

MARCH 13, 2018

ARTISTS WE LOVE: WALLEN MAPONDERA



INTERVIEWED BY Cheri Morris **IMAGES** courtesy of [SMAC Gallery](https://smacgallery.com/gallery/)(<https://smacgallery.com/gallery/>).

Zimbabwean conceptual expressionist Wallen Mapondera is an award-winning creative renowned for works that incorporate animal symbolism, explore ideas of socio-politics, the struggle for power, and more.

Many of Wallen's works make use of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms to explore inequality and power struggles. He was the recipient of Zimbabwe's prestigious National Arts Merit Award in 2015 for his outstanding achievements in arts and culture and has exhibited across the globe, including Germany, England and Switzerland, to name a few.

We caught up with him to find out what inspires him, how he creates his arresting multimedia installations and what he hopes to achieve in the future.

From paint to mixed-media installations, you work with a range of different mediums. Do you have a preference?

I work with a range of mediums and I am constantly exploring my choices in a deeper way. I do not favour one medium over the other because I see all mediums as equally strong; as long as they work in harmony with the idea. Some ideas are best expressed in paintings and others in mixed-media – one just has to discover which medium works best.

Your harmonious and arresting combination of both matter and art express narratives of protest and socio-politics. Do you have any specific opinions you want viewers to take from your works?

Artworks have several interpretations, depending on the viewer. Two people might connect with one of my pieces but they might both have a different understanding of the piece – and I respect that.

Take us through your artistic process in terms of multimedia creation.

I am interested in giving lasting life to decaying things and those that are seen as temporary. In my case, I mostly use cardboard, which is very fragile and does not have a long lifespan. I tear, twist, glue, remove or add layers and laminate to create a unique outcome, which obviously increases its lifespan. Sometimes I envision an idea and then I gather material that will effectively convey a message.

Sometimes I find interesting material, pick it up, and research it: what was its previous use and how did it get to be where it is? Then I build the narrative from there. Before I start a piece, I have an idea and a vision of the end product, although most often the piece takes another direction as it evolves. At this juncture, I communicate with the work and all I need to do is to begin working for it to take shape. Some ideas grow slowly and some appear vividly and clearly.

What or who inspires you?

I am inspired by nature, the tonal variations of our skin, how the grass and trees grow, how termites build their shelters. All these processes and shapes – the amount of time it takes for things to mature, how they mature and how they die/ decay – fascinate me.

What would you most like to achieve in the future?

I wish to establish and run an academy/institution for residency programmes, mentorship and arts education in Zimbabwe. Currently, I am one of the co-founders of Post Studio Art Collective(<http://www.poststudioart.net/>), an organisation that runs projects in informal spaces, connecting and bridging the gap between the general public, artists, collectors and all other players in art circles. We believe that art should be accessible, but in Zimbabwe, there is a gap between the local public and the artists, resulting in a lack of appreciation from our own people. This is my point of departure and I would love to see the organisation grow into a physical institution rather than a pop-up one.

What's next for Wallen Mapondera?

I have an upcoming exhibition in May at Tyburn Gallery(<http://www.tyburngallery.com/>) in London. I am currently completing my Masters in Fine Arts at Rhodes University in Grahamstown and will be joining the other students there soon.

Love Wallen's work as much as we do? See more of his pieces [here](https://smacgallery.com/artist/wallen-mapondera/).