyboards and keys are employed as the symbol of the colonial language system.

Vestiges of Colonialism,⁵⁹ Takadiwa’s solo exhibition at the NGZ, is a comprehensive presentation of the artist’s engagement with residue and its politics in relation to what the artists called “colonial hangover”. The exhibition features a collection of installations and sculptures created from the artist’s primary materials, namely used toothbrushes, computer keys, plastic bottle caps and other commodity debris. In the installation *Maruva Enyika*, old office desks denote a system inherited from colonial rule. Found Rhodesian and old European

57 For more on these series of works, see Zhang (2023).

58 Solo exhibition at the Tyburn Gallery (closed in 2020) in London. For more information, see <http://www.tyburngallery.com/exhibition/say-hello-to-english/#:~:text=For%20Takadiwa%2C%20language%20not%20only,colonial%20cultural%20legacies%2C%20including%20language.>

59 This exhibition was curated by the Gallery’s chief curator, Fadzai Muchemwa, and opened on 16 March 2023. It marks the artist’s inaugural solo presentation in the state-affiliated art institution.

vinyl records sourced from Harare are incorporated into the installation Mudiwa's Kitchen to address the influence of colonial culture and the need for "decolonising the mind".⁶⁰ As further discussed in the following chapter, urban decay and colonial architecture in Harare is also a form of found materials in his artistic practices regarding institution building.

Placed at the central position of the exhibition room is a massive installation titled *Walk of Shame* (Fig. 3.9). The installation comprises a collection of handles derived from thousands of used toothbrushes, arranged within a wooden frame. A discernible hexagram-shaped pattern can be observed on the tiling handles of multiple hues. According to the artist,⁶¹ the title *Walk of Shame* is drawn from the renowned Hollywood landmark, Walk of Fame. This iconic attraction is characterised by its numerous five-pointed star patterns that span multiple blocks in Hollywood. The stars embedded in the sidewalks serve as enduring symbols of accomplishment of a diverse array of celebrated figures within the entertainment industry. Drawing from the Walk of Fame, Takadiwa's *Walk of Shame* prompts an inquiry into the paths of Zimbabwean people in their pursuit of achieving "stardom" while grappling with the burden of colonial legacy and the condition of being at the lower end of globalisation. Meanwhile, as the toothbrush is an imported tool for cleaning, the "useless" remaining handles comprising the assembly also raised questions on the collective experiences of individuals residing in areas with inadequate hygiene conditions.

Nevertheless, the significance of this work can only be fully grasped by unfolding its process of becoming. Before being arranged by hue and framed in the wooden square, the thousands of toothbrush handles were literally residues. As the debris of imported commodities, the discarded toothbrushes were first collected from the Chitungwiza dumpsite through the artist's collaboration with people who depend on the recycling industry. At Mbare, where the Takadiwa's studio is located, the toothbrushes were thoroughly washed and turned into art materials. Subsequently, while the brush heads were removed to create artwork, the handles again became the artist's own residue, piling up in front of his studio for years. To access the studio, one had to carefully navigate this path of handles, taking care not to trip and fall (Fig. 3.10). It might remind one of the unease navigating the roads with unavoidable potholes in Harare.

They were then moved to the gallery space, with the dust, odour and soil affixed to them, which were accumulated from the touch of their makers, their users, the junkman who

60 The term is drawn from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's book *Decolonising the Mind* (1986).

61 Artist's statement at the walkabout of the exhibition, Harare, 18 March 2023.

collected them, the visitors who trod on them, as well as the artist and his assistants who laboured on them (Fig. 3.11). With each individual item still recognisable, these toothbrush handles not only move through the urban spaces from Chitungwiza to Mbare to the CBD physically, but also move from the state of being residue to art material and to artwork, undergoing a series of transformations in different value systems. It could be argued that *Walk of Shame* is the meta-representation of things on the move in relation to the artistic practices in Harare, both physically and cognitively. It should be noticed that such transformations were materialised through a process of the collective labour of seeking, collecting, washing, deconstructing, drilling, connecting, assembling, and so on. This process reveals the “common mode of practice” (Muchemwa 2020) that was adopted by several artists who work with found materials in Harare.



Fig 3.9 Moffat Takadiwa, *Walk of Shame*, 2023, Toothbrushes, various dimensions.

Photo by Lifang Zhang



Fig 3.10 Toothbrush handles paved outside Moffat Takadiwa's studio, 2021, Harare.

Photo Lifang Zhang



Fig 3.11 Toothbrush handles paved outside Moffat Takadiwa's studio, 2021, Harare.

Photo Lifang Zhang

3.4 Collecting, (re)skilling, and collective process

Whether historical or modern objects, they can both be used to narrate stories of a particular people, space and time. In my artworks, I am drawn to discarded materials that spark a memory within me ... The materials help me convey and explore the concepts I am drawn to through building up on the narratives that the material already holds before I alter it into an artwork. I work intuitively with the material so that it leads me into the best possible effective outcome as I connect and engage in a conversation with the material through researching its past and present purpose. The process may take hours or days, and sometimes it can take months to years depending on how rapidly the material and I link.

— Wallen Mapondera (2019)

But it's the base which I will not compromise. The base of the work should be someone I know. Yes, someone I know, or the person has brought that base. So I've been asked, does that base appear like it's a canvas to you? It is sort of, but the canvas is plain. But for me, there is a history to this base. I should be able to know who has given me the base, and where it has come from, to be able to understand what I want to include or add on to this. Anything that then goes on to it can be foreign because I want to reach a certain stage. But the base will form the title, form the energy, form the statement, the story, the content. It's the base that forms that.

— Gina Maxim (2021)

Sometimes it depends on what is available and what is it that I can work with in a way I understand ... I think the idea of working with different materials was more of trying to discover myself ... I go to expose myself to different materials, trying to find that connection ... At some point, I think it yields me as well. I can think more about expressing, with what I have.

— Takunda Billiat (2021)

As previously mentioned, a focus on the materiality of art would inherently include the analysis of the process through which the artwork is materialised. This method not only expands an understanding of art beyond simply visual objects, but also draws our attention

towards the activities and labour in creative process, where in artists “connect and engage in a conversation with the material” as stated by Mapondera (2019). As art historian Kim Grant (2017, 4) points out, artists’ activities and experiences have been historically neglected until recent decades. The perception of art was primarily influenced by formalist approaches with more emphasis given to discursive and theoretical concerns since the flourishing of conceptual art in the 1970s. The recent embrace of the process by many contemporary artists is “an attempt to reclaim the significance of what artists do and how they do it” (Grant 2017, 5).

The transformation of modest materials into valuable pieces⁶² of art takes place in physical locations and temporal contexts in Harare. Frequently, it transcends the laborious activity of a single individual in the studio and entails an intricate web of social interactions among artists, objects, and other members of the urban community. As Grant (2017:2) points out, the process comprehends

a multiplicity of approaches, connections, and relations embraced by contemporary artists in their work. In this sense “process” becomes a term that reveals the extent to which contemporary artists are engaged with situating their work within the world—not just finding it a physical location, but siting it much more broadly in terms of social relations and cultural significance.

Based on this insight, the following discussion on the artistic labour involving found materials in Harare seeks to explore the social interactions and relations concealed in the creative process. An interaction worth emphasising is the activity of collecting materials, referred to as the “preparatory process” by Wu Hung (2019, 34). To source materials is the initial labour that artists invest in the creative process. While other phrases such as “pick up”, “exchange” or “recycle” may be used on different occasions, most artists commonly describe

62 Although comprehending the significance of labour in the process is crucial, the intention of this section is not to delve into the theoretical dimensions of labour or the technical intricacies, knowing that different artists employ distinct working approaches, strategies, and rhythms. Labour is the foundation of value regardless of distinctions such as the productive or unproductive, manual or intellectual, concrete or abstract character of the labour (Beech 2015; Beech 2020; Durán 2016; Child 2019). From a Marxist approach, Durán (2016:230) points out that the commodity form of artwork is the “product of a specific relationship, historically determined, between the activity of the artist and the result of this activity as property”. The artists enter the market with outcomes of their labour rather than with their labour power, and the key is the artist’s ownership over such product which is sanctioned by intellectual property rights. The socio-economic relevance of artists’ ownership of ideas arises when these ideas are transformed into property, a process that could only be actualised through their labour (Durán 2016, 231).

their practices as “collecting materials”. The verb “collect”, denoting the act of gathering something, carries connotations of both temporal aspects and the gradual course of accumulation. While the initial motivation of gathering and accumulating materials could be read in relation to one’s psychology under material scarcity, which is an ongoing condition in the nation, the practice of accumulating materials have become common practices in Harare. For example, this could be observed in most collective studios where different artists’ materials are compiled next to each other, as further discussed in Chapter 3. The process of accumulating could be exemplified by the increasing amount of toothbrush handles paved outside Moffat Takadiwa’s studio which turned into the installation work *Walk of Shame* as mentioned above. Another example is Gareth Nyandoro’s practices of saving paper slices (Fig. 3.12) from his own *kuchekacheka*⁶³ process, in which paper is treated as a lino plate and sliced with a blade. The accumulated paper is then reused in his work.



Fig 3.12 Paper slices at Gareth Nyandoro’s studio, 2021, Harare.

Photo by Lifang Zhang

It is important to note that acquiring materials from the urban spaces is not a passive act of taking in. As Grabski (2017, 147) has remarked, the process of obtaining materials involves a bundle of visual and cognitive activities such as looking, speculating, prospecting, identifying, recognising, and evaluating. She further underscores the act of imagination:

63 The word means “to cut”. For more about the *kuchekacheka* process, see Simbao and Hwati (2019).

Before grappling with materials physically in the studio, artists engage them visually to identify how their formal qualities make them eligible as expressive materials. What is especially compelling here is the argument that imagination results from visual engagement with urban space. Visual processes facilitate a subsequent act—that of imagination, or more specifically, imagining objects otherwise

Grabski's observation on Dakar artists' material acquisition also applies to artists who source materials in Harare. Clive Mukucha chooses soft and flexible materials considering mobility and being easy to pack. Besides the physical attributions, artists' visual engagement and imagination are often linked to their original use. For Takunda Regis Billiat, the texture and colour of rubber flip-flops, one of his primary materials, indicate the way and distance one walks, while these humble objects themselves also provide new ways of thinking about globalisation (Knowles 2014)⁶⁴. Such details become what Billiat thinks and works with to create artwork pondering on one's path and directions in specific conditions. Attention should also be paid to the ways of collecting, which often contribute to the meaning of the artwork. For example, Gina Maxim obtains personal gadgets from family and friends to create works memorising the owner.

It is important to shed light on a specific mode of collecting materials which is common in the practice of several artists such as Julio Rizhi, Takunda Billiat, Tawanda Takura, Moffat Takadiwa, Wilfred Timire and so on. As mentioned above, the toothbrushes in *Walk of Shame* were collected from the Chitungwiza dumpsite through “work with the local community as a team” (Takadiwa 2018). In the initial years dedicated to working with salvaged consumer waste, Takadiwa diligently scoured the streets and dumpsites on a daily basis, earnestly experimenting with a diverse array of materials such as worn footwear, packaging from antiretroviral (ARV) tablets, discarded light bulbs, beverage containers, cosmetic remnants, and the like. Over time, Takadiwa cultivated relationships with numerous individuals colloquially termed “peers” within the garbage dumps of Harare. As his artistic practice evolved, Takadiwa transitioned into a more organised modality, establishing a collaborative working structure with those individuals reliant on the dumpsites for their sustenance.⁶⁵

64 For more information about flip-flop's global journey, see <https://www.flipfloptrail.com>.

65 For more on Takadiwa's collaboration with them, see Zhang (2022).

Working primarily with plastic, Julio Rizhi often sourced materials from Magaba centre in the high-density neighbourhood of Mbare where his studio is located. In April 2021, when I was conducting my field research in Harare, Rizhi took me to visit the particular recycling centre where he collects materials. We proceeded from the main road connecting the Mbare National region into the Magaba area, transitioning onto an unpaved dirt road. We drove at a very slow pace and traversed through a secondhand clothing market that sprawls along the route, extending into the residential quarters of Magaba. After parking next to a bachelor's hostel bearing historical imprints from the colonial era, we commenced our journey on foot towards the recycling station where Rizhi sourced his materials. We walked through an expansive market, comprising stalls selling hardware, small appliances, everyday commodities, wooden crafts, and even those engaged in the production of coffins. These stalls were closely juxtaposed, and as we navigated the narrow passageways between different sectors, the overall organisation and layout of the market eluded clear observation. The market is bustling, crowded, noisy, yet seemingly ordered. Eventually, we reached the recycling station and met Rizhi's collaborator Katenge, a genial middle-aged man. He guided us to his stand in the recycling station, which consisted of 28 stalls featuring an assortment of recyclable materials.

Katenge primarily focuses on the recycling of plastic products. According to Rizhi, people from the neighbourhood, particularly unemployed youth, would scour the streets, alleys, and garbage dumps to locate discarded plastic items. These items are then sold to Katenge at the recycling centre. Katenge would decompose part of them into small fragments with a machine, subsequently selling them to various consumers in need of plastic materials. This process epitomises the typical mode of plastic recycling industry in Harare. Once Katenge accumulates a sufficient quantity of the specific plastic products required by Rizhi, he notifies Rizhi for retrieval, occasionally delivering the materials to Rizhi's studio. Over the years, their collaboration has fostered a deep understanding, with Katenge becoming adept at recognising Rizhi's needs for art materials.

Based on the map of Magaba centre, one of Rizhi's works from the Chakafukidza series, serves as a homage to his collaboration with Katenge and the labour inherent in this partnership. The materials employed in this piece are sourced from the plastic provided by Katenge's recycling facility. Upon receipt of these plastic products or fragments, Rizhi enlists his studio assistant to immerse and cleanse them with chemicals and water. Subsequently, employing minimum equipment at his studio—fire and containers—he melts the materials swiftly, moulding them with prepared metal mesh. The mesh apertures yield a distinctive

granular texture to his work. Throughout this process, he employs a discerning colour palette by mixing with ink or retaining the original colours of the plastic. As seen in the image, *Chakafukidza Part 3* (Fig. 3.13) is characterised by an exceptionally rich array of colours, drawing its inspiration from the eclectic and bustling attributes of Magaba markets and the recycling station. Rizhi asserts that the decision to encase the map within the metal frame is symbolic, raising questions on the constrained survival living conditions in Zimbabwe in which people have to conduct informal economic activities for livelihood.

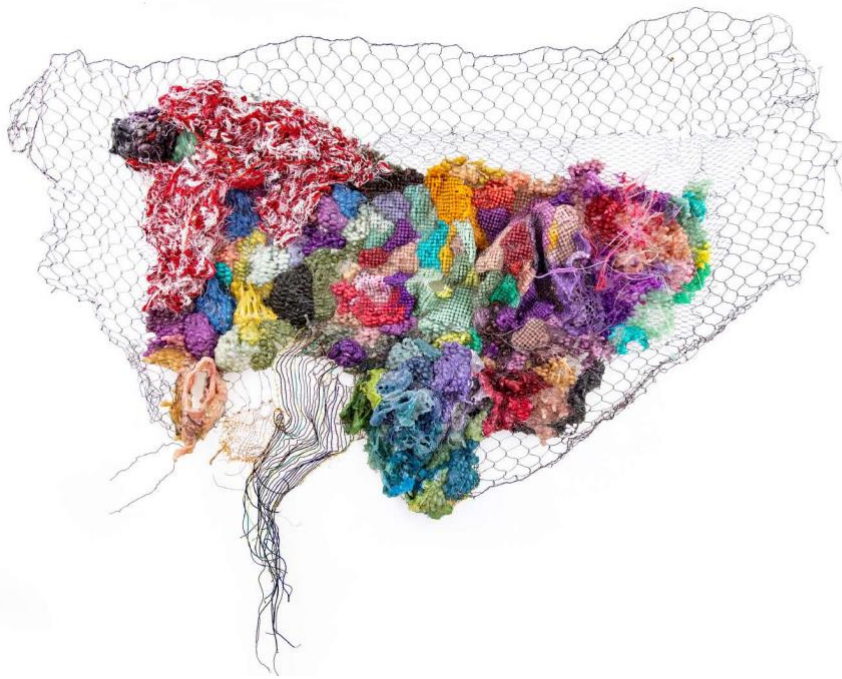


Fig 3.13 Julio Rizhi, *Chakafukidza, Part 3*, 2020, Molten plastic and spray paint on wire, 200cm x 230cm x 40cm.

Source: First Floor Gallery.

A discussion on “collecting” and “recycling” involved in the process of acquiring artistic materials may be pertinent in this context. In line with the classification of found materials as trash, the procurement and utilisation of such materials are often labelled as “recycling”. Notably, artists such as Rizhi engage in recycling, in the sense of economic practice, in his process of obtaining materials. This thesis uses the term “collecting” instead of “recycling” for several reasons, primarily due to the preference for “collecting” demonstrated by the aforementioned artists and the term’s nuanced implications linked to accumulation. The term “recycling” is commonly linked with waste. As previously discussed, the discourse on waste necessitates consideration of its underlying political dynamics. Besides, artists employ

materials sourced from urban spaces extending beyond mere refuse, with some incorporating natural or organic elements. Additionally, although artworks also enter the capitalist exchange market, they constitute a distinctive and exceptional category of commodities, characterised by unique pricing structures and a lack of regulations regarding abstract labour time (Durán 2016, 220). Consequently, the transformation of used materials, including waste, into artworks diverges from the value system inherent in conventional recycling practices. This distinction also distances the artistic process from the popularised term “upcycling”, which, by substituting “re’ with “up”, subtly implies hierarchies of value and significance. Furthermore, certain artists who utilise found materials, such as El Anatsui, reject the term “recycle”. Anatsui has explicitly urged art historians not to succumb to the allure of discourses of “recycling in contemporary African art” (Binder 2008, 35). One rationale behind this rejection is that “recycling” implies a cyclic potentiality. In contrast, when an artist incorporates an object into creative work, it signifies the radical transformation of the social life of the object, leading to the termination of its prior use and the emergence of a new existence within the artwork. Consequently, the object ceases to possess recyclability, existing solely as an integral component of the artistic creation.

It could be argued that Rizhi’s artwork *Chakafukidza Part 3* engaging in the cartography of Magaba, presents a profound concern for the labour inherent in the broader sense of the recycling industry. It unveils the intricate social relations concealed in the labour involved in the processes of collecting materials and creating artworks. This encompasses collaboration between the artist and practitioners beyond the realm of art, as well as their engagements with the urban spaces. Importantly, this process elucidates the broad societal conditions that drive such interactions, specifically characterised by Zimbabwe’s prolonged socio-economic crisis, giving rise to the livelihoods of many citizens centred around creativity and informality. It is the condition in which both the artist and his collaborators practise and labour. The interactive and dynamic relationship between artistic labour and general abstract labour unfolds in the creative processes, along with the materials themselves, contributing significantly to the meaning production of Rizhi’s artwork. In a sense, the artists’ practices cannot be separated from other works in a broader social context.

These social interactive relations not only occur in the process of collecting material but also extend into the artist’s studio. Many artists work with long-term or project-specific assistants, especially when aiming for an exhibition. These assistants are not necessarily artists or art students. The studio culture in Harare, which will be specifically explored in Chapter 5, plays a significant role in this regard. Art historians have discussed the economic

relationships between the head of the studio and assistants, especially in relation to the value of artworks (Durán 2016, 229). In the context of Harare, similar to material collecting, the collaboration between artists and assistants in the studio requires consideration of the social and urban conditions that drive such interactions. It is crucial to locate and comprehend the artistic process and labour in specific contexts. Many artists also highlight the significance of such collective, collaboration and community in the meaning production of their works.



Fig 3.14 Moffat Takadiwa, Joseph Madzima and Tendayi Shonhiwa working at the studio,
MAS, Harare

Photo by Lifang Zhang

One example is Joseph Madzima (Fig. 3.14), who had been working as an assistant at Takadiwa's studio for over a decade when I interviewed him in 2021. Before moving to the current Mbare Art Space (MAS) in 2019, Takadiwa was working from Chinembiri Studios with a group of artists including Julio Rizhi and Zacharara Magasa. Also located in Mbare, the studio was part of the Chinembiri Training Centre, a community space run by Harare City Council for education and skills training services. It includes courses in catering and baking, dressmaking, and interior decoration. Across from the artists' studio was the classroom for sewing courses. At times, they even had to allocate part of the studio space for community

activities. Joseph Madzima (2021)⁶⁶ was born in a village in the Masvingo province and, in his early twenties, relocated to Harare around 2000 in search of job opportunities. He came across Takadiwa at Chinembiri Centre where he worked as a security guard. He spent time observing how Takadiwa dealt with materials and created artwork. Noticing Madzima's curiosity and interest in art, Takadiwa would sometimes show him how to fabricate those materials. In 2011, he resigned from his security job and formally became an assistant at Takadiwa's studio. It is the artistic practices engaging with the public urban spaces that enabled such collaborations of informal and creative activities. Madzima's labour in the transformation of found material not only impacts the material's social life but also brings changes in his personal life and social relations.⁶⁷

Madzima was involved in dealing with the art materials from the beginning, particularly with drilling holes in used computer keyboard keys. On occasion, he would undertake the collection of materials for Takadiwa from the nearby urban areas. Following several years of dedicated assistantship, he acquired proficiency in "running a work", such as setting up and fabricating the material under Takadiwa's guidance. What is remarkable is that he also exhibited comprehensive familiarity with many of Takadiwa's works, quickly identifying titles and years of production when shown images of some pieces. In addition to material manipulation and work assembly, Madzima is involved in tasks such as cleaning and packaging of the completed works. His family had visited the studio to witness his work and "they found it funny". When asked about his own sentiments regarding the ostensibly monotonous and repetitive labour such as perforating holes in computer keys, he responded, "I'm now used to doing that. That's my professional also. I like drilling, and it needs a lot of concentration when I do it" (Madzima 2021).

The term "professional" is captivating. In addition to Madzima, Takadiwa also engages in collaborations with other young individuals from the Mbare community, who constitute a portion of Zimbabwe's high unemployment rate. Similar to Madzima, these individuals at the artist's studio are involved in activities that deviate from conventional professional art skills such as painting. Their activities entail rigorous and repetitive manual work, such as cutting, sorting, drilling, cleaning, and manufacturing, among other tasks. In this context, it is necessary to draw attention to the art historical concept of "deskilling" and "reskilling" which

66 The contents in these few paragraphs on Madzima is based on my interview with him at MAS, Harare, in 2021.

67 In my interview, Madzima told me people in both his village and his neighbourhood in Harare expressed respect for the material achievement he gained from work and the community he engaged with.

is pertinent to the discussion on both artistic labour and found materials. Danielle Child (2019) has highlighted the key moments of interactions between art and labour in modern and contemporary art, especially in the context of the West. Used in describing numerous artistic practices throughout the twentieth century, “deskilling” refers to artists’ endeavours to “eliminate artisanal competence and other forms of manual virtuosity from the horizon of both artistic production and aesthetic evaluation” (Foster et al. 2016, 607). This conscious artistic strategy was associated with European avant-garde art, especially Duchampian readymade, after which the function of the artist’s hand is placing, ordering and selecting (Roberts 2020). In theorising the origin of contemporary African art, Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009, 14) also highlight the artistic exploration and evolution of deskilling from traditional style and craftsmanship.

