

basket case

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delaine le bas
alexandra bircken
matali crasset
tapfuma gutsa
sebastian herkner
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curated by raphael chikukwa & christine eyene

basket case

contributors: raphael chikukwa, christine eyene & doreen sibanda
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Printed

Zimbabwe

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acknowledgements

The EUNIC Zimbabwe Cluster (British Council, Alliance Française and the Zimbabwe German Society) would like to thank the Ministry of Sport, Arts and Culture and the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe for all the support that these organizations have given towards the Basket Case II exhibition, which is part of EUNIC Creative Zimbabwe project. A big thank you must go to the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, without whom this project would not have been possible. We would also like to thank Binga Craft Centre, Bulawayo Home Industries, Lupane Women's Centre, Sustainable Tourism Enterprise Promotion (STEP) and Zienzele Foundation for their hard work and dedication to this project. Last, but not least, we would like to thank the European Union, who provided the funds for the EUNIC Creative Zimbabwe programme.

Sam Harvey

Director, British Council, Zimbabwe



contents

- 2** Acknowledgements
- 4** Minister's Statement
- 5** Foreword by EUNIC Zimbabwe Cluster
- 6** Basketware in Zimbabwe
By Doreen Sibanda
- 10** Weaving communities
- 18** *Kuluka*: Contemporary meets tradition
By Raphael Chikukwa
- 20** Weaving a common visual language
By Christine Eyene
- 22** Exhibition of Basket Case II
- 60** Artists / Designers Biographies

ministers statement

On Behalf of the Government and people of Zimbabwe, we are delighted to be celebrating the traditional, cultural and timeless basketry of Zimbabwe, during the Basket Case II exhibition. We hold this opportunity close to our hearts and cherish it because it provides a unique platform to demonstrate the breadth and depth of Zimbabwe's outstanding artistic talent, design and cultural diversity. The Basket Case II exhibition will increase exposure of rural weaving communities in Binga, Bulawayo, Honde Valley, Lupane and Masvingo to local, regional and international markets, with the aim of realising improved livelihoods within these participating rural communities. Also, more broadly, this will contribute towards the sustainable development of the creative industry in Zimbabwe by creating links to European and regional markets. The Basket Case II exhibition gives us yet another amazing opportunity to celebrate Zimbabwean culture and tradition, and focus on both economic development and women empowerment. The global image of Zimbabwe is effectively portrayed through our excellent works in basketry, art and design.

Hon. Deputy Minister Tabetha Kanengoni

Ministry of Sport, Arts and Culture



foreword – european union national institutes of culture, zimbabwe cluster (EUNIC)

British Council, Alliance Française and Zimbabwe German Society as the EUNIC Zimbabwe cluster, are proud to be part of this amazing opportunity that celebrates cultural exchange between European and African traditions. Through basket weaving, we are proud to present the Basket Case II exhibition, as part of the Creative Industries programme. Basket Case II is about traditional weaving meeting contemporary ideas and gives life to a basket full of culture, value and art.

The journey towards putting on this exhibition has been a collective experience, as people from different parts of Europe and Africa have come together to work, and create outstanding new art and design pieces. In addition to cultural exchange, were born dimensions of friendship, respect, laughter and sharing of skills among the crafters.

Basket Case II is part of the EUNIC Creative Zimbabwe programme. This programme seeks to contribute towards sustainable development of the creative industry in Zimbabwe by creating links to European and regional markets. As EUNIC we seek to facilitate cultural cooperation, to create lasting partnerships between professionals and to encourage greater understanding and awareness between diverse cultures.

We would like to thank the European Union Delegation to Zimbabwe for their support with the catalogue and project.

EUNIC Zimbabwe Directors

Sam Harvey	<i>British Council</i>
Roberta Wagner	<i>Zimbabwe German Society</i>
Franck Chabasseur	<i>Alliance Française</i>

basketware in zimbabwe

doreen sibanda

executive director, national gallery of zimbabwe

The onset of basket making in Zimbabwe is associated with the era of the Iron Age when the population moved towards a more sedentary way of life. The development of rudimentary technology led to the transformation of life towards a more sedentary life. The division of labour became more adjusted and the role of agriculture took a more centre stage. Whereas men incorporated basket weaving in their early tasks such as managing the livestock and making the required tools and implements, women gradually took on the role of basket makers in addition to the lighter tasks of food preparation and cooking. The inhabitants sought to make use of the basket making materials available to them in their local vicinity and took to fashioning items that they needed to harness the environment while employing greater levels of creativity, innovation and aesthetics.

