

■ OPINION

Zimbabwe meltdown from street to gallery

Gareth Nyandori has been rewarded for large-scale paintings that use his technique of kuchekacheka

18 OCTOBER 2016 - 06:26 AM by EDWARD TSUMELE



Social Identity: Gareth Nyandori combines two-dimensional collages with three-dimensional objects. Picture: SUPPLIED

Zimbabwean-born multimedia artist Gareth Nyandori is making waves in the art world and this has been recognised in the awarding of the 2016's Financial Times-Oppenheimer Fund Emerging Voices award to him.

He has a solo exhibition on at Smac Gallery In Cape Town. It is informed by his observation of commercial activities in Zimbabwe, where unemployment is at 90% and the informal sector provides an income for the majority of people.

Every day, thousands of people sell all kinds of goods on the streets of Harare and other urban spaces, from second-hand clothing to medicines. This seemingly ordinary activity has not escaped the keen eye and sharp mind of Nyandori, who has captured their commercial activities on canvas.

Entitled *Ipapo-Ipapop*, this is his first solo exhibition in SA and his first with Smac Gallery.

His new body of work comprises large-scale paintings and installations, both performative and static, that use his unique technique of kuchekacheka.

This method involves inking, tearing, and peeling layers of paper to form an impression of his observations of daily African urban life.

The Shona term *Ipapo Ipapo* (there and then) is used colloquially in the same way that English speakers use the acronym *asap* (as soon as possible) to indicate a sense of urgency.

In *Ipapo-Ipapo*, Nyandoro evokes an atmosphere of brisk business and production.

This exhibition comes at a time when Nyandoro's practice has reached a point of conceptual resolve, simultaneously displaying his complex visual exploration.

His initial themes have become tangled with the evolution of urban environments in Zimbabwe as well as elsewhere on the continent.

With these city-style spaces going through a metamorphosis, things appear static, yet they are impermanent. Often appropriated elements appear like mirages in uncanny spaces and Nyandoro reinterprets these juxtapositions and commonplaces of urban societies, challenging audiences to review and re-envision the things that frequent everyday street life through his own relationship to them. This is a clever representation of commercial activities by desperate people in an economy that for all intents and purposes, long ceased the pretence of being formal. It is a battered economy, and Nyandoro's art works do not just aesthetically represent how the hawkers elaborately display their goods, but also reflect the story of a country in the grip of economic meltdown.

Nyandoro is one of the important visual art voices in Zimbabwe, and is now spreading his message in SA.

In recent years, he has moved from creating a two-dimensional body of work to the more complex three-dimensional approach. And the art market is noticing as he steadily matures and evolves.

During 2005, while enrolled at Chinhoyi University of Technology, where he completed his studies in creative art and design in 2008, Nyandoro attended the Batapata International Artists Workshop outside Harare.

This was where he was introduced to the global art world and where his experimentation with unorthodox or informal media – such as torn or damaged paper and found objects – became pivotal to his practice.

As his climb into the high echelons of the art world began, he was offered a residency at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam.

He had a sold-out solo show at Tiwani Contemporary Art Gallery in London, and recently represented Zimbabwe at the 56th Venice Biennale.

As a frequent artist in residence at Dzimbanhete Arts Interactions in Harare in 2006-10 – progressing from intern to project co-ordinator for printmaking exhibitions and workshops – he became involved in the Zimbabwe-based collective Village Unhu.

Nyandoro has always had a keen sense of community and interest in common societal practices.

He was awarded for his work entitled *Recyclazation* (2010) at The National Gallery of Zimbabwe. The piece, which highlighted environmental awareness, exploited reclaimed domestic debris as medium.

Nyandoro has also dabbled in performance, such as his piece entitled *Musika wemaloli pop neeyatime* (2011). The title means a market for lollipop calling cards. This work was performed at The National Gallery of Zimbabwe, and marked a turning point in his thematic approach by bringing common street vending into the more austere gallery environment.

Ipapo-Ipapo is at Smac Gallery, 145 Sir Lowry Road, Woodstock until October 22.