The process of “deskilling” could also be observed in the root of contemporary Zimbabwean art, particularly in the artists’ attempt to depart from the refined stone carving as mentioned in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, this does not imply a one-sided rejection of creative skills and forms derived from local norms, nor is it a simplistic dismissal of the value of manual labour. Rather, the works of many artists in Harare display a common feature, namely the intensive handiwork in the creative process. But these artists’ practices also involve immaterial and intellectual labour, such as in their conscious redefinition and selection of art materials. In Rizhi’s artwork *Chakafukidza Part 3*, the contrast between the labour invested in the creative process and the value of the art material of the recycled plastics is noticeable. One can also observe intensive artistic labour in Gina Maxim’s stitching, Gareth Nyadoro’s *kuchekacheka*, Kundai Nathan’s weaving, Admire Kamudzengerere’s stamping, and others, which is further demonstrated through the visual effects of the finished artworks. For example, the intricate stitches in Gina Maxim’s artwork and the repetitive arrangement of materials with nuanced reorientation in Wallen Mapondera’s artwork.

Regarding their relationship with traditional craftsmanship or handiwork, many artists not only refrain from emphasising distinctions but rather underscore the connection between their artistic process and these traditional forms, demonstrating a consciousness of reskilling. Takadiwa, for instance, highlights the impact of the weaving culture of the Kore Kore people, his own ethnic group, on his artwork, both in terms of technique and visual patterns. Another crucial aspect in relation to skill competence, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, is the agency of things. Materials have a crucial role in determining the specific techniques and manual work involved in the artistic process. As one example, Zacharaha Magasa utilises self-made tools to etch patterns on his art material of the used tyres (Fig. 3.15), creating a

distinctive texture that communicates personal narratives related to migration. Magasa's tools bear a striking resemblance to the ones employed by personnel at tyre shops (Fig. 3.15). These tools are utilised for carving fresh textures onto imported worn tyres, replicating the designs found on new tyres and giving an illusion of newness.



Fig 3.15 Zacharaha Magasa's tools at his studio, Domboshawa, 2021

Photo by Lifang Zhang

Another instance is artist Tawanda Takura, who has been utilising old shoes as art materials and, more recently, has also included rubber gloves previously used by industrial labourers. Curiously, Takura began his career as a shoemaker, possessing skills in all aspects of the process from creating shoe models to providing customer support after the sale. At first, the act of "collecting material" did not revolve around art but rather entailed recycling worn-out or discarded shoes made and sold by himself, motivated by a desire to improve his craft. Drawn by the work of artists based in Chitungwiza who use found materials, he shifted his focus to artistic creation, employing collected used shoes as his main medium. Due to his experience in shoemaking, his understanding of the design, components, and materials enables him to treat the materials skilfully. Takura attaches special symbolic meaning to these shoes and their components, especially in relation to personal life

experiences. Takura's recent works effectively exemplify several aspects of the discussion on labour in this section. *Nekuti madzisekuru ako/because of your forefathers...* is a wall-length piece created with old latex gloves, a winnowing basket, and bones. It skillfully assembles worn industrial gloves to visually portray a reclining figure. The artwork prominently explores the topic of labour. As demonstrated in several works mentioned previously, both the materials utilised and the creative process employed play significant roles in the production of meaning in artwork.

Gina Maxim and Anne Zanele Mutema also place significant emphasis on both the art materials and the creative process in their practices. What should be highlighted is that, their poetic explorations of the language of memory evince and accentuates the interplays between the tangible and intangible, the materiality and the immateriality in art. Memory, which is "subject to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting" (Nora 1996, 3), emerges as a central thematic locus in Maxim's work. In some of her work, Maxim (2021) utilises the clothing of late individuals, particularly women she knows directly or indirectly, as the "base" of creations. Employing stitching as the principal technique and process, Maxim adeptly interweaves the threads of memory, in the absence of their erstwhile owners (Fig. 3.16). Mutema's piece, *Cislunar Lulu*, amalgamates 30 frames containing diminutive fabric samples stitched within (Fig. 3.17). The fabric material used in this artwork originates from a dress purchased by Mutema's late mother, who once processed a sample book of stitches, which has since been lost. In considering the stitch as a communicative language between herself and her mother, Mutema (2021) regards the needlework within her artistic compositions as epistolary expressions directed towards her mother in the Cislunar, the space between the earth and the moon. Both Maxim and Mutema's works exhibit a vivid dialectic between absence and presence, stemming from loss that leads to absence and the attendant desire for presence that ensues. Through the labour of iterative labour of stitching on fabric or a base imbued with mnemonic vestiges, they transmute the inherently immaterial essence of memory into tangible materiality. The process of artistic creation assumes a form of remembrance, wherein absence as a space for imagination and productive engagement, thereby engendering the presence and manifestation of memory.



Fig 3.16 Georgina Maxim, *This Whole Place Will Become A Memory*, 2021, textile et technique mixte, 85 x 135 cm

Photo source: <https://www.31project.com/georgina-maxim?pgid=jtvo92e6-2866eb80-b34c-4821-b2b7-a78362a947db>



Fig 3.17 Anne Zanele Mutema, *Cislunar Lulu*, 2020, double sided embroidered cloth in wooden frame/Perspex, 20 x 20 x 5 cm

Source: <https://www.firstfloorgalleryharare.com/anne-zanele-mutema.html>

Conclusion

This chapter employs the “social life of things” as the approach to the discussion on art materials and the artistic process, emphasising their close relationship with the urban spaces of Harare. Diverging from visual analysis that primarily focuses on artistic forms and visual narratives, this chapter underscores the materiality of art and its significance in the production of meaning and narratives within artworks. By doing so, the analysis in this chapter extends beyond the visual object to encompass a complex of the broader social contexts. The agency of materials manifests in the process of interacting with artists. These social-relational interactions are not only crucial for understanding specific artworks but also hold significant implications for comprehending the use of found materials in Harare and, more broadly, within the African context. In this sense, this chapter also serves as a methodological discussion on how to comprehend these artistic practices and artworks involving found materials.

Chapter 4 Re-Presentations of the Restless City in Art

Introduction

In December 2022, a group exhibition titled “Framing the City” opened at the Old Gretermans Building located in the central business district of Harare. The exhibition included artists from different generations, such as Tapfuma Gutsa, Admire Kamudzengerere, Kundai Nathan and Wilfred Timire, who are living and working in different urban neighbourhoods, reflecting “their realities and relationships with their cities and communities; capturing what excites them, what makes them afraid, what troubles them and what makes them hopeful” (ZICCA 2022). These works further affirmed the city as a site for artistic creations. Besides material sources, they also “asserted a place for the city as a thematic premise and pictorial subject” (Grabski 2017, 176). Such urban-referential propositions and representational forms of Harare city can be found in many events and artists’ works, which is the subject of this chapter.

The preceding chapter discussed artistic practice from a material perspective, unfolding the process of creation within the urban space of Harare. This chapter explores the visual and semantical interactions between art and the city, analysing the reference to the city as the subject in art. Specifically, it focuses on artworks created from found materials and sheds light on the artistic imaginations of Harare City. The all-embracing and dynamic urban life not only influences artists’ choices in material but also shapes their artistic expressions. With materials sourced from the city, these works inherently bear a connection with the city. They are re-presentations of the lived experiences in the urban space rather than merely visual representations of the city. Or in literal terms, it is both narrating the being of the city and the (visual) narrative being of the city.

This chapter analyses works that consider the city itself as the subject of art. In other words, these artworks are the artists’ imaginations of Harare and their representations of lived experiences in this city. This chapter discusses a selection of works related to several themes. Firstly, it looks at artistic exploration of the city as a place of habitat. It focuses on artworks by Wallen Mapondera, Moffat Takadiwa, and Anthony Bumhira related to the notion of home and housing. Collectively, rather than a space of security and stability, their selected pieces depict residents’ homes in the crisis-ridden city of Harare as precarious. The second section revolves around the works, practices, and life of the young artist Wilfred Timire, whose work investigates the living conditions of youth in urban spaces. Youth constitute a major portion

of the urban population and also actively engage as actors in the city. This thematic section places emphasis on Timire's visual language in addressing the theme. The third section focuses on the experiences of women in the gendered city, centring around the works of Kresiah Mukwazhi and discussing how she employs female undergarments to embody women's experiences and resistance. The final section centres on Admire Kumudzengerere's *Harare Phonebooks* series, exploring the way in which he symbolically inserts himself into the city as a space of exclusive citizenship.

4.1 The precariousness of home in postcolonial Harare

Home can have multiple meanings and at times I stammer to respond when I am asked 'how is home?' Although I respond 'home is fine', it makes me question the word 'home'. Where is home? What is it that makes it a home? Beyond where one stays, eats and sleeps, at times I feel like home is who you are. I feel like home is time and energy spent on a property which in turn elevates its importance to that individual who spent time on the property ... If that freedom to move around without any restrictions or fear is lost, or if the people we have close relations with are scattered around the globe and are no longer residing in that same space where profound memories and energy have been made, will that place still be home? Political and economic status is the major contributing factor for people to leave their homes in pursuit of [a] better life and yet still, there is always a reason to find ourselves back home.

— Wallen Mapondera (2019)

Where are the houses? Promises promised, not fulfilled.

— Anthony Bumhira (2020)

Wallen Mapondera's *Kudzoka Kumba* (2019) is a large-scale artwork made from a found tarpaulin tent measuring eleven metres in length and three metres in height. The Shona title of this piece carries the meaning of "returning home". This piece unveils the thematic essence of this section, home, a profoundly elemental yet intricately nuanced concept. The following discussions centre on three works which revolve around the idea of home, unhomeliness and the precariousness of home: Wallen Mapondera's *Kudzoka Kumba*, Anthony Bumhira's *Houses For All* (2018) and Moffat Takadiwa's *Rugger* (2023). Home in these works is

imagined as both an individual dwelling and the metonym of the city itself. As Mapondera reflected, the notion of home is not easy. It is one's experiences but also beyond, being shaped by social, political and economic status. Scholar Thabisani Ndlovu (2010, 117) points out that the concept of Zimbabwe as home has been "fractured along historical, spatial, political, racial, ethnic and personal lines, and indeed a multidimensional intersection of all these factors". For example, one might have a rural home and an urban home with different meaning and significance. The view is echoed in NoViolet Bulawayo's renowned novel *We Need New Names*, as the protagonist ponders on the meaning of home:

There are four homes inside Mother of Bones's head: home before the white people came to steal the country, and a king ruled; home when the white people came to steal the country and then there was war; home when black people got our stolen country back after independence; and then the home of now. Home one, home two, home three, home four. When somebody talks about home, you have to listen carefully so you know exactly which one the person is referring to.
(Bulawayo 2014, 194)

Within the novel, the actual home of the character Mother of Bones and the concept of home have been consistently reshaped, intricately interwoven with the undulating tapestry of the nation's history. From the period of colonisation to the warfare, from the dawn of the nation's independence to the relentless urban crises permeating the contemporary era, citizens found themselves adrift in the vicissitudes of history, subject to the ceaseless processes of deconstruction and reconstruction of their home. In this context, the notion of home, traditionally a sanctuary of security and constancy, paradoxically assumes traits of instability and transience in Zimbabwe. Such unsettledness and precariousness that characterise people's lived experiences of home become a motif in literary canvas (Muchemwa 2013; Mangena and Nyambi 2022). It also finds resonance within the realms of contemporary artistic expression. Moffat Takadiwa's installation work *Rugare Kwamuri* (see Fig. 4.1) delves into the precariousness of home, unfurling its intricate connection with the underpinnings of colonial history.

In Takadiwa's solo exhibition at the NGZ, the showcased installation *Rugare Kwamuri* presents a suspended garden which graces the gallery corridor, featuring vegetables cultivated within scorched administrative furniture drawers, delicately suspended beneath the celestial glow of dome lights. "Rugare" is a loaded word in local Shona lingo and conveys meanings

with profound significance associated with its urban history. It could be translated into “peace” or “a good life”. Rugare also refers to the enduring township in Harare, whose genesis traces back to the 1950s when Rhodesia Railways erected it to house native labourers—distinct and segregated from the domains inhabited by white settlers. After the nation’s independence the custodianship and ownership of these settlements passed to the National Railways of Zimbabwe. Most importantly, rugare is the Shona name of the vegetable in this installation, a resilient and easily cultivable daily crop. It was introduced to the urban areas during the colonial era as a utilitarian response to the growing African population and persists as the prevalent strain of kale that can be found in ordinary households and small backyard gardens in urban areas. Vhavenda farmers in the northern region of South Africa refer to the vegetable as “muRhodesia”, indicating its historical association with the colonial state (Mariga, Mativha, and Maposa 2012).

In such a nuanced tableau of *Rugare Kwamuri* (Fig. 4.1), Takadiwa deftly intertwines the botanical, linguistic, and urban historical dimensions, engendering a multilayered narrative that invites contemplation of the intricate threads connecting housing, sustenance, and the enduring echoes of colonial legacies. The administrative drawers are symbols of the confined living space of the townships that were constructed under colonial rule as the temporary home of migrant workers, and was fenced off from the city centre. Such spatial structure continues with today’s high-density neighbourhoods where one still finds these vegetables. Within the perennial growth trajectory of the rugare vegetable, a manifestation of the residents’ affinity with land and premise unfolds. As rugare can reach massive sizes with much attention, the height could subtly delineate the temporal expanse of a household’s residency within its abode. The colossal specimens emerge as emblematic representations of a relatively enduring and stable “good life”. The modest shoots, while providing support to the nascent domiciles, encapsulate aspirations for residential constancy, embodying wishes for a stable and secure home. In the tapestry of *Rugare Kwamuri*’s narrative, the vegetal growth becomes a metaphorical medium, encoding the temporal and aspirational dimensions of human habitation. However, as voiced by one audience during the walkabout of this exhibition, to start with, one must have access to land for growing vegetables. Through a sophisticated intertwining of narrative threads, the artist navigates the intricate intersections of temporality and the deep-seated historical imprints on the concept of home, thereby enriching the discourse on identity, displacement, and the ever-evolving contours of belonging.



Fig 4.1 Moffat Takadiwa, *Rugare Kwamuri*, 2023, installation view

Photo by Lifang Zhang

In the wake of relentless urban crises and increased intra-city and transnational mobility, the representations and imaginations of home in the post-2000 era have been marked by conspicuously heightened sentiments of unsettledness and precariousness. Intertwined with the evolution of the found material movement is Operation Murambatsvina, a governmental initiative designed to eradicate illegal and informal settlements, as delineated in official accounts. Launched on the 19 May 2005, the scale of this campaign in a short duration was unparalleled in the context of urban Africa, surpassing even similar events during apartheid in South Africa (Potts 2006, 275). According to official reports, an estimated 92,460 dwelling units were demolished, resulting in approximately 570,000 individuals, or 133,534 households, being displaced; an additional 98,000 were documented to have lost their means of livelihood in the informal sector (Potts 2006, 276). The enduring impacts of Operation Murambatsvina on the residents' lives and urban habitation have been profound and

expansive (Potts 2008). This unfolding effect is discernible in the literary works produced after its implementation, in which Operation Murambatsvina frequently surfaces as an intricately hinted societal backdrop, casting a nuanced shadow of uncertainty that permeates the narratives and stories. In *The Uncertainty of Hope* by Valerie Tagwira (2006, 140), the aftermath of the cleansing operation is depicted as “homes collapsed spectacularly”, leaving behind “only a pathetic layer of wreckage”. Similarly, in *We Need New Names*, the haunting recollection of “bulldozers” lingers, serving as a poignant reminder of the profound disruptions caused by Operation Murambatsvina.

When the bulldozers finally leave, everything is broken, everything is smashed, everything is wrecked. It is sad faces everywhere, choking dust everywhere, broken walls and bricks everywhere, tears on people’s faces everywhere.
(Bulawayo 2014, 68).

It is important to underscore that Operation Murambatsvina in 2005 was neither an abrupt nor an isolated incident. Its antecedents can be traced back to the colonial era and the campaign should be contextualised within the historical entanglements of Zimbabwe’s colonial past and post-independent period (Harris 2008). The event of Operation Murambatsvina was embedded in Rhodesian rule, substantiated by comprehensive systemic support, including legislative measures. Colonial authorities compelled the displacement of African populations from their original dwellings for the sake of resources and land and forcibly removed them from the city into camp-like townships to implement racial segregation in urban areas. Analogous episodes of forced evictions and displacements permeate the post-independent annals of Zimbabwean history. Notable instances include the 1983 initiative to restore order, the pre-1986 Non-Aligned Movement Summit, the 1991 visit by Queen Elizabeth II, and the 2001 clean-up operation targeting illegal outbuildings (Musiyiwa 2008, 65; Matamanda 2020, 478). Scholar Maurice Taonezvi Vambe (2008) observes the “rehearsals” of Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwean literature and popular music well before the event itself. In Chenjerai Hove’s collections of short stories *Shebeen Tales* (1994), the essay *Cleaning the Streets for the Queen* recurrently mentions systematic government-led “cleaning” operations resulting in the demolition of numerous homes (Vambe 2008, 137). Petina Gappah’s story *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009) similarly depicts the protagonist relocating to a foreboding residence in the Easterly neighbourhood due to a clearance operation in preparation for the visit of England’s Queen. These literary references

offer alternative narratives, positioning the 2005 Operation Murambatsvina within a broader historical continuum.

The state operation of forced eviction starkly illustrates the systemic exclusion of marginalised communities from the urban spaces (Muchemwa 2013, 10). In the period of Rhodesian colonialism, the urban territory was claimed as the exclusive domain of the white populace, leading to the expulsion of African labourers from the city centre. This spatial apartheid crystallised in Salisbury, forging a stark dichotomy between the city of the white and the city of the black, where inhabitants lived in vastly disparate urban modalities. In the post-independence era, governmental cleanup initiatives mirrored this exclusionary ethos. The official rhetorics surrounding the 2005 Operation Murambatsvina advocated for the return of the displaced to their rural areas. Such narratives were founded on tenuous assumptions which proved to be not true, presupposing either the rural origin of the dispossessed or the expectation of sufficient livelihood opportunities in rural areas (Potts 2008, 54). Importantly, these operations constitute a denial of both spatial and civic rights for the displaced dwellers, “establishing and conjuring ‘identities’ which make inclusion and exclusion possible and mess democratic governance” (Chimedza 2008, 87). Throughout history, this manoeuvre has often been complemented by the official stigmatisation of the marginalised community who have been evicted, couched in discourses invoking notions of “dirt”, “disease” or framing them as an urban “embarrassment”, thus insidiously eroding the city’s image (Harris 2008).

Wallen Mapondera has consistently immersed himself in the exploration of socio-political themes in his artistic expressions. The creation of *Kudzoka Kumba* is deeply rooted in Operation Murambatsvina, both conceptually and materially. The tent employed by Mapondera in this work, potentially once a shed for someone, was collected from the aftermath of a demolition operation that took place in February 2019 (Mapondera 2019, 18). Evident in the visual representation (Fig. 4.2), this colossal masterpiece, when observed from a distance, ostensibly mirrors the vestiges and ruins of a destroyed abode. The erstwhile shelter, now reduced to debris, bears witness to a tent ragged, torn, and poised at the brink of collapse. However, upon close attention, one can observe an intricate tapestry, replete with stitches and imprints left by the artist. Suspended within the exhibition space, it retains a similar spatial disposition in the artist’s studio, where Mapondera devoted several months working on it, deliberately rending certain segments while conscientiously mending others. As Mapondera (2019, 19) described, he was “renovating the tent” when he “slowly stitched pieces back together and fixed patches over holes to retain a better state of the tent”. To him,

this creative process serves as a symbolic reflection of the resilience observed in Zimbabwean citizens, endeavouring to piece together fragments torn asunder and to reconstruct not only physical structures but, in a broader sense, the very fabric of their existence and sense of belonging in the urban spaces.



Fig 4.2 Wallen Mapondera, *Kudzoka Kumba*, 2019, Waxed Paper and Thread on Found Tarpaulin Tent 300 x 1100 cm
Source: SMAC Gallery

The title of the artwork, which means “returning home”, points to an additional dimension that contributes to the (re)configuration of the concept of home in and of the city. In the backdrop of multidimensional crises, individuals have been compelled to leave their homes – be it individual dwellings, their home city, or their home country – in pursuit of alternative livelihoods. This migration is driven by the imperative of securing the survival and well-being of family members, coupled with the pursuit of educational and economic prospects for enhanced development. The political and economic upheavals in Zimbabwe have reshaped its status into a prominent origin of migrants and refugees on a global scale (Crush, Chikanda, & Tawodzera, 2016, 13). Regarding the neighbouring country South Africa, Zimbabweans are deemed to be one of the largest migrant cohorts within the country, encompassing both legal and undocumented individuals (Mawadza, 2008, 1). Scholars Sarah Chiumbu and Muchaparara Musemwa (2012, xiv) point out that, while migration has

historical roots in both colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe, there has been a pronounced upswing post-2000, with an escalating number of individuals seeking livelihoods beyond the political borders of Zimbabwe. Of particular note is the transformation in the demographic composition of this contemporary migration pattern from the trends observed in preceding decades, with an apparent increase in the participation of women and young people.

This phenomenon of transnational migration has exerted a profound influence on Zimbabweans' conceptualisation of home. Thabisani Ndlovu (2010) contends that migration introduces an ambivalent impact on the notion of homes. While the act of forsaking one's original home and establishing residence in a host country has become a survival strategy, the enduring connection with the "home" country persists in myriad ways. Tendai Mangena and Oliver Nyambi (2022) use the concept of "ambivalent continuum of precarity" to articulate the experiences of and beyond precarity encountered by Zimbabwean immigrants in their "home" homes and diaspora homes. Many Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa, especially those who arrived during the third wave approximately after 2005, are actively involved in establishing livelihoods and social networks, viewing the country as a place to reside in and shape their future, despite facing hostility (Crush, Chikanda, & Tawodzera, 2015). This underscores the complex interplay of emotions and circumstances in the migrant experience. Home can be "elsewhere" while the diasporic home could also be unhomely. The conceptualisation of home is in a perpetual state of reshaping, engendered by the intricate entanglements inherent in these circumstances.

