

ARMORY

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Booth 104 | Pier 92

GARETH NYANDORO

ZIMBABWE



Gareth Nyandoro | *Stylish Mielie Seller* | 2017 | Ink on Paper, Mounted on Canvas | 211 cm x 257cm

smac

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Artist Profile & Biography

Gareth Nyandoro was born in Bikita, Zimbabwe in 1982. He obtained a National Diploma in Fine Art from Harare Polytechnic in 2003 before going on to further his studies in Creative Arts and Design at the Chinhoyi University of Technology in Zimbabwe, qualifying in 2008. In 2014 and 2015, Nyandoro was a resident artist at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Since his debut solo exhibition, titled *Mutariri*, at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in 2012, Nyandoro has exhibited widely in Africa and internationally. His most recent solo exhibitions include *IPAPO-IPAPO* at SMAC Gallery in Cape Town, South Africa; *Gareth Nyandoro* at Art Brussels in Belgium and *Paper Cut* in London, UK, all in 2016; *Presentatie Gareth Nyandoro* in Amsterdam, Netherlands in 2015 and *Weaving Life* in Harare, Zimbabwe in 2013.

In 2015, Nyandoro was one of three artists selected to represent the Zimbabwean Pavilion in an exhibition titled *Pixels of Ubuntu/Unhu*, curated by Raphael Chikukwa, for the 56th Venice Biennale in Italy. That same year, Nyandoro took part in *Round – Tripping: Gareth Nyandoro and Richard Parry* at Narrative Projects in London, UK; *TREK: Following Journeys* at SMAC Gallery in Cape Town and *Group Exhibition* in Cologne, Germany. Earlier group exhibitions include; *Zamboni for the Moose* at Galerie Juliëtte Jongma in Amsterdam, Netherlands in 2014 and *Live & Direct* at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Harare in 2010. Nyandoro also featured in *Colour Africa* in Munich, Germany in 2011 and *Expressions of Zimbabwe* at the Université d'Aignon, France in 2008.

Gareth Nyandoro has been selected as the recipient of the FT/OppenheimerFunds Emerging Voices 2016 Art Award. Nyandoro has also been awarded a residency with SAM Art Projects in Paris, France, which will conclude with a solo exhibition in Spring 2017.

Street Slang and Visual Improv: Gareth Nyandoro's Kuchekacheka

Nyandoro's large paper-based works hang on the pristine walls of white cube galleries. Sometimes the bustle of the street scenes or marketplaces that he portrays are contained by frames, but other times the works are deliberately frayed at the edges, or appear to slide down the wall and spill onto the floor. This encroachment of his paper-based works into the three-dimensional space of viewers—particularly the space in which viewers usually stand to scrutinize two-dimensional artworks—reflects the ways in which informal business in Zimbabwe spills onto the street, as a fragile economy demands entrepreneurial agility. Nyandoro's use of materials and his hanging technique that allows works to slip off the wall, converge with his portrayals of everyday street life in the context of economic slide.

ZIMBABWE'S 'KUKIYA-KIYA ECONOMY'

Due to hyperinflation and recession, previous ways of making ends meet are suspended, and Zimbabweans are forced to wander down new paths in a “zigzag” search for opportunity in the hardened face of reality.¹ Referred to by some as *kukiya-kiya*—that is, to resort to “strenuous or difficult activity with an eye to fulfilling basic needs”—this agile economic logic can range from the buying and selling of legal or contraband goods, to the act of ordering/hording goods (*kuhodha*) or engagement in fraudulent deals.² The Minister of Finance who served from 2009 to 2013, was nicknamed Tendai 'kiya-kiya' Biti by some and Mr Kiya Kiya by others, revealing both negative and positive translations of *kiya-kiya*—that is, a crooked dealer or a resourceful Mr. Fix It.

Importantly, moralistic notions of 'good' or 'bad' associated with hierarchical divisions between 'rich' and 'poor' are turned topsy-turvy in a 'kukiya-kiya economy'. In Nyandoro's representations of the spilling of various occupations onto the street, he draws from stories of university graduates who become street vendors; touts (*mahwindi*) who sometimes earn more than teachers, and stylish sellers of mealies (corn) who resist stereotypes of poverty, revealing the ways in which the values usually associated with particular professions are in certain situations rendered obsolete.

SHIFTING LINGO AND REDUPLICATION

On the streets of many African cities—Harare, Johannesburg, Maputo, Lusaka, Gaborone or Luanda—the flexibility and ingenuity of the informal economy is manifested in the suppleness of ever-changing lingo on the street. New forms of slang involving code switching, code mixing and patterns of redoubling have developed alongside Zimbabwe's shifting economy. Shona and English words are expressively mixed together to both reveal and confront oppressive circumstances and ongoing struggles to survive. For example, the slang word *zvakaressa* alludes to the pressing down action of a difficult situation, and the phrase *ndiri patight* suggests that 'I am in a tight spot'³. When people say they have hitched a ride in a *Mitsubhutsu*, they play on the words Mitsubishi and *bhutsu* (the Shonalized word for boots or shoes) to convey the reality that many people walk to work because they cannot afford public transport.⁴

An increase in reduplication—the morphological device that expresses frequency, continuation or a heightened sense of intensity by repeating parts of a word such as *kiya-kiya*—articulates an increase in improvisation, which refers both to the sense of managing ('making do' in a tight spot) and

to the sense of being creative and inventive. This increase of reduplication in street slang suggests a manifestation of urgency in a context of precariousness. Economic hardship has forced many Zimbabweans into diaspora, and those who remain sometimes speak disparagingly of diasporans who end up doing *rese-rese*, that is, any job available no matter how degrading it might be.⁵

A number of the titles of Nyandoro's works draw from street slang, at times including patterns of redoubling, such as the work he exhibited at the 2015 Venice Biennale titled *Mushika-shika Wavanhu* (2014). Importantly, redoubling registers a shift in meaning: *kiya-kiya*, for example, is far more evocative and open to poetic interpretation than the word *kiya* (slang for key) from which it is derived. Significantly revealing the impetus behind these shifts in language, Nyandoro has deployed redoubling in his own way in order to develop a new word—*kuchekacheka*—that describes his unique artistic technique.

NYANDORO'S KUCHEKACHEKA

Kuchekacheka alludes to Nyandoro's training as a printmaker in Zimbabwe. While the word *kucheka* means 'to cut' (an action associated with many forms of printmaking), *kuchekacheka* employs the reduplication process in a way that expands this word beyond the simple act of cutting. Inventively, this word alludes to the lingo of the Harare streets as well as the logic of recycling that feeds into ways of making a living (often in the street) in a 'kukiya-kiya economy'. More than just reflecting the action of cutting into paper, Nyandoro's *kuchekacheka* is about reusing materials, and in doing so it is about redefining meaning; reinventing what it means to be, to survive and to thrive.

In the *kuchekacheka* process, paper is treated as a piece of lino, a plate or a woodblock and is sliced with a blade. However, instead of producing a printed impression from the remaining image and discarding the fragments that have been cut out, the pieces of paper 'waste' are returned to the artwork as part of a process of gluing, staining and layering. The very act of naming this technique becomes part of the improvisational process, as naming and making—renaming and remaking—are fundamentally entangled in the shifts of street slang, the slide of the economy, and the inventive logic of 'making do'.

By Ruth Simbao and Masimba Hwati

Ruth Simbao runs the *Arts of Africa and the Global South* research programme at Rhodes University in South Africa and Masimba Hwati is an artist based in Harare, Zimbabwe.