The colonial period – from 1887 to 1980 – saw improved basket making in all regions of the country, as baskets played an essential role in the agricultural cycle and were a part of all cultural aspects of life. The pursuit of agriculture resulted in improved life styles with a better diet through the introduction of proteins in the form of milk and other dairy products. This period was linked to increased organisation of society through the domestication of grain and livestock.

type and function of traditional basketware

Early baskets were developed using available natural raw materials in the form of reeds, grasses, sisal, bamboo as well as banana and palm fibres. The shapes, styles and functions of the baskets were determined by the established lifestyles of communities.

Basket making techniques were either created from the coiling or weaving methods. Sizes and shapes were determined by local traditions and functions, some with wide or narrow openings, depending on their function. Traditional baskets displayed intricate patterns imbedded into the building technique. They represented symbolic patterns depicting movement of familiar animals and birds such as zebra stripes, spider webs, butterfly wings, lizard

paths, animal hooves or snake patterns. Other motifs represented natural phenomena such as rainbows, lightning, clouds and hills, even modern objects such as bicycles. One also found an appropriation of designs from familiar cultural objects such as clothing items, tools, architectural elements, as well as references to weapons, boats, windows and huts. There are numerous basket forms available, each with its particular function in the traditional household and community.

These baskets included the *tswanda*, a deep wide-mouthed woven wicker basket with a hollow base which enabled it to fit neatly on the head and were used to carry food. It often had horizontal bands of colours obtained from the dye of grasses, roots and leaves. The baskets were made from the young shoots of the *mutondo* tree. A variation of *tswanda*, known as *sangwa* and characterised by its square base and round rim, was found amongst the *Nanzwa* people of Hwange area. This basket had a finely woven quality and intricate designs; the contrasting light and dark colours were produced by boiling some *ilala* fibres to whiten them and then dyeing others with *munyii* roots.

A courser but similar square-based basket, *cusuwo*, is found among the Tonga. Used for carrying dry commodities, the base was woven from *matete* reeds to form a check pattern. The reed strips were continued to the circular rim as the warps; the wefts, made from *ilala* palm leaves, were woven in an anti-clockwise direction.

The large bowl-shaped continuous coil basket, made by the Ndebele and sometimes over one meter in diameter, was known as *isitcha*. Patterns of varying complexity often appeared on these baskets; the *ilala* fibres from which it was made were boiled and the dyes from powdered roots of the *munyii* tree applied to the fibres.

The Shangaan people, found in South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, also employed a continuous coil form in their baskets using long and short stitches to hold the coil together. Their basketry is distinctive for the use of dramatic geometric designs.

The saucer-shaped baskets known as *rusero* (Shona) or *hlungwana* (Ndebele) are used throughout the country as winnowing trays. The decoration and materials used vary and for the Shona-speaking Ndaus, usually only the edges were decorated. Among the Shangaan there was usually decoration



Name of basket | size | who made it | where it was made

inside the basket, resembling the patterns on the stone walls of Great Zimbabwe.

The *Chitundu* basket made by the Ndau people was a deep circular vessel often used to store personal or medical items. Woven from palm fronds, it was sometimes smeared with a bark gum or red mahogany which served as a preservative. The *mutundu* basket, similar to *chitundu* but with a cover, was used mainly by *n'angas* (traditional healers) and occasionally for food storage.