Partly drawing from his personal experiences, Mapondera's *Kudzoka Kumba* is pertinent in relation to the entanglement between the notion of home and migration. Born and educated in Harare, Mapondera relocated to South Africa in 2018 to further his education and navigate the currents of career development. Created during his residency in South Africa, *Kudzoka Kumba* made its debut exhibit during Mapondera's MFA graduate exhibition in Makhanda (2019) and subsequently at SMAC Gallery (2020)⁶⁸ in Cape Town. Mapondera (2019, 18) posits that an integral layer of meaning encapsulated in this artwork revolves around the experiences of Zimbabweans dwelling in foreign lands. Despite the palpable economic struggles in Zimbabwe, there persists an unwavering desire among its diaspora to return home, seeking for a sense of belonging, even amid the daunting realities of a nation failing its civic obligations. While the material was collected from the street of Harare, the artwork

68 For more information, see <https://www.smacgallery.com/exhibitions-archive-3/chirema-chine-mazano-chinotamba-chakazendama-madziro-part-2>.

itself with the title “returning home”, paradoxically, is yet to embark on its homecoming and be showcased in Mapondera’s home country. As an artist, Mapondera’s distinctive career path demands frequent traversals across international borders. Yet, for many Zimbabweans supporting their families back home from abroad, their home in and of Zimbabwe has been a precarious space to stay and return to.

Also born and growing up in Chitungwiza, artist Anthony Bumhira (1985–2020) grapples with pertinent thematic concerns. Graduating from the National Gallery’s affiliated art school (NGSVAD) in 2005, Bumhira carved out a niche for himself through the creation of semi-abstract, expansive artworks, often employing materials imbued with personal and spiritual resonance, most notably crochet doilies. His oeuvre aligns him with the doily generation, nurtured by resilient mothers whose doily creations were peddled through cross-border trade between Zimbabwe and South Africa. Crafting these intricate doilies was a labour-intensive and time-consuming endeavour, and Bumhira’s initial piece, composed of numerous doilies, demanded nearly three months of meticulous effort (Bumhira et al. 2020, 364). Coming from the same generation, Wallen Mapondera (2023) recollects the endeavours of his mother and two of her companions who engaged in the artistry of doily creation and trade venturing to neighbouring countries for sale in neighbouring countries for seven years to sustain the family:

I then realised that the trio’s journey did not start on the bus or train, but from the moment they set a date for departure. They set targets and deadlines when they had tea/*svutu-gadzike* breaks during their crocheting marathons. Most of all, they prayed for guidance and protection (Shield). I vividly remember the feeling of waiting for my mom to come back from their trip, because I knew she would be loaded with goodies. Their journey did not end when they got home though. They had to do more trips back and forth.”⁶⁹

Anthony Bumhira, in a poignant exploration of shared experiences, utilises crochet doilies as a medium to articulate narratives intricately woven with the fabric of socio-economic conditions. His artwork *Houses For All* (2018) unfolds a tapestry with blankets, textiles and doilies constituting its principal materials (see Fig. 4.3). As illustrated in the

69 Mapondera’s statement for his exhibition *Manzwi Akazvitakura/Pregnant* in 2023, at Gallery Mitterrand. For more information: <https://galeriemitterrand.com/en/exhibitions/194-wallen-mapondera-manzwi-akazvitakura-pregnant-words-space-for-breeding/>.

image, a discernible and conspicuous boundary cleaves the composition into distinct realms with varied background hues. Above this demarcation line, hand-drawn contours delineate an array of houses in diverse forms. Below, numerous doilies of diminutive textile figurines appear to be in a perpetual flux—simultaneously distancing themselves from and inexorably converging towards those houses. The surroundings of the houses are sparsely populated, with only a handful of figures wandering near the borders, seemingly “always on the verge of departure” (Gappah 2009, 213). For the majority who are not at home, these houses appear either inaccessible or wholly inadequate to accommodate them. Bumhira employs a palette of light colours, simple lines and delicate and innocuous aesthetics to present this weighty subject matter. Remarkably, within the visual narrative, the doilies are materialised in intricate three-dimensional textiles, densely clustered, while the houses exist as mere rudimentary sketches, sparse and scattered. This deliberate visual contract accentuates the profound disjunction between tangible reality and aspirational imagination. The title *Houses For All* assumes a simultaneous gesture of irony and vision, encapsulating the complex interplay between the artist’s commentary on the socio-economic landscape and the collective yearning for an inclusive dwelling space.



Fig 4.3 Anthony Bumhira, *Houses For All*, 2018, mixed media, 200 x 190 cm.

Photo Source: Zeitz MOCCA

4.2 *Kurembera*: urban youth and quiet resistance

Tsaga. It is that bag. In our language, that slang language, there are times we can call someone Tsaga ... It doesn't know anything, just here to be a container. It doesn't do anything. When you put it there, you come tomorrow, it's there. You come the other week, it's there. So it's like you are the person. You are just Tsaga, the person who doesn't know what needs to be done at that time, at that particular time, not always.

— Wilfred Timire (2021)

Timire: We have talked about potholes, right? Our roads with potholes. They used to patch it. When you patch something, it is like you are trying to fix that particular problem.

Nyandoro: So, the other part, it is exploding.

— Wilfred Timire and Gareth Nyandoro (2021, at Timire's studio)

Urban youths are the unequivocal protagonists in Wilfred Timire's artistic expressions. His collection of works unfolds a veritable compendium of youth life in Harare. One series of works comprises small-scale character portraits, typically confined to dimensions not exceeding a metre in length and height. These portraits are predominantly titled with the subjects' names, identities or nicknames, such as *The Boxer* (2021), *The Hair Dresser* (2022), *The Slay Queen* (2022), *Chichi* (2023) and *Melaz* (2023). A series of more expansive works usually depict everyday life scenes in urban spaces, with titles such as *Kurembera* (2021), *The Bar* (2022), *The Game Players* (2022), *Picking Up* (2023), *Two Girls and the Empty Bucket* (2023), *Forex Bureau* (2022) and so on. These works visualise the urban youth of Harare, especially in densely populated neighbourhoods, or "ghettos" in the artist's words. These young figures are often dressed in vibrant colours: girls and young women are vivaciously adorned, wearing different types of wigs and various shades of lipsticks; guys with sunglasses and colourful hats. They are either hanging around at the bar sipping libations, playing pools, chatting casually, or partaking in street-side card games. There are also depictions of street vendors, sex workers and young people working at construction sites.

Youth is a dense notion. Statistically, most African countries exhibit a prevalence of a youthful demographic. In Zimbabwe, approximately 68 per cent of the total population of 13 million falls within the age cohort of 35 and below, which is the age range defining youth in

the country (Pilossof 2021, 3). Nevertheless, youth extends beyond mere age categories. From a socio-psychological point of view, youth denotes a phase of inherently pliable development. During this period, young people assimilate a historical imprint as a foundation for their explorations into novel ways of living and existence (Bourdillon and Parsons 2021, 8). They depend on their environment while frequently responding to it in unexpected and innovative ways. Consequently, the state of youth must be understood with their dynamic interactions with the social conditions.

Referring to youth across different generations in Zimbabwe as the young postcolonial, scholars Eric Makombe and Timothy Scarnecchia (2021) review the impacts of the historical trajectory spanning four decades on the youth. They commence with an insightful inquiry into the involvement and contributions of the youth during the tumultuous era of the independence struggle, coupled with an analysis of the reverberations of conflict on their lives and educational pursuits. It was followed by the early years of independence which witnessed the positive development and optimism of the nation's future due to the political transition, educational reforms and economic conditions. However, the youths experienced substantial shifts in the following decades due to the social-political circumstances. especially the societal structural reforms, the menacing shadow cast by the HIV/AIDS crisis, and the relentless crises that have unfolded in the early years of the twenty-first century. They have been grappling with challenges in education, health, employment and daily living. Youth in the inner-city of Harare are described as “underclass” who are unable to participate in the labour market and are out of the system (Kamete 2006). Beyond the economic dimension, youths are frequently subjected to political polarisations and often find themselves entangled in various forms of political violence (Reeler 2021). Zimbabwe's most popular Zimdancehall musician sings about urban youth in his song *Twenty Five*:

The rich have closed and locked the door of wealth and good life for the poor
The urban youth are trying to survive
I will remain at work and continue to work hard
My dream is to have a table full of food just like in Chiyangwa's plate
I have opened my eyes, I have learned that life is a struggle.⁷⁰

70 Translated from Shona to English by Simbarashe Gukurume (2022).

Wilfred Timire's artwork *Kurembera* provides a metaphor to address the state of youth in urban Harare. The piece captures a common scene found on the streets of Harare: two young individuals hang on behind a moving kombi (minibus). To save seats and maximise earnings when the bus is full, kombi operators, mostly youths, would cling to the rear of the vehicle where there is barely something to hold on to. They often call for passengers at the same time. This tableau encapsulates not only a prevalent urban scene but also Timire's personal story (Timire 2021). Timire was born in Masvingo and raised in the suburban enclave of Msasa in Harare. Driven by an impassioned commitment to art, Timire took a one-year course at the Peter Birch School of Art after completing secondary school in 2011. Following a year immersed in the study of drawing and painting, Timire, compelled by the need for livelihood, worked as a kombi operator after undertaking various odd jobs. The portrayed scene in his artwork poignantly encapsulates an intimately familiar facet of his daily routine. As seen in the image (Fig. 4.4), a young guy in resplendent yellow apparel, sporting a hat, tenaciously clings to the roof of the minibus. Another youth, wearing striking red sunglasses, a red short-sleeved shirt and jeans, appears more adept in mastery of the act. He casually grips the vehicle's side with a sense of ease, casting a glance beyond the image. An ambivalent expression appears on his face. The depicted action is inherently precarious, especially when the vehicle is moving at high speeds, rendering it both vulnerable and reckless. The title *Kurembera* in Shona translates to "barely holding on to something", which not only captures the scene itself but also resonates strongly with the survival strategies of youth in what the distinguished Mozambican anthropologist Alcinda Honwana (2014) called "waithood"

Through the lens of societal expectations and responsibilities, Alcinda Honwana (2014) conceives youth as individuals yet to attain social adulthood, irrespective of age. Delving into the intricate landscape of youth transitions to adulthood in Africa, Honwana (2014) accentuates that the pervasive spectre of unemployment and the formidable challenges to sustain a livelihood, stemming from overarching social and economic crises, have precipitated a prolonged period of suspension between childhood and adulthood for young Africans—a conceptual realm she aptly terms "waithood". Despite the myriad challenges, the youth in waithood display a remarkable dynamism, harnessing their agency and ingenuity to forge innovative modes of existence and societal engagement (Honwana 2014, 30). In the context of Zimbabwe, the informal sector stands out as youths' paramount strategies for survival. At the early stage of Zimbabwe's independence, the informality remained inconspicuous, occupying a marginal role in the societal and economic landscape. However,

by 2015, a staggering 90 per cent of the Zimbabwean populace found themselves unemployed, compelling them to carve out livelihoods within the informal sector, notably through the trade of second-hand garments and essential commodities (Mlambo 2017, 99). The evolution of informal economic activities, shifting from the fringes to the centre stage in Zimbabwe, underscores the pivotal role assumed by young individuals in this transformative process. This transition not only highlights the significance of the informal economy as a domain where young people deftly navigate the uncertainties inherent in their lives (Gukurume and Oosterom 2021, 242), it also offers insights into the agency and resilience of youth, who are consistently engaged in precarious “hustling” (Gukurume and Oosterom 2021, 243).



Fig 4.4 Wilfred Timire, *Kurembera*, 2021, Sacks, thread, printing inks, 150 x 160 cm
Photo by Lifang Zhang

Timire also depicts the portrayal of precarious labour in his work. *Mabhiridha* (2022), for example, represents four young labourers constructing a wall of bricks. One is pushing a cement-laden wheelbarrow, another is laying bricks, and a third is stirring cement (Fig. 4.5). Similar to the work *Kurembera*, this piece also features a figure gazing beyond the frame, with an indiscernible expression on his face. The young worker is dressed in the customary blue work suit with his jacket partially open, revealing a white shirt inside. Holding a tool in

his hands, he casually sits at a corner of the brick wall, seemingly immersed in a moment of profound contemplation. Similar to Timire's other works, the materials consist of thread, offset ink and plastic bags used for packaging groceries. Timire employs a meticulous technique of stitching to create collaged tapestries. Occasionally, he incorporates filling in certain parts of the figures, lending three-dimensional effects to the artistic images. These two works give a hint of not only Timire's visual thematic consistency on urban youth but also his unique visual language



Fig 4.5 Wilfred Timire, *Mabhiridha*, 2022, plastic bag, ink and thread, 206 x 376 cm

Source: <https://www.osartgallery.com/shanduko?pgid=l4h17vbo-58d823fa-f461-464d-9c7f-a99528222333&lang=en>

Diverging from the abstract styles prevalent among many artists utilising found materials, Timire's works exhibit a remarkable realistic style, with the majority of the human figures and things rendered on a life-sized scale. The artist attends to details meticulously, from the distinctive dressing styles of young men baring a hint of their undergarments to the conspicuous display of cash within exposed pockets. Even upon close scrutiny, the artist's profound exploration of proportion, lines, and boundaries becomes palpable. The compositional aesthetic is characterised by its cleanliness, simplicity, and precision. Backgrounds are subdued, presenting a meticulously orchestrated and patiently observed close-up. Most figures within the images remain absorbed in their actions with a sense of ease and nonchalance as if the artist happens to peek into and capture a fleeting moment of

their daily routines, while onlookers can only peep at their backs or sides, drawing from the artist's view. Only sporadic instances of individuals casting their gaze beyond the frame, subtly remind onlookers of the artist's discreet "presence".

Although focusing on youth life, the visual language of Timire seemingly does not resonate with the connotations associated with youthfulness, such as passion, rebellion, vibrant vitality or restlessness. In these urban scenes depicted, there are no grand narratives, exhilarating events, or potent emotional articulations. The faces of the depicted young figures predominantly lack discernible expressions, engendering a perceptible sense of detachment between the subjects and the actions they perform. Even in the recreational or leisure scenarios, the direct manifestation of pleasurable emotions remains notably muted. These individuals appear seemingly the carriers of the actions as if it does not make a difference with or without attention and consciousness of the activities. No background, no noise, no crowds. The depicted figures embody a state of patient temporality, immersed in the moment of activities and awaiting the passage of time.

Intriguingly, Timire's style carries echoes reminiscent of the ethos of Roland Barthes' *Writing Degree Zero* (1970)⁷¹ or, in the lingo of visual culture, a sense of "seeing/image degree zero". While *Writing Degree Zero* primarily addresses debates in linguistics and literature, its conceptual purview can be extrapolated to the domain of visual art, offering insight into the notion of a visual "degree zero" characterised by an austere, stripped-down and neutral visual lexicon. The artist seemingly refrains from overt intervention, assuming the role of an outsider recording from a detached perspective, devoid of any conspicuous emotional or evaluative inclinations. The portraits, while potentially invoking speculative inquiry into the depicted personae's latent stories, seem like a freeze-frame in the continuum of their daily existence. Even for a portrayal of a weeping female figure, the artist only provides an entry in the title which is nothing more than a simple statement of "Too much in my head". The urban tableaux portrayed constitute cross-sections of quotidian existence without overt narrative or plots. Whether portraying scenes of casual gatherings in a bar, construction sites, or the street-side currency black markets, the artist's deliberate omission of the perceived hustling, clamour or tumult typically associated with such spaces in the common perception is noteworthy. A consistent thread of objective, diary-like and quiet depiction runs through these works.

71 This book was first published in 1953 in French.

A pronounced contrast is evident between the calmness and quietness in Timire's imagery and the restlessness in the experiences and representations of urban youth in Zimbabwe and the broader context of Africa. Kevin Quashie's (2012, 3) investigation of the concept of quiet in understanding black culture is inspiring: he delves into the prevailing notion that public expressiveness has emerged as the predominant framework for interpreting texts or moments in black culture, and blackness is often associated with being expressive, dramatic or loud. By undertaking an examination of the concept of quiet, Quashie posits a compelling argument against the constrictions imposed upon the notion of blackness, advocating for a shift beyond the lens of resistance to present a more expansive view of humanity within black expression. As articulated by Quashie (2012, 6):

The idea of quiet is compelling because the term is not fancy—it is an everyday word—but it is also conceptual. Quiet is often used interchangeably with silence or stillness, but the notion of quiet in the pages that follow is neither motionless nor without sound. Quiet, instead, is a metaphor for the full range of one's inner life—one's desires, ambitions, hungers, vulnerabilities, fears. The inner life is not apolitical or without social value, but neither is it determined entirely by publicness. In fact, the interior—dynamic and ravishing—is a stay against the dominance of the social world; it has its own sovereignty. It is hard to see, even harder to describe, but no less potent in its ineffability. Quiet.

Following such insight enables a deeper understanding of the significance and potency of quietude manifested in Timire's depictions of urban youth. For instance, in *Mabhiridha*, the abundance of blue and green hues, along with neatly arranged bricks, creates a visually ordered and calm composition. The contemplative figure gazing beyond the canvas finds resonance in the work *Forex Bureau* (Fig. 4.6). Instead of a vibrant market scene, this vendor was sitting alone in the minimalist setting with a table, a chair and an umbrella. Facing away from the foreground, the young market operator appears to cast his gaze in a far realm beyond the pictorial frame, with a focus directed not towards a lively market or street but a concealed and vacuum background. These moments embody a profound inwardness, “a sublimity that is often barely acknowledged” (Quashie 2012, 3). The figures momentarily transcend their immediate environment, physically and socially. The construction worker, temporarily stripped of uniform anonymity, is restored to the status of a young individual. Simultaneously, the audience is drawn into a temporal dimension induced by this tranquillity,

pondering what the contemplative figure might be thinking and what is the view of the vendor's gaze. In effect, the audience also undergoes a temporary shift from the prevailing analytical frameworks that characterise youth as a collective entity associated with notions such as victim, violence, restlessness or societal upheaval. Importantly, this is not a denial of their social conditions, apathy or apolitical stance. The notion of quiet unfolds additional facets, redirecting attention toward internally expressive dimensions that, while not loud, are substantively significant.

This interpretive undertaking of quiet necessitates a nuanced consideration of the visual metaphors embedded within the artist's work. Primarily, the materials employed in the artworks and the artist's appropriation of the term *tsaga*, borrowed from Shona slang, convey a condition reminiscent of waithood, a state marked by unfulfilled expectations. In his creative process, the artist, similar to many urban youths, has to undertake a laborious act of continuous stitching to piece together and present a moment of and from the physical and symbolic *tsaga* rags. Another visual metaphor is the sole element in the subdued background, namely the ubiquitous potholes in every work. Potholes represent the road conditions in Harare. They encapsulate the artist's experiences of daily navigation in the city and a tangible manifestation of restlessness during his tenure as a kombi operator. They also symbolise a fractured system and a broken social contract between the state and the youth. Their recurring presence in the blank backgrounds serves as a potent metaphor for the social and existential conditions that have been profoundly internalised by the youth. Potholes become a tangible manifestation of their state of survival and a spiritual dimension within the artworks.

Another pervasive feature across Timire's body of works is the dangling threads (Fig 4.7). Notably, rather than concealing the residual threads resulting from the stitching process, Timire allows each stitch to leave behind extensive threads several centimetres long. These hanging threads contribute to an additional layer of visual effects in the composition. From a distance, they appear as elusive clues, while upon closer inspection, they reveal the fragmented patches, stitches, and intricate tangle of lines. They embody the inherent uncertainties of the life of urban youth and visually engender a palpable sense of disorder and unease. Their presence is not solely confined to the frame of the artworks but extends into the exhibition space. Serving as interfaces connecting the figures in the compositions and the observers, these dangling threads disrupt the internal calmness composed within the artwork and perceived by the audience. These visual features persist throughout Timire's depictions of urban youth, articulating a normalised state of restlessness and uncertainty, subtly and serenely. The quietness in Timire's works is not one of silence. Rather, the strategic

calmness of Timire's visual language and its contrast with the restless reality generates tension and potency, conveying a continuous, quiet yet powerful critique of and resistance against their living conditions.



Fig 4.6 Wilfred Timire, *Forex Bureau*, 2022, Offset ink, sacks and thread, 105.4 x 152.4 cm

Photo by Lifang Zhang



Fig 4.7 Wilfred Timire, *The Bar* (details), 2022, Offset ink, sacks and thread

Photo by Lifang Zhang

4.3 Embodying the gendered city

I believe that one needs to embody a certain feeling to fully channel it, otherwise, communication cannot be achieved ... That is how I perform. You curate your message, you pick your objects carefully, you move intentionally.

— Kresiah Mukwazhi (2022)

One other thing I want to do with my work is to make a comment on the state of the economy and the state of the realities that force women into some of these informal labours.

— Kresiah Mukwazhi (2021)

Following previous discussions, this section delves into Harare as a gendered space embodied in art. Harare was constructed as a city of exclusion, especially for African women, who are still navigating at varying intersections of class, citizenship, background, race and gender (Chiweshe 2016: 220). This is evident from the demographic composition during the early days of the colonial city, where the majority of the population consisted of single young males. The records from the 1911 census indicated that the male population constituted 95 percent, whereas the subsequent 1921 census revealed that the male proportion in African Salisbury was 94 percent (Yoshikuni 1991: 136). As noted by scholar Manase Kudzai Chiweshe (2016: 220), the colonial government marginalised black women from urban spaces in order to confine them to unpaid social reproductive roles in rural areas, caring for the elderly, children and the injured workers without cost to the state. This agenda reflected congruence with African patriarchy (Chiweshe 2016). The urban built environment also aligned with these strategies, resulting in predominantly basic single accommodations rather than family abodes. Although women began entering cities during this time, the demographic shift was not significant. Moreover, women faced difficulties finding formal employment in urban areas until the tobacco boom of the mid-1930s (Parry 1992: 132).

After independence, the new state demonstrated an attempt to improve the status of women in legislation and education, acknowledging their contributions during the struggle for independence (Bourdillon and Parsons 2021:13). However, this did not signify a thorough transformation of patriarchal structures to gender equality, a path remained significantly prolonged (Bourdillon and Parsons 2021:13). Zimbabwean sociologist and feminist scholar

Rudo B. Gaidzanwa (2015) points out the patriarchal tendencies and hegemonic masculinities in Mugabe's politics. This is evident in the limited voices of women in land issues and their low representation in various national bodies (Gaidzanwa 2015:166). Urban history and state politics impact the urban experiences of women in Harare. An example with symbolic significance is the scarcity of streets renamed after female (national heroines) figures in post-independent Harare (Mamvura, Muwati, and Mutasa 2018). On a more practical level, not only are young girls' aspiration needs relatively invisible, but also women's income is influenced by male-biased norms in both formal and informal sectors (Mate 2021). Women also face inequalities in spatial rights. Writer Chenjerai Hove (1994:83) documented this dimension with the case that, before the 1986 Non-Aligned Conference in Harare, many women who walked alone on the city streets were arrested as they "were presumed to be soliciting for men, the rich delegates to the conference". This stigmatisation of women in urban spaces persists and has been repeatedly exploited in various events, including Operation Murambatwvina which influenced a series of artworks by Kresiah Mukwazhi, as further discussed below.

A few artists, mostly female artists, have engaged with performances to explore the politics of gender and the place of women in urban environments. In 2017, artist Miriro Mwandambira presented her performance piece *Try to Adore Me, no?* in the city, depicting "the intimate drama of a young woman drowning in social expectations and peer group pressure".⁷² In the bustling and commercialised streets of downtown Harare, the artist created a setting reminiscent of the bedroom of a young woman who stood in front of a mirror and ornamented herself. Behind her stood an inanimate store mannequin in the form of a feminine body. The young woman meticulously plastered her body with sand, milk, and paint, all the while stealing glances at the mannequin, presumably striving to emulate its appearance. Occasionally, she applied substances onto the mannequin, rendering it more similar to her own look. Throughout the performance, she repeats these endless and reciprocal actions. Under the gaze of the audience, this initially modestly dressed woman underwent a process of objectification and dehumanisation, gradually merging with the plastic figure standing behind her. However, her bizarre and curious look, embellished with inappropriate materials, resisted and challenged the gaze, preventing herself from being reduced to merely an object. An angered male audience suddenly intervened, grabbing her arm, and seemingly attempted to

⁷² First Floor Gallery's introductory text of the performance, see <https://docs.inventory.gallery/266/ku9qpd2w/Vacancy%20Exhibition%20texts%20and%20list%20of%20works.pdf>.

eject the peculiar or perhaps “shamed” young woman from the public space. And we saw Mwandiambira as the artist in that moment of pause.

Besides Mwandiambira, artists such as Kresiah Mukwazi and Shalom Kufah have also performed their work in the urban spaces of Harare to address issues such as the female body, gender-based violence, the labour of women and so on. As a form of live art, performance involves the interactions between artists, urban settings, and audiences, embodying, enriching, and sometimes dramatising these subject matters. Artists immerse themselves inside the public places of the city, prompting inquiries on gender in the city and the gendered nature of the city. The body serves a crucial role in these works as the medium and the subject. Pertinently, artists also utilise found materials in their performances, which are carefully picked as stated in the first quotation of this section. This section foregrounds such artistic interventions with a focus on Kresiah Mukwazi’s performance pieces and the use of found materials in her work.



Fig 4.8 Kresiah Mukwazi, *Chembere Dzagumhana*, 2022, installation view

Photo by Lifang Zhang

The bra, a women’s garment, is a prominent artistic medium in Muwazhi’s portfolio. It is evident in her mixed-media paintings, installations, and performance works. The object has a variety of meanings and connotations in regard to women, encompassing both individual and societal perspectives. They provide protection while indicating a certain level of constraint. Given the intimate connection with the female body, they become potent metaphors to

convey messages and stories about women's experiences and living conditions. Associated with gender symbols, underwear is the proxy of the female body and is closely linked to nakedness and nudity which was often the gazed object in Western art history. Mukwazhi (2022) has channelled multiple meanings into this material, with one notable aspect being the object serving as a symbol of women's protest which is derived from her society and culture:

I use bras as a catalyst for my message, knowing that nudity is a form of protest in the African context. You would hear of someone's aunt or grandmother airing out her deep grievances over a certain matter. She would strip to her petticoats or get entirely naked. You knew from that act that she was pissed off. I, therefore, utilise the perception of a woman in the nude or a woman in her underwear as a form of protest, to make a statement against the unjust ways in which women can be perceived in African communities. I use the bras to present the idea that things are not okay, that I am pissed off. I see the bra as an object of resistance, as a tool or a weapon instead of being merely a garment.

The significance of bras as a symbol of protest is highlighted in Mukwazhi's installation work *Chembere Dzagumhana* (2022). The title has loaded meaning in Shona culture. *Chembere*, which means old women, could refer to unmarried women over 35 or a single mother as well as female ancestral spirits coming back to protect the living ones. *Dzagumhana* means coming together, which Mukwazhi interpreted as mobilisation as preparation for war⁷³ as a tribute to female fighters who sacrificed their lives during the anti-colonial struggle. As seen in the image (Fig. 4.8), predominantly created from bras, the two women fighters in black and white with guns on their shoulders are guarding the falling yet rising women in unity and struggle. What should be noticed is that nakedness as a form of protest is not only cultural. In a contemporary social-political context, naked protests by women, or what scholar Naminata Diabate (2020) conceptualises as "naked agency", can be traced to events taking place across the African continent, with well-known figures such as Wangari Maathai in Kenya, Leymah Gbowee in Liberia, Stella Nyanzi in Uganda, and as

⁷³ Information about this artwork derived from my personal conversations with the artist when this work was on show at Venice Biennale 2022 and also the exhibition catalogue *I did not leave a sign?*

well as the students at Fees Must Fall movements in South Africa.⁷⁴ With the use of female underwear and the metaphor of nakedness, women figures in Mukwazhi's work are never merely victims but also possess powerful agencies of resistance.

The bras in Mukwazhi's work become super agency, not only representing the female body but also denoting notions of resistance, protection and care. Note that the bras are mostly used ones. The artist collects these worn bras from friends and second-hand shops, as well as through open calls. She creates sculptural figures as well as abstract works from these deconstructed undergarments, such as the Mambokadzi series and the frame abstractions shown in her solo exhibition *Bedroom Interview*⁷⁵ which addressed the issues of sexual assault and gender-based violence. Bras are also used in her performance pieces. In 2017, Mukwazhi participated in *That, Around Which The Universe Revolves*,⁷⁶ a project by SAVVY Contemporary that took place in different cities, and presented her performance work *Please Tip Your Dancers*⁷⁷ (see Fig. 4.9) at Njelele Station in Harare. The performance started with the artist in the persona of a club dancer. Wearing a white shirt and under-knee skirt, she stood on a carpet of bras, the patterns and colours of which reminded one of the working environment: glinting sequins, deep purples, leopard print and flashes of lace. Entering the audience, the dancer walked around and among them with a transparent container in the shape of a high heel, asking for tips. Some ignored her, some dropped coins in, and some waved their hands to indicate that they got nothing. One audience gave her a cigarette which the dancer lighted and put into the heel, closing the performance. Throughout the process, the dancer was in silence and with the same calm expression, seemingly alien and indifferent among the audience who were chatting and drinking. There were moments of stillness for the audience to "go within and get to a state of meditation". From the artist's perspective, it is also a moment of gazing back.

Derived from this performance, Mukwazhi presented a short video work with the same title in the exhibition *Mukando*.⁷⁸ Focusing on the same transparent container shaped like a high-heeled shoe, the video depicts a hand retrieving a few coins from it and, after a few

74 For more information on the protests, see Diabate (2020).

75 SMAC Gallery, Cape Town, 2018.

76 For more information see <https://savvy-contemporary.com/en/events/2017/that-around-which-the-universe-revolves-harare/>.

77 The video is available at <https://vimeo.com/322268874>

78 2021, Jan Kaps gallery, Cologne, Germany. For more information see: <https://jan-kaps.com/exhibitions/kresiah-mukwazhi-mukando>.

seconds of stillness, putting some coins in. This simple scene refers to the cyclic and repetitive daily life of women including the nightclub dancers who rely on the informal sector and precarious income for their livelihood and family sustainability. What should be noticed is that these are not discursive topics in Mukwazhi's work. *Please Tip Your Dancers* is inspired by the artist's own experience in working at a nightclub to sustain her artistic practices after school, buying basic materials such as paint and brushes as well as collecting found materials. This experience brought Mukwazhi into intimate proximity with the subject matter of her concern. Through these works, as Mukwazhi (2021)⁷⁹ states, she wants to "make a comment on the state of the economy and the state of the realities that force women into some of these informal labours".



Fig 4.9 Kresiah Mukwazhi, *Please Tip Your Dancers*, 2017, performance

Source: <https://jan-kaps.com/exhibitions/kresiah-mukwazhi-that-around-which-the-universe-revolves-on-rhythmanalysis-of-memory-times-bodies-in-space>

Mukwazhi's artistic practices have consistently engaged with a particular group of women within the informal sector: sex workers residing in the Hopley Farm settlement. Located at the edge of Harare south, Hopley is an emerging settlement in Harare whose history can be traced back to the mid-1990s when the government altered the boundaries of Harare, incorporating 35 farms into the jurisdiction of Harare (Matamanda 2022, 4). The

⁷⁹ An online interview, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9JQTHUEtVo>

official occupation took place in 2005 as an act of Operation Garikai, the government's response to Operation Murambatsvina which demolished thousands of informal dwellings. Due to international pressure, the government allocated plots to some of the victims at Hopley (Matamanda 2022, 6). However, the community residing at Hopley do not possess access to the formal facilities that serve the major part of the city, which confirmed this settlement as a space of exclusion and discomfort (Matamanda 2020, 480). Lacking infrastructure and work opportunities, the majority of the communities at Hopley are either unemployed or depend on their livelihood in the informal sector. In such circumstances, many women are forced into sex work without other options.

Mukwazhi has researched this settlement and engaged with many sex workers based at Hopley, visiting, interviewing and bringing work to show them. She also collected bras from some of her interlocutors. Mukwazhi's solo exhibition *Mukando* is based on this research process, presenting a body of works about the stories of these women in the sex industry. In the performance piece, which was displayed as a video, the artist created a character in shining clothing and wearing a bright blue wig, surrounded by empty alcohol bottles and valuable bank notes on the floor. On the walls behind her hangs some bright pink fabric ornament pieces, which are drawn from decorations inside the homes of those sex workers. The figure picks up a bottle and counts the bank notes now and then. The artist uses bright and seducing colours to disguise the heaviness of these gender-related issues while resonating with the images of sex workers in public perception. The staged setting addresses their living and working environment, characterised by the stressful economic conditions and the industry's association with alcohol issues.

In the history of Harare, women working in the sex industry have a deep history that can be traced back to the early colonial period. The "native" woman had no place in the colonial city (Chiweshe 2016, 220). When women migrated to the townships in Salisbury at its early establishment, most of them had to practice prostitution or beer brewing for sustainability, both of which were considered illegal. In contemporary Zimbabwe, sex work is illegal yet only the women are arrested and imprisoned (Chiweshe 2016, 226). Consequently, there is no protection for them although they are facing many dangers and risks, such as sexual assault, robbery and other violence. Furthermore, sex workers have been stigmatised throughout history and associated with terms such as "dirty", "illness" or "immoral" which is especially evident during cleaning-up operations from the colonial to the independent era (Harris 2008). In a patriarchal and conservative society, their personal experiences are still invisible and

unspeakable in the public space. They exist as open secrets, with their struggle, hopes and fears, working and living in the urban spaces of Harare.

Using female undergarments in artwork, Mukwazhi's work challenges socially constructed boundaries of private and public which conceal the sex worker's lived experiences. By doing so, the artist reveals these unspoken issues and brings their intimate experiences into the public spaces. What should be noticed is that Mukwazhi's work not only addresses their struggles but also their practices of empowerment and unity. Besides working with the bra as a symbol of resistance, Mukwazhi also explores their hopes and empowering strategies. The exhibition title *Mukando*, which means "pool in" in Shona, refers to the initiative when a group of women come together and pool a certain amount of money regularly to create capital, and are also called *maRounds*. Members of this informal "saving club" could borrow from the pooled money either for emergency or business purposes (Mutsindikwa and Gelderblom 2023, 856). Shedding light on these stories, Mukwazhi's work not only embodies women's living conditions in the city but also embodies how they navigate the urban spaces.

4.3 Harare Phonebooks: self-registering in the exclusive space

The phone book is also like an image of who is who in society. Because to have a phone was a privilege ... it was about status. And if you follow through, especially on names and who's got phones, it was actually certain spaces. These were not high-density suburbs, they were northern top suburbs that people lived in. It also represented the kind of income you earned and the position which you belonged to in the society. It was about privilege.

— Admire Kumudzengerere (2020)

They believe that when you arrive at a new place, if you want to climatise with the space so that you don't get sick, with water, you have to actually take the earth in that space.

— Admire Kumudzengerere (2023)

Phonebooks are one of the primary found materials in artist Admire Kumudzengerere's recent works. In the ongoing series work *Harare Phonebooks*, Kumudzengerere works with old phonebooks he collected from people residing in Harare through open calls. A

phonebook, also known as a telephone directory, is a publication that lists information about telephone subscribers in a specific geographical area. As a city directory, it typically includes names of residents, business and institutions, phone numbers, and their locations in the city. Kumudzengerere's initial curiosity about this material arose when he encountered an old phonebook in which some deceased individuals were still listed. While the information could function in identifying an urban resident, it can also be irrelevant to the individual's experiences. Besides, as mentioned in the quote above from the artist, a phonebook is not a neutral reference tool, it carries historical and societal significance. In the time when paper-based phonebooks prevailed, being listed was a symbol of privilege and social status. This was evident in the resources required for phone installation and could also be observed in one's home address.

The title of the remarkable and absorbing nonfiction by Deirdre Mask (2020), *The Address Book: What Street Addresses Reveal About Identity, Race, Wealth, and Power*, has revealed the significance of urban addresses. Mask takes readers through a global journey from Kolkata to Rome, from Haiti to South Africa, and delves into the social, historical and political dimensions of addresses, exposing the nuanced stories they tell about individuals and societies. Urban addresses are not only related to municipal administration but also significantly impact residents' social lives, such as banking transactions, social security, or the basic function of being accessible. An urban address indicates one's geographical and social location, intricately connected to one's being in the city.

In Harare, similar to many other postcolonial cities, an important aspect regarding address is the naming and renaming of the places. Toponymy weaves a vital narrative through Harare's political history. Upon the arrival of the Pioneer Column, places were given names with military connotations as a way to indicate occupation and authority, such as Fort Salisbury, the early stage of city Salisbury and then Harare (Snodia, Muguti and Mutami 2010, 18). Many places were named after British towns, persons or heritage, which were obvious in the many streets or buildings bearing names such as Rhodes, Victoria, or Elizabeth. During the same period under colonial rule, Africans also talked back through names. They nicknamed mines and farms to code information about the white employers' cruel exploitation or show resentment toward colonial rule (Snodia, Muguti and Mutami 2010, 20). Soon after the independence of Zimbabwe, the change of place names became part of the effort to decolonise the colonial legacy and of the process of nation-building and state formation. This process was conducted by the Cabinet Committee on Place Names constituted in 1982 and supported by legal instruments such as the Names Alteration Act

(1983) and the National Heroes Act (1984) (Mamvura, Pfukwa and Mutasa 2020, 21). Attention was given to places in the CBD, especially the longer streets. Many streets in Harare CBD were renamed after national heroes and renowned African statesmen, featuring Mugabe as the name of one main road.

The rewriting of the political and cultural landscape through place naming continued into the post-Mugabe era after he was pulled from power in 2017. Place renaming became part of Mnangagwa's regime to symbolically distinguish from Mugabe's political hegemony and ritualise itself as a "new dispensation" (Mamvura 2022, 972). Enterprise Road, a main road connecting the city centre, was renamed Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa Road, intersecting with Robert Mugabe Road. And similarly to the most featured Mugabe, Mnangagwa's name was given to thoroughfares in towns and cities across the country (Mamvura 2022, 982). The change of street names entails a process of decommemoration and commemoration during the political transition in Zimbabwe (Mamvura, Pfukwa and Mutasa 2020, 22).

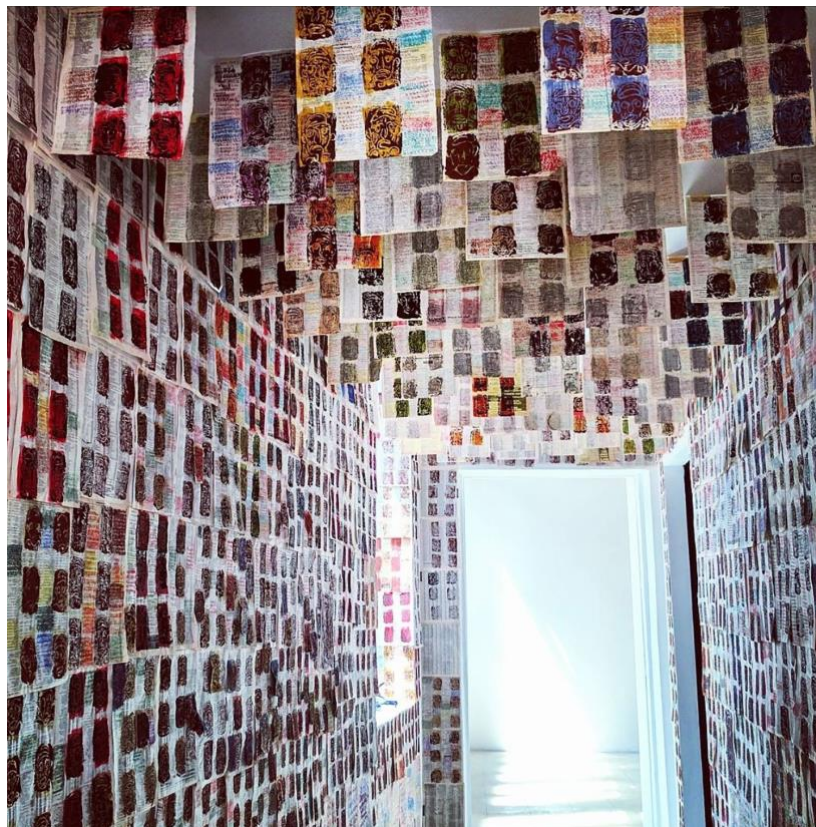


Fig 4.10 Admire Kumudzengerere, Installation at Zimbabwe Pavilion of the 57th Venice Biennale, 2017

Source: Galeria Catinca Tabacaru

The restless naming and renaming of places demonstrates that the societal significance of addresses is not solely about their urban locations but also resides in the linguistic dimension. There is a close relationship between the change of place names and the shifts in political and cultural commemorative landscapes of the city. As a derivative of the city-text, telephone directories from different eras hold archival value in this sense. The city itself changed from Salisbury in the Southern Rhodesian telephone directory to Harare in the Zimbabwe directory. The valuelessness and lack of functionality of the old phonebooks employed in Kumudzengerere's work not only reflect changes in city toponyms but also demonstrate the obsolescence of paper-based city directories in the era of new technological developments. His artistic intervention, on the visual level, is to collage, write and print on the old pages that indicate ambiguous relationships with time, city and the individuals the codes represented.

Kamudzengerere's *Harare Phonebooks* series was shown in the Zimbabwe Pavilion of the 57th Venice Biennale (2017), and his solo show *I'm Gonna... You. Till You Run* (2017) in New York, among others. As seen in the installation view (Fig. 4.10), the phonebook pages hang on the walls and the ceilings of the entrance of the exhibition room. These pages feature numerous small portraits in different colours, accompanied by statements written in various hues. These facial portraits are connected to Kamudzengerere's other body of works, particularly the *Post-it* series. These facial portraits were derived from the artist's quick sketches done in front of a mirror after his father's death. Seeking traces of his father on his own countenance, Kumudzengerere swiftly captured these imprints with lines as a personal and intimate way of commemoration. As the artist expanded this endeavour with hundreds and thousands of portraits, the imagery grew to encompass friends and community members, while retaining a thread connecting back to his father. Notably, within the *Harare Phonebooks* series, these portraits take the form of monoprints, and the pigments used are extracted from soil collected across various locations in Zimbabwe. Describing his creative process, Kamudzengerere (cited in Lehrer 2017) articulates:

The technique on the phone book is a printing method called monoprint. Each face is made individually. I spread the mud pigment on a metal plate then I make my drawing in the pigment using the back of a paintbrush or a stick. Then, I take the phonebook page and press it over the pigment drawing, rubbing gently with my hand. I lift up the page, which has picked up the imprint. The result is the monoprint.

It is crucial to shed light on another material employed by the artist in this series, namely natural earth of various hues collected from different locations across the country. In the 2000s, the artist began using natural soil as a pigment, due to the shared experience of limited accessibility to paints and other art materials. Delving into the diverse soil types of Zimbabwe's landscape, he became attuned to the cultural and political connotations embedded in the earth. The initial soil collection came from a farm burned during Zimbabwe's land reform period. Besides the political implications tied to the land, the essential aspect lies in the personal connection to a place that the soil represents. Kumudzengerere's elders advised him to take water with earth as a way of adapting to or climatising a new place. The significance of these artistic materials and the creative process imbue his works with a deeper and more nuanced meaning.

Registrar (Fig. 4.11) stands as Kumudzengerere's artistic response to the tumultuous period surrounding Robert Mugabe's downfall and subsequent elections. Alongside a body of works including *Voters Roll* (2017) and *Open Line* (2017), it is the artist's visual commentary on Zimbabwe's political landscape, particularly the electoral process. Within these phonebook pages, portraits scatter irregularly, annotated with occasional remarks such as "registered" or cryptic data. Ahead of each election, makeshift sites emerge across Harare for voters to re-register. Among the personal information, residential address is crucial as it also determines one's electoral constituency. This artwork, as part of Kumudzengerere's *Harare Phonebook* series, delves into the complexities of individual identity within the urban context. How does code intertwine with and represent an individual? Are those absent from the phonebook considered urban citizens and do they retain access to civic and spatial rights? Kumudzengerere restless imprints monoprint portraits and inscribes statements, embedding or reclaiming the space on the metaphorical phonebook which represents privilege. The earth used for these portraits is sourced from the artist's life experiences and tactile interactions, symbolically expanding and substituting the listed addresses with personally connected places. In other words, the artist creates alternative and more inclusive spaces in his work. It is the artist's climatisation and renaming of Harare. Through the works, the artist imagines a restless process of self-inscription and self-insertion into urban spaces and reclaims citizenship in the postcolonial city.



Fig 4.11 Admire Kumudzengerere, *Registrar*, 2018 (detail)

Source: Galeria Catinca Tabacaru



Fig 4.12 Admire Kumudzengerere's work in progress at his studio at Animal Farm Artists Residency, Chitungwiza, 2023.

Photo by Lifang Zhang

Conclusion

While this chapter primarily centres around the visual and narrative aspects of artworks, the discussion extends to underscore the significance of art materials and the creative process in the meaning production of the artwork. The artworks under consideration are not mere visual discourses of urban experiences: rather, they draw their materials directly from the fabric of urban life, thereby constituting an integral part of the materiality of the city. This direct linkage highlights the profound interplay between artistic expression and the urban environment, establishing a more rooted and grounded connection to the creation of urban imageries. In a sense, it can be posited that art possesses the capacity to actively contribute to and play a formative role in city-making. Similar to written accounts of the city, artwork pertaining to urban themes also “brings certain parts of the city into view, rendering others invisible” (Bremner 2010, 34). This implies that artistic representations not only depict aspects of urban life but also shape perceptions by selectively emphasising or excluding certain elements. Besides, artists’ imaginations of the city are not passive reactions but possess the potential to reshape urban spaces. This dimension will be further explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 Transforming the City: Independent Art Spaces in Postcolonial Harare

Introduction

Following the previous discussion on artists' representations of the city within artworks, this chapter explores their re-imaginings of the city which result in their practices extending to art infrastructure building. Infrastructure, as an integral component of urban materiality, is commonly referred to as the physical and organisational systems and facilities which are required for the functioning and reproducing of city life, such as roads, pipes and electricity supplies. Artistic infrastructure often includes physical institutions such as museums, galleries, and educational facilities, as well as other art spaces and platforms. They are part of the urban infrastructure which ensures the creation, consumption and dissemination of art and sustains the functioning of the "art world".

In the specific context of Harare, art infrastructure includes previously mentioned public institutions such as the National Gallery and its associated art school; private commercial institutions such as First Floor Gallery, the (now-closed) Gallery Delta, the Artillery Gallery and so on. However, along with the evolution of found material movements, art spaces and platforms established and operated by artists emerge as a significant portion of the art infrastructure in Harare, serving as venues for the creation of artworks while frequently functioning as spaces for exhibitions, workshops or educational activities. They play a significant role in promoting art and reshaping institutional power dynamics in the city.

This chapter starts with an alternative map of art spaces following my route of conducting fieldwork on found materials in Harare. As little research has been done on these emerging spaces, this chapter discusses them in relation to the border context of artists' initiatives and art infrastructures on the African continent. Adopting the concept of "people as infrastructure" (Simone 2004), this chapter expands the notion of art infrastructure to the artists' activities with a focus on the open studio culture in Harare. This chapter also unpacks the way urban architecture as a form of found materials is transformed through artistic practices.

5.1 An “acentric” map of the emerging

During my field trip conducted in Harare in 2021, I stayed at an apartment on Herbert Chitepo Avenue by Harare Gardens, the largest public park located in the heart of the city. The NGZ could be conveniently accessed within a short walk through the garden, while Gallery Delta and First Floor Gallery, both situated around Harare's central business area, required only a few minutes' drive from my accommodation. As mentioned in Chapter 1, these galleries constituted the primary public art institutions in Harare. Thus, I anticipated that the city centre would be the focal point of my activities during this field trip. However, my visits to these institutions were just on a few occasions, mostly for accessing archives and attending exhibitions. On most days, I would commence my daily journey from the city centre in the early hours, navigate through the bustling commercial edifices and municipal establishments in the urban hub, and then travel towards different directions of the city to visit artists and their studios, returning to the restful CBD as dusk descended.

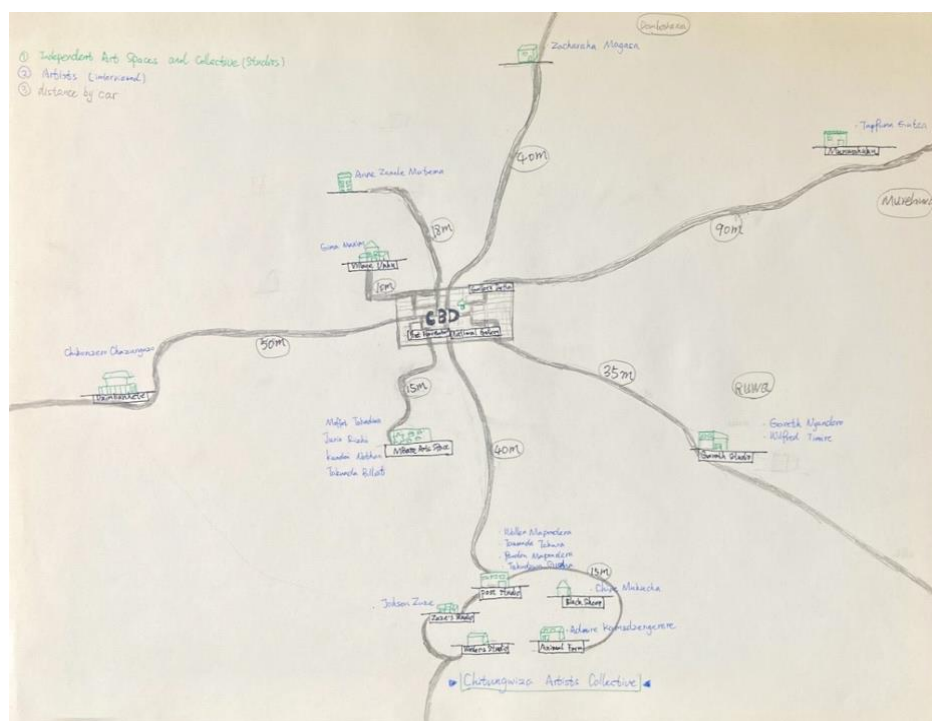


Fig 5.1 Hand-drawing map of my research routes in Harare, by Lifang Zhang

Upon conducting several visits, it became noticeable that many artists whom I interviewed were working from shared studios or communal spaces. Mostly established and operated by artists, these spaces also frequently served multiple functions such as hosting

exhibitions or facilitating educational activities. At that time, I generally referred to them as “art centres”. Nevertheless, they are not necessarily at the centre, in terms of either their geographical location within the urban city or their institutional position within the established complexes of the global art world dominated by museums, galleries, curators and other art brokers. These spaces unexpectedly took on the central spot of my research pathway⁸⁰ to visit and interview artists in Harare whose practices evolved found materials. The emergence of these “art centres” in my research process indicates the imbrication between these art spaces and the phenomenal use of found materials by artists in Harare. I drew a map to delineate the routes undertaken during my research in the city (Fig. 5.1).

As shown on this “acentric” map, the “art centres” are dispersed in various directions, extending outward beyond the central district of Harare. MAS is located approximately 15 minutes’ drive south of CBD, close to the industrial area and several marketplaces. Artists Moffat Takadiwa, Jurio Rizhi, Kundai Nathan, Takunda Billiat and a few others are based in this space⁸¹. Village Unhu is also around a 15-minute drive from CBD in a suburb to the northwest. Gina Maxim resides here alongside her family while engaging in the collaborative utilisation of the studio space with fellow artists who work with diverse mediums. Gareth Nyandoro, Wilfred Timire and Clemence Murenza are affiliated with Tarisa Art Studio in Ruwa, an area about 40 minutes’ drive east-south of the city centre. Chitungwiza town, approximately a 40-minute drive from Harare CBD, encompasses several collective art spaces. Post Studio Arts Collective is close to Chitungwiza town centre and is shared by Wallem Mapondera, Tawanda Takura, Pardon Mapondera and Takwudzwa Guzha. Animal Farm Artists Residency, established by Admire Kamudzengerere, is a 20-minute drive from Chitungwiza town centre. Johnson Zuze and Clive Mukucha also reside in Chitungwiza and work from their own spaces. Dzimbanhete Arts and Culture Interactions, founded by Chikonzero Chazunguza, is located in the southern outskirts of Harare, around 50 minutes’ drive from the city centre. I visited Dzimbanhete in the company of Kundai Nathan, who was conducting her degree attachment on-site under the mentorship of Chazunguza.⁸² It should be

80 There was not much information online, but I came across some spaces during my research or was introduced to them by artists in Harare.

81 In this chapter, I only name those artists who are working with found materials or with whom I have conducted interviews.

82 I also made multiple visits to Murewa, which is not part of Harare but a town around a two-hour drive northeast of the capital. The pioneering artist Tapfuma Gutsa was constructing his studio and residency space in this town. I also visited a few artists who work individually in their own spaces, such as Zacharaha Magasa at Domboshawa, which is about half an hour’s drive north of the CBD, and Anne Zanele Mutema, in a suburb around 20 minutes north of the town centre.

noticed that it is a “map of becoming”, as it does not contain all artist-run “art centres” that already existed in Harare then, nor does it include those that have been established, relocated or closed more recently.⁸³

In her contribution in *Condition Report: Symposium on Building Art Institutions in Africa*, Françoise Vergès (2013, 37), a political scientist, film-maker, curator and activist, points out that “new centres and new peripheries are emerging, and the new traffic routes ... are paving new pathways”. And itineraries of the unexpected, the unpredictable, the invisible and the emerging would “reveal the realities that escape hegemonic logic” (Vergès 2013, 39). Following this insight, the above exercise of alternative mapping of the collective studios has unveiled the emerging itineraries and artistic landscape in Harare. The meaning of such novel realities revealed in this acentric map could only be grasped by adopting a historical perspective on the urban spaces. Before examining these spaces in Harare, it is necessary to briefly review the discussions on such artists’ initiatives.

5.2 Spaces of Proximity: Independent Art Spaces and Knowledge Production in Africa

In art lingo, the above-mentioned art centres were often referred to as independent art spaces, independent art institutions, artist-run spaces, artists initiatives or collectives, etc. In her monograph, *Panya Routes: Independent Art Spaces in Africa*, South African researcher and visual artist Kim Gurney (2022, 15) gives a brief definitive outline of these spaces:

The terminology varies but generally refers to small-scale organisations often located in mixed-use or industrial areas and repurposed buildings... They operate collaboratively, with a regional emphasis and on a non-profit basis that is formalised in a cooperative structure to work towards common and more equitable social ends. Such spaces are often, but not always, artist-run. Either way, artists are the main constituents, and art practice and process drive the organisational thinking. Relative programming autonomy due to their independence from mediating frameworks helps produce experimental endeavours that are often less supported by purely state, commercial or developmental agenda. Public sector support in these contexts is negligible or non-existent.

83 For example, Njelele Station.

The previous two decades have witnessed a notable proliferation of independent art spaces across the African continent. Yet, this is not a recent occurrence, as there are some institutions such as Doual'Art in Douala⁸⁴ which was established in 1991 and has contributed significantly to contemporary art in Cameroon art by supporting artists' practices, exhibitions, workshops and festivals. In the case of Zimbabwe, although the flourishing of independent art spaces started in the late 2000s, its evolution can also be attributed to the establishment of Utonga Studios by artist Tapfuma Gutsa in the early 1980s, right after the nation's independence.

Many artist-led spaces on the continent have taken on an important role not only in promoting local art but also in engaging with the regional and global art scene. Notable examples include the Centre for Contemporary Art⁸⁵, established in Lagos in 2007, the GoDown Arts Centre⁸⁶ in Nairobi, established in 2003, and the 32° East Ugandan Arts Trust⁸⁷ in Kampala, established in 2012, among others. More recently, in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Ghanaian artist Ibrahim Mahama founded the Savannah Centre of Contemporary Art (SCCA)⁸⁸, Red Clay and Nkrumah Voli that combine visual and performance art, architecture, ecology and science, with multiple functions of exhibition, art-making, screening, education and research. These initiatives, along with numerous others on the continent, are gaining international influence through their massive and bold projects while shifting the urban landscapes through art.

It is intriguing that independent art spaces in Africa provide not only novel infrastructures for art but also engines for the development of a body of knowledge. As scholar Garrido Castellano (2017, 116) points out, histories of art in Africa have conventionally placed a greater emphasis on discursive and representational achievements. Exiting research on art institutions and events focuses more on state institutions and cultural initiatives (Pinther and Nzewi 2015, 8). Therefore, it is imperative to shed light on the discussions about these independent art spaces in order to explore artists' organisational and collective agency in shaping the art scene.

84 For more information, see: <http://doualart.org>.

85 The Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) Lagos is an independent non-profit making visual art organization founded in December 2007 by Bisi Silva (1962 – 2019). For more information, see <https://ccalagos.org>.

86 For more information, see <https://thegodown.org>.

87 For more information, see Castellano (2017) and the official website: <https://ugandanartstrust.org>.

88 For more information, see <https://www.sccatamale.org>.

A collection of literature has grown alongside the evolution of such spaces, including various forms such as anthologies, journal articles, and monographs, as well as symposiums, panels and lectures⁸⁹. In 2011, *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* organised an online roundtable moderated by art historian Chika Okeke-Agulu, focusing on independent art centres in Africa.⁹⁰ The invited participants were founders and directors of some renowned independent art spaces on the continent, including Bassam El Baroni (Alexandria Contemporary Art Forum), Koyo Kouoh (Raw Materials Company, Dakar), Jimmy Ogonga (Centre for Contemporary Art of East Africa (CCA EA), Nairobi), Abdellah Karroum (L'Appartement 22, Rabat), and so on. The core issues outlined by Okeke-Agulu (2011) echo the general concerns in the discussions on this topic, such as necessity, challenges, impacts, sustainability, and their relationships with global networks and local industries. The available content documented online provides the participants' reflections on their careers and the conditions in which these centres were established. Among other core issues, the necessity of these initiatives turned out to be one of the main motifs among the presentations and has resonated in more recent discussions on these spaces. For example, Abdellah Karroum started art and cultural programmes at his apartment facing the challenges of taking action within the exciting educational system. Jimmy Ogonga established CCA EA to cultivate new opportunities for contemporary expression as a counter-strategy in a social-political environment that was not friendly to artistic practices (Okeke-Agulu 2011).

In January 2012, the RAW Material Company founded by Koyo Kouoh⁹¹ hosted the first Condition Report symposium in Dakar. A collection of essays based on the symposium was published in 2013, titled *Condition Report: Symposium on Building Art Institutions in Africa* (Kouoh, 2013). Although previous scholarly works exist⁹², *Condition Report* was one of the first published compilations addressing the subject of art infrastructure in contemporary

89 In her publication *Panya Routes*, Kim Gurney (2022) compiles a section of literature reviews on independent art spaces in Africa. This thesis benefits from the list and shares many common references while drawing from Gurney's findings. Together with a handful of other scholarly works, they lay the foundation for discussing the independent art spaces in Harare and beyond. For details of the review in *Panya Routes*, see Kim Gurney (2022: 166–183). Rather than summarising all the texts repeatedly, my thesis highlights the most pertinent discussions and unpacks the way they inform my research.

90 The roundtable was documented online at: <https://nkajournal.wordpress.com/2011/08/30/nka-roundtable-iv-independent-art-centers-in-africa/>.

91 Koyo Kouoh is a Cameroon-born pre-eminent art curator and cultural producer and is currently the chief curator and executive director at Zeitz MOCCA in Cape Town, South Africa. For more information on the art institution RAW Material Company, see their website: <http://www.rawmaterialcompany.org>.

92 For example, Okwui Enwezor's (2007) analysis on Congolese collective Le Groupe Amos in the book *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*.

Africa. RAW Material Company is an art initiative and centre that engages in curatorial practice, artistic education, residencies, knowledge production, and archiving of theory and criticism on art, fostering appreciation and growth of artistic and intellectual creativity in Africa. In the introduction “Filling the Voids”, Kouoh (2013b, 16) elucidated the roles of these institutions in shaping the contemporary art landscape in Africa:

Whether large or small, generously funded or not, centres such as these are changing the cultural and artistic landscape and, if nothing else, they replenish the dearth in spaces of free expression, production, exhibition and reflection ... These independent initiatives set themselves apart from state-affiliated institutions as well as from commercial (art) markets, by creating alternative models and platforms for negotiating art and history, and reflect upon the archive, visual culture and cultural history. They generate a much-welcomed knowledge and experience in the local artistic and intellectual biotopes in relation to continuity, the re-assessment of contemporary history and the challenging of canons, geographies and master narratives of postcolonial schemes of artistic action.

As proposed by Kouoh, the main themes discussed regarding independent art spaces on the continent include the lack of infrastructure, departure from state and commercial establishment, alternative modes of operation, changes in narratives and logic, connection to local contexts and explorations of new possibilities for art and knowledge creation. Kouoh (2013b, 17) also discussed her curatorial project in which institutions were invited as participants to explore their roles in the art landscape in Africa after fifty years of independence⁹³ and thus “the art institutions became the artworks”. Thinking with this curatorial framework on the flourishing of independent art spaces on the continent further stresses the perceptions of the role of art and artists in society, as well as the relationship between artistic practice with society. These aspects are also key enquiries explored in this thesis centred around the “working” of art.

In the publication titled *New Spaces for Negotiating Art (and) Histories in Africa* (2015), the editors Kerstin Pinther and Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi, who are both art historians, offer a different perspective that aligns with Kouoh’s propositions. They highlight the two preferred labels “independent” and “alternative” of these artist-led spaces, whose approach

93 GEO-graphics Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels.

and activities distance themselves from state-funded or commercial institutions (Pinther and Nzewi 2015, 9). However, they also point out the importance of investigating the degree of independence of these institutions, especially when they rely on donor agencies and cultural foundations. These donors “mainly support activities that tally with their respective funding agendas and ideologies” and their logic of project-chain funding is often precarious while art infrastructure building requires long-term investment (Pinther and Nzewi 2015, 13–14). The crucial matter highlighted pertains to artist-led institutions, specifically their sustainability in a challenging reality marked by inadequate support and ever-changing social conditions. It is also due to this urgent reality that many spaces are moving towards a blended model for funding, support, income and other requirements (Gurney 2022, 115).

Although the lack of art infrastructures is often cited as the primary catalyst for the birth of independent art spaces in Africa, Simon Njami (2013, 21), a renowned curator, writer and critic, argues that their emergence is also driven by independent and organic thought, rather than merely being a mechanical reaction to the void. The establishment of numerous independent art spaces is indicative of Njami’s emphasis on the agency of artists. One notable individual involved in the promotion of independent art spaces in Harare is Chikonzero Chazunguza, who left Harare Polytechnic College and founded Dzimbanhete Arts and Culture Interactions (2008). Since graduating with an MFA from the Institute of Pictorial Arts in Bulgaria in the mid-1990s, Chazunguza has taught at Harare Polytechnic for over 15 years, in addition to instructing various modules at the University of Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Institute of Vigital Arts, and the Chinhoyi University of Technology. During his teaching career, he spared no effort in reforming the Eurocentric curriculum at Harare Polytechnic. However, he realised the constraints at formal institutions that were exacerbated by the 2000s socio-economic meltdown. After coordinating a few international artists’ workshops that were discontinued due to a lack of funding, he decided to create a space for less constrictive methods of art mentoring and art creation, while fostering greater interaction with local cultures.⁹⁴ Dzimbanhete is Chazunguza’s ongoing commitment and intentional intervention in art education.

Some scholars analyse the significance of these spaces from a political and ideological perspective. In his article on black collectives and activism in contemporary South African art, critic and researcher Athi Mongezeleli Joja (2020) highlights the racial and political concerns in black collectivism in relation to the country’s cultural resistance and art practices

94 The biography is extracted from my interview with Chazunguza at Dzimbanhete in Harare, 2021.

in history. Fadzai Muchemwa, a curator and art historian from Zimbabwe, examines three art collective spaces in Harare – Village Unhu, Chitungwiza Art Centre, and Chinembiri Studios – and discusses their significance within the context of political movements that have unfolded in the country. According to Muchemwa (2020, 26), these independent art spaces emerged as “a form of counterculture that is comparatively egalitarian in outlook”. There are discussions on the relationship between artistic initiatives and urban spaces. The publication *Public Art in Africa: Art and Urban Transformations in Douala* (2017) examines the impact of art or urban changes with a focus on artworks created through the independent art space doual’art (Gurney 2022, 178). Some scholars approach from the dimension of operation and management of independent art spaces. For example, Molemo Moiloa (2022) applies Simone’s (2004) concept of “people as infrastructure” in the field of art, analysing artists’ initiatives in Southern Africa which will be further discussed in the following section.

Panya Route is a monograph published in 2022 authored by Kim Gurney and based on research associated with the Platform/Plotform project at five independent art spaces across Africa: namely GoDown Arts Center (b.2003) in Nairobi, Kenya; ANO Institute of Arts and Knowledge (b.2012) in Accra, Ghana; Townhouse Gallery (1998–2019) in Cairo, Egypt; Zoma Museum (b.2002) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; and Nafasi Art Space (b.2008) in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Besides the brief description and the informative literature review as mentioned above, the key finding of the research is articulated through five working principles that elucidate the prevailing organisational logic in these independent art spaces. The first principle, horizontality, which reflects on the non-hierarchical collective approach, is one of the key features that are shared by most independent art spaces, especially in the context of collaborative efforts among individual artists (Gurney 2022, 56). The second principle is the idea of reuse, referred to as “second chance” by Gurney (2022, 70), which is prominently evident in the practices of many artists examined in this research. This pertains to the artists’ (re)use of found materials as well as urban spaces which will be further unpacked below. The third principle, performativity, “an agentic capacity to institute new context” (Gurney 2022, 86) is also an important aspect of this research as further discussed below. The elasticity, the fourth, in response to the changing conditions and, lastly, the temporal convergence of past and future into present also characterise the independent art spaces (Gurney 2022, 94; 98). These commonly observed principles serve as valuable instruments in understanding the different dimensions of the day-to-day functioning of artist-run spaces in Harare. Yet it is also important to highlight specific features in relation to their

locality and to unpack the conditions that shape these features and, in turn, how they reshape their conditions and environment.

It is noteworthy that the majority of the above-mentioned authors are scholars based on the continent, while some others are African scholars in the diaspora. And similar to the participants of *Nka* Roundtable, besides Koyo Kouoh, several contributors at *the Condition Report* symposium are also art practitioners, such as Nana Oforiatta-Ayim from Ghana and Gabi Ngcobo from South Africa, both of whom are curators and founding members of cultural initiatives. In a similar vein, some of the other essential reference texts included in this chapter were also authored by practitioners and scholars in the region. For example, Athi Mongezeleli Joja (2020) and Molemo Moiloa (2021), who write about the collective spaces in South Africa and the broader southern African region, are both actively engaged in the practices they investigate. Kim Gurney is based in South Africa and has been closely researching and connecting with the artists involved in the independent art spaces in her research, such as August House in Joburg. Fadzai Muchemwa is currently the chief curator at the NGZ in Harare.

In this sense, the proximity between knowledge production and practices characterises the field of research on independent art spaces in Africa. In other words, the knowing is (proximate to) the known. It is meaningful to ponder on this proximity, highlighting the art practitioners' agency in both the building and theorising of the spaces. Rather than providing merely "raw material", this field of knowledge manifests the "theory from the south" proposed by Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff (2015). By thinking from and thinking with the local, knowledge production on and in these spaces through participatory routes also opens spaces for new nouns rather than derivative vocabularies from hegemonic concepts (de Sousa Santos 2012, 48). For example, "Panya Routes", the title of Gurney's book, is a term borrowed from Kenyan Lingo which refers to "alternative back routes made by people themselves to get around official obstacles, literal or otherwise, or to bridge a void" (Gurney 2022, 20). The Panya idea that is embedded in local practices organically grasps the artistic thinking in these self-made infrastructures and collective spaces. Thinking with Boaventura de Sousa Santos's propositions (2012, 48), the field also creates epistemological significance by proceeding beyond the "phantasmal relation between theory and practice".

Proximity also defines the characteristics of independent art spaces. As pointed out by Simon Njami (2013, 22), independent art spaces are "spaces of proximity that know their audience intimately", while public or state-affiliated institutions that assign themselves a regulatory and planning function at the national level "do not always live up to the people's

aspirations”. He continues, “Thanks to that proximity, they [independent art centres] are able to determine the needs to be satisfied to resolve the issues raised by community living.” (Njami 2013, 22). Gurney (2022, 19) also points out that the art spaces in her research emerged from “where they are and use whatever is to hand”, although this is not the final destination. In the context of Harare, many independent art spaces arose from and for the immediate environment, effectively addressing the specific needs of the artist’s community. For example, Admire Kamudzengerere, an artist and the founder of Animal Farm Artist Residency, conceived the idea of establishing a residency space during his tenure as an instructor at the art school affiliated with the National Gallery. He realised that a span of two years was insufficient for young artists to fully develop their “language” and that there exists a dearth of resources to sustain them until they could make a living from art.

Many of the previously cited authors have emphasised the experimental nature of these spaces. They possess a level of reactivity and particular sensitivity, grasping the ever-changing reality and responding to the need of the immediate world around them (Njami 2013, 23). It could also be understood as the working principle of elasticity, in Gurney’s (2022) words, and the collective strategies of resilience to navigate prevailing conditions of uncertainty on the continent and the global, which has become the artistic thinking of many. Animal Farm combines art and farming in order to meet the basic needs of artists who live in the nation’s economic crisis and also to emphasise the connection between art and reality. Accordingly, the knowledge of these spaces is also not predetermined by existing and often north-driven frameworks, but rather in the process of manifesting itself, predominantly led by the very actors involved in promoting these spaces. Thus, both the independent spaces and the corresponding knowledge sphere are arguably in the territories of emerging and, with potency and potentiality, promise different possibilities and futures of art-making and knowledge production.

5.3 Situating artists’ initiatives in postcolonial Harare

Carole Rakodi (1995, 8), author of *Harare: Inheriting a Settler-colonial City: Change or Continuity?*, points out that Harare was the outcome of the political, economic and administrative structure of not only a British colony in Africa but also a long-lived settler state. Zimbabwe scholar and urban planner Davison Muchadenyika (2020, 53) argues that metropolitan Harare, which is composed of three urban areas (Harare, Chitungwiza and Epworth), is a product of colonial planning institutional arrangements which continue to

influence the city's structure and organisation in the present day. Similarly, Abraham Matamanda (2021) conceptualises Harare as a postcolonial city in his analysis of the urban legacy of Mugabe's political ideologies and strategies. He argues that although the base has changed from race to political affiliation, class and income, the postcolonial Harare perpetuates the social-spatial segregation created in the colonial era (Matamanda 2021, 814). These scholars emphasise the significance of comprehending Harare city in relation to its colonial history.

The history of Harare dates back to 1890, when the Pioneer Column of Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company reached this region and established the later Salisbury (now Harare), to extend Britain's colonial frontier and seek mineral resources (Chitofiri 2019, 218). Although chiefdoms such as Neharawa, Mbare, Gutsa and many others were occupying the area before 1890, the city was planned and designed as a colonial settlement determined by the settlers' need (Muchadenyika 2020, 57). Due to the precariousness of its economy at the early stage of Salisbury town, the administration laid less emphasis on controlling and disciplining labour but focused more on entrenching the colonial spatial order which provided the economic and ideological base for the exploitation of the town's black populace (Parry 1992, 116–117).

According to Tsuneo Yoshikuni (1991, 134), a prominent scholar in the field of Zimbabwean urban studies, Salisbury's industrial ambition was manifested through the establishment of the central business district at the Causeway side of Manica Road in the early 1900s, which laid the foundation of Harare's CBD today. The town also developed a residential area in the 1910s for a new generation of colonial settlers at the Avenues close to the business district. This development was characterised by the consolidation of services and facilities in these white settlers' areas, in combination with their segregation from the African workers' locations. The Harare Gardens (next to the apartment where I resided during field research) was initially known as Salisbury Gardens. With a history dating back to the early 1900s, it was designed to provide recreational space at the city centre for European settlers, while Africans were not allowed to access the park under colonial rule (Matamanda at al. 2019, 2).

The earliest African labourers in Salisbury consisted of the indigenous Shona people, and migrant workers from South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia and so on⁹⁵. The dominant African

95 For more details about the evolution of ethnic composition in early Salisbury, see Yoshikuni (1991, 134–136).

populations were youth and single male workers, with approximately 85 per cent of the population falling within the age range of 10 to 29 years old in 1911 (Yoshikuni 1991, 136). Drawing experience from South Africa, particularly Kimberly, the Salisbury administration implemented the pass system in 1892 as a means of regulating the mobility of Africans in the urban area (Yoshikuni 1991, 140). In 1907, the Salisbury town council established the first “Native Location” under the Native Urban Locations Ordinance and declared that all Africans in Salisbury would have to reside in the Location⁹⁶, which led to the “extensive removal of urban Africans from the town centre and solidified the racial segregation of Salisbury” (Chitofiri 2019, 220). The original establishment of Salisbury’s oldest Native Location consisted of a combination of Kaytor huts and brick barracks, colloquially referred to as “Ma Tanks” by the African residents. In 1946, the location was officially renamed Harari African Township, and following the country’s independence, it was further renamed Mbare (Gundani 2019, 2).

In 1935, the town of Salisbury was elevated to city status (Muchadenyika 2020, 58). The industrial expansion and the post-World War II influx of European migrants necessitated an increased labour force to sustain the needs of the settlers. In the interim, legislative measures such as the Land Apportionment Act (1930) and the Land Husbandry Act (1941) resulted in the displacement of Africans from declared ‘European’ land, compelling their relocation to Salisbury and other urban and industrial regions (Gundani 2019, 2). The growth in urban population led to the expansion of Harari Township and the establishment of additional townships. An instance of this can be observed in the housing units area in Mbare called Nationals, the very location of MAS, which was built in the late 1940s (Vambe 1976, 178). Chitungwiza has undergone development through the merging of three smaller townships: St Mary’s, Zengeza, and Seke. The establishment of Seke, the oldest township of the three, can be traced back to 1952, with the primary purpose of providing housing for civil servants in Salisbury (Muchadenyika 2020, 65).

As asserted by Chitofiri (2019, 215), the Native Locations and Townships were established at as low a cost as possible to the Rhodesia state. This was evident in the poor infrastructures in townships that remain observable today. The neighbourhood was not only dense but also lacked basic facilities. In the 1910s, the location lacked any essential amenities such as shops, clinics or schools, and the 250 Kaytor huts were reliant on a single borehole and three communal latrines for water and sanitation needs (Chitofiri 2019, 223–224). In

96 It started in May 1908, except those already sleeping on their employers’ premises.

1913, diesel-generated electricity was provided for domestic and street lighting in town, however, there were only two lamps altogether in the location by the year 1930 (Muchadenyika 2020, 58; Chitofiri 2019, 229). In March 1930, the colonial government enacted the Native Social Welfare policy in response to the grievances expressed by Africans regarding the impoverished built environment and their growing involvement in urban protests. This policy primarily focused on the coordination of sporting events with the municipality and constructed a limited number of recreational facilities within townships (Yoshikuni 1997, 21; Chikowero 2015, 117). For example, Salisbury's Recreation Hall built in 1935 under this policy, which was renamed Mai Musodzi Hall, stands as the earliest cultural facility in Mbare township. Rufaro Stadium, with its site designated for construction in 1932, was formally established and inaugurated in 1972. It should be noted that these architectures and their affiliated activities were mostly funded by the Kaffir Beer Fund, which will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

In her monograph *Zimbabwe Township Music*, Joyce Jenje-Makwenda (2005), an ethnomusicologist, historian and producer, highlights the connection between the development of certain township cultures and the presence of recreational amenities in the location. One such example is the Jazz concert held at the recreational halls. Yet Zimbabwean historian Mhoze Chikowero (2015, 112) emphasises the significance of understanding the “socio-political maps and designs of this rukesheni⁹⁷ leisure culture”, as the Native Social Welfare policy and its facilities were “architectures of control”. Yoshikuni (1997) also delves into the underlying administrative logic behind this policy in his work tracing the historical roots of urban protest in Harare Township and its relationship with the Native Welfare Society. According to him, the launch of the Society system was in an effort to enhance supervision and regulation of the migrant labourers in Salisbury by disciplining and managing their activities outside of working hours (Yoshikuni 1997, 21). Chikowero (2015) provides a detailed analysis of the ideological and administrative structure of the policy, specifically examining its impact on African urban culture. The welfarist intervention firstly reinforced the falsifying image of the location as “terrible places” characterised by disorder and immorality with behaviour such as “fornication” or “criminalised beer swilling” (Chikowero 2015, 119). Through white trusteeship, organising sports and recreational events,

⁹⁷ Rukesheni refers to the native locations.

and broadcasting the “responsible” Africans with “healthy leisure”, etc.,⁹⁸ this colonial project sought to stabilise and depoliticise the native labour. Africans’ cultural activities in open spaces, such as outdoor dances, were compelled into confined architecture supervised by the colonial state, as open spaces could be politically dangerous (Chikowero 2015, 120).

From the other perspective, the locations were also site of struggle and resistance. The 1940s, especially post World War II era, witnessed a notable uprising against the Native Welfare Society, marked by community centralisation from below, such as the self-proclaimed independence of the Football Association from the Society (Yoshikuni 1997, 24). Mbare was also a site of cultural struggles to control the built environment, as well as the birthplace of nationalist liberation music (Vambe 2012). And as Chikowero (2015) argues, while the native social welfare aimed at socialising Africans into sanctioned spaces, Africans’ early urban culture, specifically music, emerged as an outcome of colonial structures and African innovative agency.

As evidenced by the absence of any art infrastructures or facilities, these locations were never designed as spaces conducive to the cultivation of visual arts. While the colonial landscape portrays the land of no man, the art historians described the urban scene of no art until the arrival of a white man, Frank McEwen. In the account of German scholar Ulli Beier (1968, 75): “Salisbury, the capital of Rhodesia, is a town so deadly bourgeois, so painfully respectable and sterile, that any form of artistic activity comes as a complete surprise”. McEwen’s citadel, as mentioned previously, was the National Gallery of Rhodesia located at the southern corner of Salisbury Gardens in the CBD. Despite the institution’s early attempts shortly after establishment to promote local black sculptors, it maintained a policy of segregation by having two separate entrances – one at the front for white settlers and another at the back for black people. Following Zimbabwe’s independence, the government advocated for the notion of ‘one city’ in urban planning, which merely shifted the existing racial disparities into income disparities. The development of urban infrastructure mirrored the income pattern of settlements (Muchadenyika 2020, 30). Researcher and creative practitioner Molemo Moiloa (2021) divides the current arts infrastructure in Southern Africa into two categories. The first category comprises arts venues and funding systems that originated during the colonial era and primarily catered to settlers. The second category encompasses infrastructure established or developed during the independent era as part of

98 These are summarised from Chapter 4 in Chikowero’s book (2015). For more information, see the chapter “Architectures of Control: African Urban Re/Creation”.

nation-building efforts but still bears some influence from colonial legacies. After the short-lived upsurge of cultural infrastructure development, only a few state entities remain active locally and internationally in the region. In Harare, the arts infrastructure including the National Gallery and the commercial galleries are still located in the high-income area, the CBD. With a few exceptions such as Chitungwiza Art Centre established in 1997,⁹⁹ there has been a lack of significant initiatives made to improve the art infrastructure within and for the low-income neighbourhoods or the former Native Locations.

Within this particular context, I approach the meaning of Harare's emerging artistic map in relation to urban transformation. I draw the notion of "urban transformation" from Muchadenyika's definition in the book *Seeking Urban Transformation: Alternative Urban Futures in Zimbabwe* (2020). According to Muchadenyika (2020, 2–3), urban transformation grapples with issues of accessibility of services and marginalisation, entails modification in physical, socio-political and economic dimensions, and promotes inclusivity, creativity, connectivity and innovation towards better-lived experiences in the city. Muchadenyika (2020, 3) states:

I define urban transformation as changes in the urban fabric (for instance, through new housing and infrastructure services to the predominantly urban poor population), reconfiguration of power (with the urban poor playing a vital role in urban development) and the adoption by planning institutions of grassroots-centred planning and housing delivery approaches.

The artist-led centres depicted on the aforementioned acentric map are mostly located in native locations that were constructed during the colonial period, or in mixed-use areas lacking dedicated art infrastructure within the built environment. For example, MAS in formerly Harari Township, Post Studio and Animal Farm in Chitungwiza, and Dzimbanhete in the southern outskirt of Harare. As further discussed below, these spaces provide community and infrastructure support to people living in their immediate environment. Therefore, as autonomous and collective spaces, they transcend the framework of centre and periphery inherited from colonisation or the conditions that "people on the fringes were ordered to submit to the policies of the centre" (Vergès 2013, 41). Some of the centres are

⁹⁹ According to Muchemwa (2020), mainly housing stone sculptors, the Chitungwiza Art Centre was established in 1997 as a poverty alleviation programme for the youths in the Chitungwiza area, with funding from the United Nations Development Program through the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture.

located in repurposed buildings from former factories, beerhalls, residential settlements, and so on. These artists engage in the practice of reappropriating urban spaces in order to change the built environment and “define themselves in a new context” (Vambe 2012, 157).

Therefore, the map of the emerging is also a map of transforming. To gain a comprehensive understanding of these art centres, it is important to consider the discussion surrounding the flourishing of such spaces within the wider African context, as it has emerged as a continental phenomenon.

5.4 Open studios in Harare

The flourishing of artist-run spaces in Harare coincides and correlates with the evolving of found materials movements, as demonstrated by the above map depicting my studio visits of artists engaged in working with found materials. Several of the founders or leading artists in this space were also involved in the movement in one way or another, such as Chikonzero Chazunguza, Gina Maxim, Gareth Nyadoro, Moffat Takadiwa and Wallen Mapondera mentioned previously. Nevertheless, it should be noted that these spaces are not exclusively dedicated to the use of found materials, and their ecology varies with unorthodox *modi operandi*, strategies, ideas and activities.

For example, Village Unhu, situated in the formerly elite residential suburb Milton Park, was funded by artists Gareth Nyandoro, Gina Maxim and Mishech Masamvu. It is home to a creative community as an open studio, space of informal training, residency and workshop. The collective adopted the do-it-yourself culture, led by artists Maxim and Masamvu, and is predominantly self-funded (Muchemwa 2021, 29). It is also an experimental gallery with a supportive environment especially for young artists (Moiloa 2021). Village Unhu has participated in several art fairs, such as the FNB Johannesburg Art Fair 2018 and Cape Town Art Fair 2022, showing young artists who had worked in the space. Similar to many other spaces on the continent, these artists are part of the community while creating alternative value infrastructure as they “leverage their professional reputation as individual artists to garner associative value for the artists on show” (Moiloa 2021). Above all, the collective art space is also a living place. It is the home of the founding member Gina Maxim and her family. It is also a space for gathering, and Maxim would cook meals for the artists’ community on occasion (Moiloa 2021). MAS is operated under a team of board members with a project-based collaborative approach while Animal Farm is focusing on the local artist residency programme.

What should be highlighted is that most independent art spaces in Harare primarily function as art-making spaces, despite their various commonalities and distinct features. In other words, they are studios or create rooms that serve as studios. While some artists in Harare work individually in their private spaces which will be discussed later, these studios at the independent art centres are mostly collective and have distinct spatial and operational characteristics. Village Unhu, MAS and Post Studio Arts Collective were repurposed from municipal constructions with various functions, whereas Animal Farm and Tarisa Art Studio were designed by the artists, who also participated in the building process. At Village Unhu and Post Studio, artists create artwork within one open shared space. At MAS, a leading artist often shares with one or two younger artists in one small pavilion. Currently, at Tarisa Art Studio, each of the four artists has a private working space. These collective studios form a significant part of the art infrastructure in the city of Harare.

In his 1979 seminar article *The Function of the Studio*, the artist-author Daniel Buren drew our attention to the fact that the artist's studio was rarely discussed in the analysis of art system in comparison to other frames such as museums or galleries. As Buren (1979, 51) points out, studios are spaces of significant importance as part of the art edifice and system, even the first part. There are some illuminating texts following this discussion on studios, particularly in the contexts of Europe and America, such as the book *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* by Caroline Jones (1996) and the more recent *The Studio Reader* edited by Mary Jane Jacob and Michelle Grabner (2010). However, Buren's assertion remains relevant in the studies on art, especially the art of Africa.

In Harare, as well as many other African cities, there are more studios than other forms of art infrastructure such as galleries or museums, but little research has been conducted to highlight these spaces of fundamental significance. Yet, the necessity to examine studios is not based solely on their prevalence. In the introduction to *The Studio Reader*, Michelle Grabner (2010, 3) remarked that "mapping the trajectory of the modern studio is equivalent to mapping artistic style, propriety, and invention". Grabner continued to briefly trace the auratic studio of the seventeenth century, shifting from the Enlightenment values of self-determination to self-expression in the Romantic era, to the abstract Expressionists emphasising authenticity until the postmodern studio, analogous to bricolage, ad hoc and fractured (Grabner 2010, 4). Although this Eurocentric genealogy could not be applied to the context of Harare and the broader urban Africa, the studio as a clue could provide valuable insights into the evolution of art, the *zeitgeist* and the relationship between art, society, and urban spaces.

Before specific discussions, it is important to provide a brief definitional detour of “studio”. The dictionary explanation of a studio is a room where an artist works and a place where films, radio, and television programmes are produced. As the place where artwork originates, a studio is often what Virginia Woolf called “a room of one’s own”¹⁰⁰, private, autonomous, and privileged. Their appearances might be different at different periods of time and in different places. For example, Buren (1979, 52) classified the studios in the late 1970s mainly into the European type and the more recent American type, with the former one characterised by high ceilings with different floors for specific functions of sculpture and painting, and the latter located in reclaimed lofts with wider space and electricity as the main lighting source. The edited volume *The Studio Reader* also focuses on this individual-studio model, while providing illuminating essays debating issues such as gender, context or methodology in the studio, limits of the studio, boundaries between the studio and the outside world, and so on (Jacob and Grabner 2010). In her analysis of the studios in Dakar, Grabski (2017) identifies studios as a vital infrastructure of opportunities and networking in the “art world city”. From an art historical perspective, Grabski (2017, 98) highlights “the authorising and citationary nature” of studios demonstrated by studio visits when artists speak on their practices among artworks of different stages, objects, archives and stories.

The most prevalent occurrence one would find in the above-mentioned collective studios in Harare is the presence of multiple artists at work simultaneously, often with music, dialogues, and the noise of materials being handled drifting through the air. Located by Chikwanha Shopping Centre at Chitungwiza, the space that currently houses Post Studio was formerly an peanut butter manufacturing factory next to a repair garage. It is the studio shared by several artists who use found materials in their artwork, including Wallen Mapondera, Tawanda Takura, Pardon Mapondera and Takudzwa Guzha. These artists work in different quarters within one open space. Their distinct art materials, such as Mapondera’s egg cartons and Takura’s collected old shoes, are piled next to each other. The artworks at different stages of processing are suspended or positioned on the floor around their materials. Similar scenes can be found at Animal Farm, MAS and Village.

100 *A Room of One’s Own* is the title of an essay by English writer Virginia Woolf that was first published in 1929. It was used as a metaphor by Woolf to address women’s lack of space for free expressions.



Fig 5.2 Post Studio, 2023.

Photo by Lifang Zhang

As Muchemwa (2020, 26) pointed out, it is not surprising that people working collectively in shared space might lead to “common modes of practice”. This could be identified in the practices within some collective studios regarding the way artists collect materials, work with assistants, assemble materials or arrange colours, etc. Yet, artists also resist the common modes. Gina Maxim, for instance, practically and strategically creates her artwork after her administrative duties and after other artists have left the studio space at Village Unhu. Working from Jurio Rizhi’s studio, William Joseph Kachinjika continues to experiment with his minimal colour palette in contrast to Jurio Rizhi’s vibrant hues.

The history of artist-led community studios in Harare, or what Gutsa (2021) refers to as “open studio”, could be dated back to Utonga Studios, which was arguably the first independent art space and open studio initiated by artists in post-independent Zimbabwe. Located in Tafara, a high-density neighbourhood around 30 minutes east of Harare CBD, Utonga Studios was established by Tapfuma Gutsa in the early 1980s before he went to London to study. It started as Gutsa’s open working place and loosely included community members and artists who learnt to sculpt. According to Gutsa (2023), artists such as Dominic Benhura and several others were already sculpting in 1981.

Emerging at a time of social-political transformation, Utonga holds profound significance that extends beyond its function as a mere venue for art making. In Shona lingo, “Utonga”

means dawn or the golden horizon at sunset, symbolising hope and opportunity of a new generation in the recently independent nation (Gutsa cited in Kinsella 2005, 215). Similarly to Gutsa's departure from the dominant single media aesthetics as mentioned in Chapter 1, the establishment of Utonga Studio was also a new consciousness, a gesture and a promise towards new art citizenship. Gutsa (2023) recalled the conditions in Zimbabwe when he founded Utonga Studio: \, "the white painters had studios, mostly at home, while (black) sculptors worked anywhere, under trees, at quarries, galleries and art communities like Tengenenge ... NGZ has the workshop school". It was thus also "named in defiance to the white studios" (Gutsa 2023).

With his overseas experiences, Gutsa (cited in Kinsella, 2005) became more aware of the lack of formal art education in the country and the community's limited access to art. After he came back to Harare in 1985, he continued Utonga Studio which was then joined by more young artists including Keston Beaton, who was also an important figure in redefining art materials as mentioned previously. They were at times referred to as the "Utonga Group", an "elusive organisation" in Gutsa's (2021) words. Huggins (cited in Scherer 2005, 226) described Utonga as a space "where friends could drop by, young people could look and learn, workshops could be conducted and many debates were held". Utonga demonstrated the open studio convention that has been shaping Harare's urban art scene through the sharing of space, resources and ideas, the informal ways of mentoring, the supportive environment and ways of working collectively. Together with Nicole Gutsa-Field, in 1997 Gutsa started Surprise Art Centre which was a combination of exhibition space, studio and artists residency and was officially opened in 2000. Intentionally choosing the location Gweru, the artists attempted to establish an art facility in the Midland Province where there were no galleries. Surprise Art Centre was Gutsa's consistent concern for access to art and the continuing of Utonga as a concept, which still permeates his practices today. Gutsa is currently constructing an art residency space in Murewa, which was named after the local stream *Munwahuku*, meaning where the chickens drink. To him, Utonga is an idea rather than a static physical studio:

Utonga means if you put time into the project, you are not asked to pay. We shared meals, we shared everything. Mhm. You're not asked to pay anything of any kind. But you have the duty in future to go and teach what you have learnt. You share with other young people. (Gutsa 2021)

Gutsa's words speak to the open studio culture in these independent art spaces in Harare, which could be encapsulated by the notion of "people as infrastructure" (Simone 2004), in the field of art. AbdouMaliq Simone (2004), an inspiring sociologist who consistently researches cities in the global south, extends the notion of infrastructure directly to people's activities in the city, engaging with complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons and practices. These engagements and the people-based networks constituted the capacity of individual actors to provide for and reproduce life in the city when there is only limited access to formal or commercial infrastructures. Simone (2004, 410) stated that:

Such a conjunction of heterogeneous activities, modes of production, and institutional forms constitutes highly mobile and provisional possibilities for how people live and make things, how they use the urban environment and collaborate with one another. The specific operations and scopes of these conjunctions are constantly negotiated and depend on the particular histories, understandings, networks, styles, and inclinations of the actors involved. Highly specialised needs arise, requiring the application of specialised skills and sensitivities that can adapt to the unpredictable range of scenarios these needs bring to life ... This process of conjunction, which is capable of generating social compositions across a range of singular capacities and needs (both enacted and virtual) and which attempts to derive maximal outcomes from a minimal set of elements, is what I call people as infrastructure.

AbdouMaliq Simone's notion of "people as infrastructure" is vital for understanding the independent art centres in Harare, especially as an open space for the production and reproduction of artworks and artists. First of all, people and their interconnections are the core of such conjunction. As mentioned above, all these spaces are initiatives led by artists. Rather than being governed by institutional regulations or bureaucratic frameworks, such collective studios are driven by the intentions of artists and their relationships and networks. For example, Gareth Nyandoro, cognizant of Wilfred Timire's artistic talent, invited him to work as an assistant at times when Timire was a kombi conductor in Ruwa. Subsequently, Nyandoro facilitated Timire's access to a private studio space at Tarisa Art Studio (Fig. 5.3), enabling him to practice art full-time. Clemence Murenza, who acquired skills in stone sculpting from his brother and had to take construction work for his livelihood, was introduced to Nyandoro by Timire. Nyandoro not only provided Murenza with an art-making

space but also introduced him to print-making, the main technique Nyandoro employs in his work.



Fig 5.3 Tarisa Art Studio, Harare, 2021

Photo by Lifang Zhang

Informal education and mentoring are integral components in the majority of these collective spaces. Chikonzero Chazunguza is often referred to as Sekuru Chiko by his students and many other young artists. After Chazunguza (2018) left teaching at Harare Polytechnics, a number of his former students became frequent visitors to his residence, where he initiated Dzimbanhete before relocating to the current place. Due to the considerable distance from Harare city centre and the limit of transport, some of them would stay overnight. Slowly the gathering visit evolved into one or two week art-making workshops. Artists would create works and have conversations with Chazunguza and other peers. Students at the school of the National Gallery also began undertaking their attachment at Dzimbanhete, as well as other independent spaces (Fig. 5.4).

The previously mentioned Chinembiri Studio established by Zacharaha Magasa, and Wycliff Mundopa, was transformed from a training centre at Mbare and fostered the growth of artists who worked with found materials, including Moffat Takadiwa, Julio Rizhi, Takunda Billiat and Magasa himself. Billiat and Rizhi, residing at Mbare, both began their artistic practices with found materials from Chinembiri studio before they went to art school. Most of

these artists moved to MAS in late 2019. At MAS, Troy Makaza, who predominantly uses silicone, shares a studio with painter Kimberly Tatenda Gakanje. In a recent studio visit to Mbare in March 2023 (Fig. 5.5), I encountered Nigel Kanyungwe, a student of the NGSVAD. Nigel was working on his attachment with Makaza as part of his pursuit of a National Certificate in Fine Art. While Kimberly Gakanje was editing photographs of her paintings, Kanyungwe was preparing for his drawing assignment from Takunda Billiat as Makaza was travelling overseas for his exhibition. As seen in the image, the packaging boxes of Makaza's silicone were arranged by Billiat as the study subject for Kanyungwe.

The diversity of the conjunction is also evidenced in these open studios. Firstly, people-based infrastructure shifts from but also combines with available infrastructure to build the additional framework of sociality (Moilola 2021). Collective spaces in Harare provide avenues of compensation, transition, and collaboration with existing state institutions and commercial galleries, as well as non-art infrastructures such as repurposed buildings. These collective studios contain and interact with elements that are not essential to the art-making process. At Animal Farm, Tarisa Art Studio, and Dzimbanhete, as well as Tapfuma Gutsa's Munwahuku Studio (which is currently under construction), plant cultivation is consistently integrated into the built environment. Local fruit trees, staple foods and daily vegetables are grown in these places to provide food and increase the artists' resilience to social and economic change, particularly in the context of Zimbabwe's economic crisis. At Dzimbanhete, emphasis is placed on indigenous knowledge systems. The understanding of the ecological system, traditional healing, local music, and African architecture are included in their programmes. Many of these spaces encourage interactions with the surrounding community, whether through art or otherwise. During an interview with Gutsa at his studio's open field, for instance, we halted to converse with and provide refreshments for a passing neighbourhood family, as this is important in their culture. These studios are not separated from everyday engagements and daily social etiquette with people.



Fig 5.4 Dzimbanhete at its former location, 2018, Harare.

Photo by Lifang Zhang



Fig 5.5 Nigel Kanyungwe at Troy Makaza's studio, 2023, Harare.

Photo by Lifang Zhang

The heterogeneous activities that are contingent upon specific realities and needs transform these people-based infrastructures in the city into spaces that offer provisional and open-ended possibilities. One notable example is the Chitungwiza Artists Collective, whose

establishment and activities are exemplary manifestations of the concept of “people as infrastructure”. Chitungwiza Artists Collective (Fig. 5.6) was founded after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic by artists Admire Kamudzengerere, Clive Mukucha, Evans Tinashe Mutenga, Sky Salanje, Victor Nyakauru, etc., and were joined by more artist members based in Chitungwiza, such as Wallen Mapondera, Takudzwa Guzha and so on. As a consequence of lockdowns and regulations imposed during the pandemic, artistic activities and established institutions in Harare were restricted or even dissolved. The Collective started with studio visits among artists based in Chitungwiza. As stated by Kamudzengerere (2023), “The big idea was to encourage artists to open up their studio and allow others to come in there and experience how you work and how you live”.



Fig 5.6 Chitungwiza Artists Collective gathering at Animal Farm

Photo courtesy of Chitungwiza Artists Collective

The Collective then started *Nhimbe* exhibition movements (Fig. 5.7). *Nhimbe* is a Shona word which refers to the practices of mutual assistance and collective work for the development of the community. Borrowing from this notion, the Collective brings artist-curated exhibitions into each other’s studios, with different themes, participants and programmes. They have had group exhibitions at Victor Nyakauru’s studio, Post Studio, Sky Salanje’s Weiler’s Studio, and so on. For example, the group exhibition titled *Never Mind the Socks* took place at Weiler’s Studio on 12 February 2022. Before the exhibition, a poster was

shared on social media, and photographs of the events were posted afterwards. Post Studio hosted another group exhibition titled *small WORKS* in May 2022 with a larger number of artists participating in the events. Numerous artists from Chitungwiza and beyond attended the exhibition, which was followed by a social gathering event. Photos of the exhibition and events were shared on social media, exposing the Chitungwiza-based artists as a collective to a broader audience.



Fig 5.7 *Nhimbe* exhibition

Image courtesy of Chitungwiza Artists Collective

The dearth of public artistic space as a result of the pandemic necessitated the emergence of the Chitungwiza Artists Collective, which in a time of adversity cultivated a supportive and active community. The *Nhimbe* exhibitions demonstrate the notion of infrastructure based on people's activities and connections, combined with existing infrastructures, namely the artists' studios. These non-commercial and informal infrastructures create alternative exhibition spaces not just for the period under Covid but also for the post-pandemic future as currently there are no galleries or museums in Chitungwiza. These activities also create opportunities for artists based in Chitungwiza to engage with broader communities.

In this sense, Chitungwiza Artists Collective and *Nhimbe* exhibitions add new dimensions to the meaning of open studios in Harare. These studios provide not only shared spaces for art making and mentoring but also temporary exhibition venues. Open studio practice is demonstrated not only within the space but also by breaking the boundaries between the

studio and other art mechanism spaces. However, they also depart from conventional exhibition spaces such as art museums and commercial galleries. Firstly, artists themselves are the primary actors of these studio exhibitions, manifesting their agency as the participants, curators and audiences. This network is also centred around the artists. With the ongoing Nhimbe exhibitions, their affiliated studios also implicitly became a potential part of the network and gave the network infrastructural significance. In addition, the network's organisational and operational flexibility enhances its resiliency to the ever-changing social conditions.

When viewed from the angle of exhibiting, Nhimbe exhibitions present an “inverse flow” in the circulation of artwork and bring new dynamics to exhibition practices. In contrast to the common procedure of taking completed pieces from the studio to the gallery, Nhimbe exhibitions retain or present works in the studio space, which encompasses raw materials and works in various phases. Buren (1979) refers to the removal of artwork from the studio for its visibility to the public as an unescapable “mortal paradox” as the work is displaced from its origin and reality in the studio. This paradox of distancing itself is temporarily suspended during the Nhimbe studio exhibition. Could these Nhimbe exhibition practices, which cross boundaries from both ends of art making and art exhibiting, stimulate new departure points for our conception of the studio? Their impact, especially the material effect in a country grappling with economic crises, is still in the process of manifesting. However, this people-based infrastructure in Harare has presented open-ended and provisional possibilities.

5.5 Transforming the colonial architecture

Located in Harare's oldest so-called Native Location, the current low-income neighbourhood Mbare, MAS was repurposed from a colonial municipal beer outlet which was called *Chiweshe* or *Marenganya*. Occupying around 5,000 square metres, it contains two main bars, a storeroom, several semi-open pavilions and outdoor drinking spaces. Similar municipal beer outlets in different scales, such as canteens, bottle stores, beerhalls and beer gardens, can be found in most townships in Harare as well in as many other cities in Southern Africa. These architectures were the physical vestiges of a colonial system to control the production and consumption of alcohol in urban spaces in Southern Africa. Only by comprehending their historical contexts can we grasp the endeavour and significance of MAS in transforming the urban space through artistic practices.

In the seminal publication *Liquor and Labor in Southern Africa*, the editors Charles Ambler and Jonathan Crush (1992, 2) point out the prominence of alcohol in Southern African urban life and its complex relationship with the emergence of a modern urban-industrial system in the region. This history dates back to colonial encounters in the seventeenth century, followed by the establishment of alcoholic commerce in Cape Colony and cheap wine being provided to slaves and labourers. The racialised depiction of African drinking as a social disorder was constructed in this process, which took root in the development of chemical knowledge on alcohol in the nineteenth century and the response to temperance campaigns in colonies (Ambler and Crush 1992, 4-5). Such notion of alcohol abuse as a racial character dominated European observers' writings and then scholarly and official representations of Africans. With the need to control black labourers and maintain white space, alcohol regulation in both production and consumption was gradually established in the nineteenth century (Ambler and Crush 1992, 4-15). During the early colonial period in Salisbury, there was a notable increase in the penalty for the sale of European liquor to Africans, which was raised to 300 pounds in the year 1898 (Parry 1992, 119).



Fig 5.8 Aerial view of MAS

Photo courtesy of MAS

Entering the twentieth century, the number of African labourers dwelling in urban spaces increased rapidly in the process of industrialisation and urbanisation in Southern Africa.

Under such circumstances, it became imperative for the colonial municipalities to exert control over the urban black population and, as a result, secure administrative funding. The issue of alcohol had a prominent role in urban governance, being closely intertwined with other matters such as black housing. For example, it was employed by Salisbury's municipality as a means to target African settlements beyond the colonial-designated locations (Parry 1992, 121). The prevailing liquor among the migrated labourers in the urban spaces was "African beer"¹⁰¹, a traditional sorghum beer brewed for centuries in Southern Africa and had different names in different languages and regions, such as *utshwala* in Zulu, *umqombothi* in Xhosa and *doro* in Shona. Its production in the city was initiated by African women who relocated to urban areas with the aim of generating income to support themselves and their families. The colonial state not only perceived the brewing of beer as a social problem but also recognised its market potential in light of the growing African population within the city.

The widely-adopted Durban System was born in this context. It was passed in 1908 by the Natal Legislative Assembly in South Africa with the Durban Town Council as the prime driver (Hausse 1992, 78). In conjunction with labour and location regulations, the Durban System served as a legislative framework for the establishment of a municipal monopoly on the production and consumption of African beer. Initially, in order to reinforce the racial dichotomy, African beer was the only legitimate alcoholic beverage for black labour to consume. The state assumed control over the manufacturing and commerce of beer while implementing a prohibition against Africans in breweries and trade. In addition, the government exercised authority over the physical space of alcohol consumption, restricting Africans to partake in alcoholic beverages exclusively within established municipal beer halls. Through such measures, the colonial states not only exerted extreme control over the use of alcohol by the black population but also produced financial resources for the administration of urban labourers (Rosenberg 2020; Ambler and Crush 1992).

In 1911, Southern Rhodesia passed the Kaffir¹⁰² Beer Ordinance to introduce the Durban System in Salisbury¹⁰³ and the municipal monopolistic power was made more explicit with the passing of Kaffir Beer Act of 1912 (Parry 1992, 124; Chimhete 2018, 817). Beer

101 There are different types of beer depending on the process. In general, they are home-brewed from different grains and are thicker than clear beer.

102 In South Africa and many countries in Southern Africa including Zimbabwe, "Kaffir" was used as a derogatory and demeaning term to refer to black people under apartheid and colonial rule. This thesis only uses it when it is in a title of an ordinance.

103 It was also implemented in Bulawayo.

breweries and sales by Africans were banned in the location. The Kaffir Beer Act of 1920 resulted in an increased scope of restriction on beer breweries to areas around the locations and the commonage boundaries of the racial separation in the city. The complete implementation of the Durban System in Salisbury was in force until 1937, at which point the city council assumed control of its beer brewery, Rufaro Brewery, discontinuing the previous practice of importing beer from South Africa (Parry 1992, 130). The enactment of legislative measures was accompanied by the establishment of municipal beer outlets. The first canteen was opened in Harari Township (now Mbare) in 1913. In 1977, Harari Township had a total of 13 municipal outlets, while Salisbury had a total of 63 premises with varying scales for the sale and consumption of beer (Rufaro Archives 1977).

This system, a confluence of legislation, physical infrastructure, law enforcement, and other administrative tactics, constituted a comprehensive complex that served as the economic engine for exerting control over the labour force and African populations in the city. In 1922, Salisbury City Council made a handy profit of £2,400 from the beer monopoly (Parry 1992, 129), while the sales of its facilitated Rufaro Brewery reached \$7,725,903 in 1974 within the municipal outlets (Rufaro Archives 1974). The African Administration Department of Salisbury City Council, which was responsible for managing the affairs of the African population in the city, depended heavily on beer as its main source of income (Chimhete and Makombe 2020, 2). The revenue generated by the beer industry not only provided funding for the daily operation of the Department but also financed the police force in the locations, facilitated the development of other suburbs, and, importantly, contributed to the implementation of the Native Social Welfare policy and its facilities, among many other amenities. This system further reduced urban Africans' economic independence and also imposed upon them the cost of colonial administration and the limited public infrastructure in the locations. As Zimbabwe writer Chenjerai Hove (1994, 92–95) in his essay *Marengenywa: Topsy, Dead Drunk, or Having a Head* mentions this very beerhall of now MAS:

In a country whose major housing areas were built mainly for migrant labourers, most Harareans have no other way of 'killing time' except the beerhall, the bar. There is hardly any space in the housing estates or townships for anything creative or relaxing. The houses are crowded like magnified matchboxes dumped without any imagination onto a football pitch ... Before even a school is built in any new residential area, the bar is already there, visibly. Schools and clinics might come

later ... This type of leisure: ‘May it not finish us all until we are, in the name of a bar, marenganya (worn out with alcohol)’.

The municipal beer monopolistic system also contributed to controlling public life and political activities of urban Africans by restricting their activities and space of leisure time. Attacks on home-brewery and shebeens took place frequently. Ideologically, the City Council associated Africans with African beer and outlawed Africans from drinking wine, spirits and clear beer, which were “European alcohol”. Any trade of beer between individual whites and blacks was prohibited. In this sense, alcohol became a venue for further consolidating racial separation both in terms of ideology and tangible outcomes. This system also engendered social tension among different classes residing in the locations. The inclusion of alcohol consumption became intertwined with the pursuit of equal rights among the emerging African elites. From 1923 to 1961, the African elites in Salisbury waged several appeals to drink “European” liquor, “refusing to be lumped with the black masses and basing their claim on the notion that there should be ‘equal rights for all civilized men’” (West 1992, 376). In 1957 the state amended the legislation to allow Africans who had university degrees to consume ‘European Beer’, and in 1961 all racial restrictions in purchasing and consumption of European liquor were finally eliminated (West 1992). From the perspective of gender, African women were immediately and substantially affected, leading to financial disadvantages and the enforcement of social stigmatisation, notably on the perceived immorality linked to the drinking of alcoholic drinks (Parry 1992, 133).

Nevertheless, the execution of this monopolistic system encountered persistent challenges. Since its inception in Salisbury, urban Africans have made efforts to protest against, navigate in and negotiate with the system. Many brewers moved to nearby areas outside the locations or bordering the commonage areas to escape from police. They also developed different types of drinks, navigating the definition of alcohol by the state (Parry 1992, 129). Besides the request for equal consumption of all drinks, African elites, nationalists, shebeen owners and other activists also initiated boycott campaigns against municipal beer. According to Yoshikuni (1991, 141), the earliest sign of the collectivisation of African protests in the location occurred in 1914, when the tenants united under the location headman to express their discontent with the modifications made to the beer regulations. Women played a significant role in these activities, as the first ones to resist municipal monopoly while empowering themselves with underground breweries and shebeens. These

movements, the shift of drinking venues towards shebeens and other factors such as the quality of beer, led to the decline of municipal breweries.

On the eve of Zimbabwe's independence in 1979, the colonial state sold Salisbury City Council's Rufaro Brewery to Heinrich's Chibuku Breweries Limited (HCBL), a private company established by a South African and based in Zambia.¹⁰⁴ The municipal beer outlets since then have been operated by Rufaro Marketing under the City Council of Harare. In the 1980s, the recently established Zimbabwean state made efforts to curtail shebeen operations, driven in part by economic considerations. One such factor was the declining client base of Rufaro Marketing, prompting the government to revive the beerhall monopoly as a means to generate revenue for the financially strained city council (Chimete 2023, 186, 189). While such attempts failed, the municipal beer outlets, which did not have their products and lacked competitiveness in local markets, continued to face significant decreases throughout the 1990s to this current century. Gradually, Rufaro Marketing saw the end of beerhall entertainment and decided to open its outlets to other functions in the past decade (Mudiwadirwa 2021).¹⁰⁵



Fig 5.9 Images of Chiweshe bar under construction and outdoor scene

A scanned copy of the original photo, courtesy of Mrs Meike Smith

104 While many people asserted that the transfer of Rufaro Brewery to HCBL was an action to sabotage the economy of independent Zimbabwe, some argued that the market was the main reason. For more discussion, see Chimhete and Makombe (2020).

105 Daniel Mudiwadirwa was the CEO of Rufaro Marketing when I interviewed him in 2021.

It was in this context that MAS intervened in the transformation of colonial architecture. As part of the beer monopoly system of colonial Salisbury, this architectural complex still holds the vestiges of the historical vicissitude. This “architecture of control” was enclosed with tall walls constructed from red bricks, with a main gate for cars bringing beer and a very narrow entrance for its clients from Mbare. The inside bar counters were fenced with metal barriers. The precise date of Chiweshe’s establishment is unknown, however the central bar, which takes the form of an octagram, was designed and built around the early 1960s. This architectural feature was the work of Darrell Bertrand Smith, a notable South African architect who served as Salisbury’s Chief Architect until his retirement in 1981, after which he relocated to South Africa. According to Mrs. Meike Smith, Mr. Smith, the architect responsible for the construction of several beerhalls in Salisbury, was inclined to enhance the illumination within these establishments. This was achieved by incorporating a series of windows positioned directly underneath the ceiling, encircling the entirety of the octagram-shaped Chiweshe bar. Nevertheless, despite its dimension, the bar only had a single tiny entrance for its clients. A few images of vibrant scenes of people drinking could be found in Rufaro Brewery’s annual reports, propagandising beer in relation to happiness. These reports feature several vivid depictions of individuals engaging in the act of consuming beverages, thus promoting the association between beer consumption and the experience of joy.

In November 2018 when I first visited Mbare, artist Moffat Takadiwa had recently obtained permission from Harare’s City Council to utilise part of Chiweshe which was half-defunct (Fig. 5.10). Although the two bars continued to draw a dwindling crowd of patrons, the vast beer garden was in a state of decay. We entered the premises through a compact, robust metal gate that emitted a distinct, piercing sound upon its opening and subsequent closure. “There was no light”. Takadiwa immediately acquainted me with the newly installed illumination positioned above a tree, an endeavour involving a few weeks. Lacking any prior historical context, my focus was captivated by the architectural characteristics and dilapidated condition of the structure. Upon observation, I was interested in the presence of red bricks, which I afterwards learned to be the customary building material employed in the construction of beer outlets in Southern Africa. As the trees were felled, wild grasses arose in the corners. The concrete had widespread fractures and displayed signs of degradation. The chairs in the aged semi-open pavilions were covered in a layer of accumulated dust. Under the dim light, Takadiwa guided me across the space, imparting his visionary perspective on its future.



Fig 5.10 Beer garden in decay, former Chiweshe bar, 2018

Photo by Lifang Zhang

In April 2021, after enduring a rigorous one-year lockdown in South Africa, I commenced my fieldwork in Harare. I visited MAS on the second day after my arrival (Fig. 5.11). The space had transformed. Despite facing numerous challenges due to the global pandemic, a group of artists, including Moffat Takadiwa, Juril Rizhi, and Takunda Billiat, have managed to manifest their imaginations into tangible forms. In the latter part of 2019, efforts were initiated to undertake cleaning and implement minor refurbishments within the premises. During the period of lockdown, most public venues were closed, resulting in a decline in art activities. Consequently, these artists dedicated a significant portion of their time to their practices at MAS. They would arrive at MAS early in the morning and depart late in the evening, ensuring compliance with the curfew regulations. The pavilions had turned into studio spaces, wherein each pavilion was allocated to a leading artist and two or three emerging artists or art students. Takadiwa employed polypropylene cloth as a covering for his partially open studio, while Billiat adorned his studio with found materials that he repurposed for artistic creation. In addition to art materials and artworks in various stages of completion, it was common to find utensils such as pots, small gas stoves and plates within the studios. Apart from the conversion of the former storage building into an art lab equipped with internet access, efforts are currently underway to renovate the octagram-shaped bar into a multifunctional space for exhibitions, workshops and community programmes.



Fig 5.11 Mbare Arts Space, 2021, Harare

Photo by Lifang Zhang

From a pertinent perspective, architecture can also be regarded as a form of found materials, undergoing a process of reincarnation through artists' practices. The municipal beer hall has gone through profound changes, not only in terms of its functional shift but also in its overall metamorphosis, significantly, from an architecture of monopoly and control to a collective, autonomous and inclusive space. On a surface level, the major access point for the entire outlet has shifted from the previous confined and narrow entrance to the expansive gateway. An enlarged gate for the exhibition space has also been installed. Similar to other collective spaces, MAS is also a democratic artistic hub fostering an environment conducive to art creation, collaboration, conversation, educational activities, networking opportunities, and the sharing of knowledge and resources. Moreover, the scope of its openness extends beyond the confines of the architectural complex, encompassing the surrounding neighbourhood and community in Mbare. One such instance that exhibits symbolic meaning is the positioning of a borehole water tank in close proximity to the exterior wall of MAS. The establishment and implementation of the tank were launched by MAS's initiative, serving as a communal water source for both MAS and the surrounding residences since its installation.

The founding members of MAS also emphasise the establishment of collaborative relationships with neighbouring communities in order to collectively shape the future of the

art institution. MAS has implemented several community-engaged programmes, including art workshops with students from the primary school located in Mbare. A few individuals residing in the neighbourhood have integrated themselves into the MAS community. Uncle Bravo, a respected individual who possesses expertise in music and education, has been actively engaged with MAS since its inception. Indigenous plants have been cultivated along the inside walls of MAS, which forms a component of his ecological project spanning the Mbare neighbourhood. The majority of containers used for these plants were repurposed from found used items, such as fuel tankers and tyres. As previously mentioned, a number of artists affiliated with MAS are actively engaged in utilising found materials in their work. The labour involved in their creative process, as elaborated upon in Chapter 2, is evident in the auditory and olfactory elements that permeate the space. Through their practices, the artists have effectively transformed the space of consumption into a space of creation. Intervening in the urban transition, they have asserted their agency within the social life of this history-loaded architecture and demonstrated art as a part of a broader social process.

Conclusion

Shifting away from state-affiliated institutions and commercial galleries, the collective spaces in Harare are all founded and operated by artists and are mostly self-funded for non-profit purposes. They have been redefining the art landscape in Harare by creating space for art producing, exhibiting, conversing, workshopping, networking and experimenting. Notable growth of such spaces could be observed in Harare since the late 2000s, coinciding with the evolution of the found materials movement. This chapter explored these initiatives and their relationships with the urban spaces in transforming.

Contextualised in a broader discussion on artists' initiatives and the related field of knowledge production, this chapter highlights the significance of the independent art spaces in Harare. These spaces contribute not only to the production of art and the reproduction of imagination but also to the shifting of power dynamics and opening up new possibilities of artistic ecology. From the perspective of artistic engagements with the city, these spaces form part of the urban landscape and infrastructure, intervening in the transformation of the urban built environment in postcolonial Harare physically, symbolically and historically.

Chapter 6 Writing Alongside Restless Imagination

With a focus on artistic practices in Harare, this thesis investigates the phenomenal use of found materials in art and examines its historiography, mechanism, impact, and visual achievements. This thesis approaches found materials as the materiality of both art and the city, revealing a convergence of various interrelated artistic practices in Harare. It highlights artists who consistently engage with found materials in their practices and delves into their interactions with urban spaces in multiple dimensions. This undertaking, therefore, locates the study in postcolonial Harare, the city that profoundly shaped the evolution of the phenomenon of using found materials.

Drawing on debates centring on contemporary African art and theories about materiality and urban studies, this thesis contextualises and conceptualises the notion of *restlessness* as a metaphor to articulate the conditions and strategies of artistic practices with found materials in Harare. It argues the potential framing and comprehension of Harare city as the site of restless imagination pursued, embodied and materialised by artists through their artwork and engagement with urban spaces. By doing so, they open up space for possibilities to refashion the restless city, negotiate urban citizenship, and recreate themselves as agentive subjects in postcolonial Harare. Serving as a conclusion to the thesis, this chapter reviews and reflects on the contributions and constraints inherent in this research across the following dimensions and outlines avenues for future scholarly inquiry.

6.1 The found past, the found future

So basically, like for modern Africa, contemporary African psychology is in a mode of rebelling continually ... This idea of using found material. It's not a new idea. It's an idea that's born out of resistance and necessity ... The idea of reusing objects has continued even before Duchamp. It has been there. Now, if you're born in that space, that community where things are just reused, recycled, reshaped to suit other functions, and then for some reason, you become an artist, that whole psychology is inside you. It's embedded inside you.

—Chikonzero Chazunguza (2021)

I believe it's the continuation between us and our forefathers. It is the continuation of doing art. If you check out when they were creating those artworks, there are

resemblances. They were using found objects of their time, wood, bone, hides, and shields, and putting them together. So, I believe it's just a continuation of the way they lived. Now, we are using the materials we have around here ... that interest or that feel of doing or putting information on something still links us.

— Clive Mukucha (2021)

As briefly outlined in Chapter 1, the use of found materials has arisen as an indispensable aspect of contemporary African art, characterised by Akpang (2013, 41) as a “new continental creative identity.” Focusing on the case of Zimbabwe, this thesis situates itself within the knowledge production of contemporary African art, embarking upon an in-depth exploration of the emergence and evolution of this phenomenon in a specific context. Specifically, it delves into the social and urban conditions that fostered its inception in the early 21st century in Zimbabwe while contextualising its evolution in local art history by tracing the earlier pioneering practices and innovations of Tapfuma Gutsa and Keston Beaton. In doing so, it underscores the continuum of artistic innovation that precipitated the emergence of the movements of redefining art materials. This contextualisation is pivotal for comprehending this phenomenon within the specific milieu of Harare, particularly its intricate interplay with urban landscapes. In retracing this historical trajectory, this thesis also highlights artists’ dialogues with and participation in the broader art community, consciously positioning themselves within a larger framework of artistic exchange and discourse. It emphasises the agency of Zimbabwean artists in exploring artistic materials and languages throughout the evolution of this phenomenon.

This localised reading transcends the simplistic perspective of attributing this phenomenon solely to material scarcity and challenges the notion of viewing this African artistic phenomenon merely as an extension or footnote of Western avant-garde art. It is important to note that this contextual exploration is grounded within the realm of contemporary Zimbabwean art. Given the thesis’s primary focus on artists based in Harare, there is a need for further investigation into other individuals within and beyond this city who have significantly contributed to the innovation and evolution of using found materials. Furthermore, the thesis concentrates on artists who have extensively utilised found materials as their primary medium, necessitating further analysis of the interactions between the visual language and other conventional art genres. The lack of discussions on broader historical contexts beyond the post-independent era underscores the thesis’s limitation of scope and thus points to further exploration in tracing the deeper history of local trajectories.

Pertinently, Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009, 12) highlight that debates on the art of Africa have unfolded within two primary arenas: the ethnographic museum and the art museum, each representing distinct discursive systems and cultural economies. Early discussions in the field were heavily influenced by ethnographic studies of material culture across various traditions on the continent. In studies of material culture, numerous scholars have engaged in discussions concerning materiality and the incorporation of mundane objects. For instance, Suzanne Seriff (1996) has explored the use of recycled materials in cultural objects originating from Africa. The relationship between material culture and the materiality of contemporary art, regarding both artistic practices and knowledge production, awaits further exploration. Akpang (2016, 293) has drawn attention to this dimension in his study on found object art in Nigeria and argues that its emergence predates European Modernism, thus challenging its dismissal as a belated manifestation of avant-garde art. By examining pre-modern Nigerian societies' shrines as exemplified installations comprising various materials, including found objects, ancestral figures, and masks, Akpang (2016, 84) argues for the influence of traditional philosophies, cosmology, and religion on the usage of found objects in contemporary Nigerian art. Similarly, some Zimbabwean artists have proposed connections between the contemporary use of found materials and earlier artistic traditions in Zimbabwe, as shown in the above quotation from Chazunguza (2021) and Mukucha (2021). Further research on the deep-seated trajectories necessitates a profound comprehension of cultural history in specific contexts.

In the broader conversations on art, this phenomenon of using found materials is deeply embedded in Zimbabwe's artistic and social conditions while also interacting with the wider context of the regional and global art scene. This thesis does not extensively engage in dialogue or comparison between this phenomenon in Zimbabwe and other conventions, thereby marking a potential avenue for future scholarly inquiry. As mentioned in Chapter 1, both Akpang (2016) and Kearney (2016), in their respective discussions on contemporary practices involving found materials in Nigeria and South Africa, engage in dialogues with the European convention of avant-garde art. While their study provides broader conversations, it is also important to push the frameworks of reference beyond the West, including a broader range of artistic conventions for future dialogues. For instance, Art historian Saloni Mathur (2019) discusses the use of found materials in contemporary Indian art, Wu Hung (2019) explores material art in contemporary China and its connection to traditional Chinese art, while Grabski (2017) examines the history of the *récupération* movement in Senegal. In the context of contemporary Africa, since the 1980s, Zimbabwean art shares many

commonalities and connections with the art of other African countries. For example, many artists from various African countries have participated in the Triangle Workshop, which Okeke-Agulu (2021, 14) considers to be one of the drivers of contemporary African art. These examples point towards future cross-cultural analyses of materials and objects and dialogues regarding related artistic phenomena across different contexts. Materials not only conceal social relations in proximate spaces and flows of objects in broader contexts but also carry different meanings in diverse cultures. There is significant potential and space for future discussions and dialogues regarding the materiality of art within a broader context.

6.2 The arts of citizenship in postcolonial Harare

This thesis proposes the city as the analytical framework and emphasises artistic processes and labour engaging with the urban spaces. Specifically, the thesis highlights the *Redefinitions* movement, which was initiated by Gareth Nyandoro, Masimba Hwati, and the late Munyanradzi Mazarire and took place in Harare at the beginning of this century. Rooted in the urban transformations of Harare, this movement of redefining art materials laid the foundation for a close intertwining of artistic practices with urban spaces. Numerous artists such as Moffat Takadiwa, Johnson Zuze and Jurio Rizhi have not only elevated the refinement of this visual language but also solidified its connection with the city. The multidimensional relationships are manifested in the artistic processes, where the collection of materials, the creation of artworks, and collaboration with diverse urban groups, are intricately linked to urban spaces in Harare. By unfolding this process and emphasising the labour of artists, this thesis transcends conventional perceptions of artworks as mere visual objects, revealing the societal and spatial interactions inherent in artistic practices involving found materials.

This thesis also explores the visual and semantical interactions between art and the city, centring on a curated array of artworks by Wallen Mapondera, Anthony Bumhira, Wilfred Timire, Kresiah Mukwazhi and Admire Kumudzengerere. It analyses the re-presentations of people's lived experiences in the restless city as home, a site of struggle and a politicised and gendered space. The artwork is not merely a visual representation or reflection of the city but also provides critical thoughts on and dialogues with the city, as well as (re)imaginings and aspirations of the urban landscape. The relationship between art and the city is further deepened through artistic practices, extending beyond the creation of artworks and involving art infrastructure building in Harare. It explores the independent art spaces initiated by artists,

such as Mbare Art Space, Chitungwiza Artists Collective, Tarisa Art Studio and the early Utonga Studios. By reclaiming urban spaces, artists not only intervene in the city's built environment but also alter the conditions for artistic production and reproduction in postcolonial Harare.

Contemporary Zimbabwe artists have redefined their artistic practices, interacting with the materiality of everyday urban life, urban matters, urban spaces, and urban communities, and, concurrently, the relationship between art and city, art and society. The movement of working with found materials in Harare involved mobilising resources and ideas from art history, everyday practices, and the new urban reality under crisis. These were then re-integrated to envision and create a new understanding of art materials. To a certain extent, found material does not solely refer to the tangible substance of art but also denotes a way of thinking. The word "found" refers to the unveiling and reaching of the tangible or intangible existence by chance or through searching, studying, thinking, experiencing, and testing. It also encompasses meanings such as to see, to have, to discover, to perceive, or to regain. Found materials, therefore, constitute an adventure in exploring and cognising the existing to make or do things, an act of *rediscovery of the ordinary*. It resonates with what Kim Gurney (2022, 163) refers to as "artistic thinking", which is "partly an approach, a way of seeing the world, or a visual knowledge that the artworks made evident through their thematics and materiality. It is also about the strategies that artists came up with to transfigure the prevailing condition of uncertainty they were confronted with." Artists extend their artistic thinking to urban built environments and architecture, especially in densely populated areas not designed to foster artistic purposes. Leveraging the resources and the scarcity of resources, artists reimagine and create novel artistic infrastructure in the city of Harare, transforming urban spaces from non-artistic to artistic realms.

With the city as the framework, this thesis not only delves into the contextualisation of artistic practices in Harare but also contributes to broader discussions on everyday practices in African cities through the lens of art. It could be argued that the artistic practices of Harare-based artists are also *arts of citizenship*, a term conceptualised by Mamadou Diouf and Rosalind Fredericks (2014, 5) to describe the "forms of experimentation, adaptation, and negotiation surrounding claims to the rights and rewards of the city. The *arts* are meant to capture creative innovations that may be out of the range of the familiar and to conjure the artifice that may be entailed in innovative forms of governing." Artists, as urban citizens, akin to other residents grappling with everyday life in the city, exercise their *arts of citizenship* through their creative innovations in artistic expression and practices. The redefinition of art

materials stems from their daily negotiations and innovations in the constantly crisis-ridden postcolonial city. Establishing artistic infrastructures in marginalised areas not only reconfigures spaces of exclusion and inclusion but also reshapes the “aesthetic order in the city that keeps people in their proper place” (Diouf and Fredericks, 2014, 7). Furthermore, working with communities and things beyond the realm of art, they also establish new locus and networks of mobility within the city. Taking the urban spaces as “sites of experimentation”, artists create novel spaces for imagination, production, and collaboration, contributing to the re-making of the city and the “emergent reconfigurations of citizenship.” (Diouf and Fredericks, 2014, 4)

In these processes, labour emerges as a consistent key factor, whether it involves the collection and processing of materials, the individual efforts of artists and collaborative endeavours, or manual and conceptual labour. In many artists’ practices, labour is commonly characterised by repetitiveness and intensity, or, succinctly put, restlessness. This echoes the definitions and rhythms of Harare, the city where no one sleeps. Interestingly, in my interviews with numerous artists, they have mentioned that they feel a sense of calm during this laborious process. It appears that labour serves not only as the driving force of the process of materialisation but also as a dynamic element in the artist’s existence within and resistance against the postcolonial city. Labour creates a momentary escape from the restlessness inherent in this postcolonial city and its conditions. To borrow the title of Bob Marley’s last song sung on Zimbabwe’s Independence Day, it is an Exodus, “So we gonna walk, alright, through the roads of creation”. Labour, akin to imagination, becomes practices of freedom. Through imagination and labour, artists continually reposition themselves in urban spaces, constantly reclaiming their subjectivity and negotiating their citizenship within the urban landscape of Harare. Thus, labour is not merely a pursuit of artistic liberation but also a practice in which they, as postcolonial beings or “born frees”, seek their own freedom, desires, and aspirations.

6.3 Writing alongside the restless imagination

This thesis conceptualises artists’ practices of working with found material as restless imagination. The productive imagination is multidimensional, characterised by continual self-innovation and self-transcendence, rendering it restless. It constitutes an incessant movement and adventure embodied in the artists’ practices. Some artists gravitate towards specific materials, necessitating a committed exploration and imaginative probing into new expressive

potentials inherent in these materials. Artists also persistently envision novel modes of working, ranging from their searches for materials to collaborating with urban communities in various ways, and from deconstructing in alternative manners to reconstructing through diverse processes. They also engage in reimagining the very essence of artistic practice, extending from the creation of artworks and art exhibitions to the establishment of artistic institutions and the realm of art education. Through ongoing involvement in various practices, they continuously redefine themselves as artists. These practices are inseparable from the urban contexts, and consequently, artists also situate themselves in the ongoing process of re-imagining the relationship between art and the city, as well as their positions in the city. The diverse dimensions of restless imagination reproduce new possibilities in and of artistic practices.

Art historian Saloni Mathur (2019, x), drawing from critic Craig Owens, asserts that engaging with contemporary art practices is an act of “writing alongside” rather than “writing about”. Mathur (2019, 160) contends that the challenge of this moving target of writing alongside the practices is that “Its dynamic, shape-shifting, and unpredictable activities refuse to stand still for the observer for very long. As an active and inventive practice, it tends not to adhere complacently to the contours of a scholarly paradigm or to be pinned to a particular intellectual schema”. Moreover, she continues, “It is difficult to discern the shape and parameter of a thing from inside its dynamic unfolding.” The duration of writing alongside the practices of artists in Harare has witnessed the continuing adventure of exploring and innovating. As mentioned in the first chapter, my various field trips witnessed artists transitioning either from one theme to another, from one type of material to another, or from one way of working to another.

A notable evolution and expansion pertain to the artists’ initiatives in the city. For instance, as unpacked in Chapter 5, collective spaces such as the Chitungwiza Artists Collective arose as a direct response to the COVID-19 crisis, while the Mbare Art Space experienced expansion during the pandemic era. These independent art spaces play a role in cultivating institutional dynamics and facilitating the emergence of a novel art ecosystem within the urban landscape. In June 2023, the National Gallery of Zimbabwe (NGZ) hosted an exhibition titled *A Gathering*. Curated by Fadzai Muchemwa, this exhibition invited four independent art spaces to participate and exhibit, namely Animal Farm Artists Residency, Tarisa Art Studio, Village Unhu, and Post Studio Arts Collective. Each of these collectives curated its own sections within the gallery, responding to the overarching themes of collectivity, labour, and connectivity. This exhibition manifested and further heightened the

increasing visibility and significance of these independent art spaces within the city's art scene. The approach of each collective independently curating their exhibitions represents a more equitable dialogue between these art spaces and the state-driven art institution. In line with the acentric map of the artistic landscape discussed in Chapter 5, this exhibition also signifies a novel cartography of artistic networks illustrating a centripetal flow under new power dynamics and a reconfigured artistic landscape in Harare. Its occurrence is founded on transformative changes spurred by previous productive imaginations, embodying the ongoing adventure of discovery and innovation towards future possibilities.

Writing alongside the evolving contemporary artistic practice exemplifies a collaborative process of knowledge production, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Given my continuous engagement with MAS since its establishment, artists at MAS have been actively involved in sharing their projects and updating me on the progress of space construction throughout the research process. In return, I reciprocate by providing them with my research materials, including investigations into the beerhall system and explorations of other independent art spaces. Through these dialogues, we initiated a collaborative project titled *If These Walls Could Talk*, which was launched in November 2023. The project centred around the history of the Mbare neighbourhood, a colonial township, and the architecture of this art space, embodying the materiality of the history of the colonial beer monopoly system, as previously mentioned in Chapter 5.

This research-based collaboration places significant emphasis on engagement with the immediate communities and neighbourhood, reflecting a concerted effort to establish a space of and through art that is relevant to the proximate environment. The ongoing project comprises two interconnected parts. The first part, as depicted in the poster (Fig. 6.1), aims to relearn urban histories through objects and sounds of and with Mbare residents. Through an open call, the project invited dozens of Mbare residents spanning different generations to recount the community's history from individual perspectives, including narratives related to the first black Rhodesian police, the first black school, the first black theatre group, women's involvement in the beer industry, figures involved in printing, sign-writing, or crocheting businesses in the township, and so on. Their treasured objects, vintage photos, and personal archives associated with these stories will also be displayed during the event. The workshop will be followed by a pair of artists in residency tasked with creating a body of artwork and an exhibition that responds to the themes, highlighting the history of liquor and labour in Harare, as well as other cities in Southern Africa.



Fig 6.1 Poster of *If These Walls Could Talk* workshop

Image courtesy of Mbare Art Space

This ongoing project hints at an implicit yet crucial clue in this thesis, namely the notion of time in Harare as a postcolonial city. Colonial history and legacy underpin every dimension of the thesis. This is reflected, for example, in the location and the architecture of MAS, as well as the dynamics of artistic infrastructure from the colonial era to the present. It can be asserted that the urban space itself, the emergence of found material, the emergence of artists' initiatives, and the narratives within many artists' works are all linked to colonial history in one way or another. In other words, the imagination within this postcolonial city inherently encompasses the grappling with colonial history. However, this is far from a simplistic progression through different phases or ages; rather, it aligns with what Achille Mbembe (2001, 16) in the book *On the Postcolony*, conceptualises as the time of entanglement, which is not linear but could be reversible, as it is “an interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones” and “made up of disturbances, of a bundle of unforeseen events, of more or less regular fluctuations and oscillations”.

The restlessness of postcolonial beings and the entanglement of time are embodied in the urban context of Harare and in the practices of artists, where different times and spaces coexist. It resonates with the notion of contemporaneity regarding the field of art, or the

bricolage of African contemporary art, and even Tapfuma Gutsa's *Odd Coupling*. If artists' practices involving found material are a form of bricolage from both physical and conceptual perspectives, then isn't the postcolonial city itself also a form of bricolage? Artists intervene and continually transform the city through a process of bricolage, building upon the already existing structures and scenarios, fuelled by their alchemy with restless imaginations. In this sense, Harare is also, as Fadzai Muchema (2021) puts it, "a restless city in a constant state of flux, defying categorisation." In this sense, *If These Walls Could Talk* project exemplifies the transient interconnection of the past, present, and future. Its objectives extend beyond the mere reclamation of historical significance within the urban space as perceived by its inhabitants; rather, it aspires to collectively envision the future trajectory of what was once colonial architecture, now transformed into an emerging art space. Consequently, this project serves as a discourse spanning temporal boundaries and embodies a communal journey towards the establishment of a collective art space. Thus, it aligns with the methodological exploration undertaken in this thesis. With art as a way of seeing and a way of doing, this initiative delves into the potential avenues for fostering collaborative knowledge production and creating novel spaces for re-imagination and co-imagination.

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