Prior to Independence, in the 1960s, several locally run women's clubs and projects strengthened women's skills in crafts including basket making. The Bulawayo Home Industries and the Harare Weaving Centre are cases in point. Set up by the City Councils, these centres provided training and sales outlets for the community skills. After Independence additional organisations sprung up all over the country to retain and improve basket making skills while improving livelihoods. Several projects have been successful, providing much needed employment and empowerment while introducing the rural weavers to a variety of markets and platforms for the sale of their products. The National Gallery of Zimbabwe staged significant exhibitions of local crafts and basket ware in the early eighties, thus giving recognition to the basket traditions throughout the country. Several hundred items were accessioned into the Permanent National Collection at this point. Agritex (a government agricultural extension service provider) also played a significant role in promoting the creation and support for rural craft production and was led in this exercise by the late Joram Mariga who worked as a rural extension officer for several decades encouraging the development of arts and crafts.

modern day baskets

"Modern" baskets, such as laundry, shopping and storage baskets, continue to be produced mainly in rural Zimbabwe, through women's clubs and groups to meet the demands of modern life but few employ the intricacy of traditional techniques. Many traditional techniques have been adapted for new purposes, some having been incorporated into non-basket products, such as haute-couture attire and accessories.

This has been a most welcome move as to inject new life and purpose into the basket making communities and improve livelihoods, especially when local markets had run dry during the economically challenging period of the last 10 to 15 years.

Many old basket making communities have been revitalised and old skills have been rehoned to enter the international



marketplace as new basket and weaving demand remains high and is ever changing in specifications. Zimbabwean baskets have had to compete with other strong basket making traditions from other African countries including the neighbouring South Africa and Botswana basket industries. While local cultural industries have yet failed to garner Government support for the systematic production and marketing of these items, some of the projects and resultant social engagements have witnessed tremendous growth and innovation in local communities, as well as the development of innovative and highly creative products.

basket case I exhibition

The first Basket Case was an extremely successful initiative offering new design capacity to existing basket weaving projects in Binga and Lupane and organised by The New Basket Workshop project. The introduction of outside designers and the development of new designs provided stimuli to the producers to try new styles, designs and dyes. Under these auspices designers from South Africa, England and India conducted extensive workshops in selected rural basket making communities. These projects led to the debut of Zimbabwean basket designs at the London Design Show during 2010. In 2011 several of the basket makers travelled to India to take part in a new skills training workshop organised at the National Institute of Design. They worked together with Indian craftspeople exchanging skills, designs and creating new objects under the guidance of Indian designers and design students. The group was introduced to new techniques and templates as well as rudimentary tools and machinery that quicken the production process while ensuring greater accuracy and efficiency. Several basket makers were later invited to attend a Bamboo workshop in China as a further opportunity to exchange ideas and techniques with other renowned bamboo artisans.

basket case II exhibition

The current project has taken the Zimbabwean basket making skills to new heights through the twinning of local basket making rural groups with local and international creative artists. This has opened the sector to even more innovation, social engagement and opportunities for the artists and designers to explore and embrace contemporary art and design possibilities. This largely experimental project has unlocked great potential amid all the players and the resultant show reveals a new impetus for art discourse and art making in Zimbabwe.

background information about binga craft centre

Binga Craft Centre (BCC) is a community based organisation which was established in 1989 at the growth point of Binga District in Matabeleland North province of Zimbabwe. The center was set up to help empower the socio-economic status of Binga's crafts makers, mainly basket weavers, by increasing their income through the sales of baskets and other crafts produced using natural resources sustainably.

The centre is situated in the community that is well known for having been disadvantaged and marginalized since the early 19th centuries. Binga is generally regarded as poor although the district is rich in natural resources. Crafts people are encouraged to sustainably tap into those resources for improvement of living standards. The main activities of the centre are Product design and quality control, marketing and natural resources management. The centre and weavers come together regularly, identify the weak points of the products and work together on improving them. Quality is a must at BCC; products go through a thorough quality control before being sold. Workshops are held to train weavers on this respect.

BCC is also involved in a natural resources program consisting in replanting the *ilala* (*Hyphaene petersiana*) the palm tree whose leaves are used to make baskets. The centre established ten *ilala* palm plantations with over 30 000 tree *ilala* palms growing successfully. Weavers are harvesting from them for their basket making.

Despite many challenges, Binga craft centre has engaged with various organizations and taken part in craft fairs both locally and internationally. In July 2014 Binga craft centre exhibited at the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market. The centre has also been involved with The New Basket Workshop (TNBW) a South African organization that assisted BCC to design and develop new products using locally available raw materials and skills.



artist residency: delaine le bas

Binga craft centre was host to one art residency and one design workshop, British artist Delaine Le Bas conceived an art piece modeled on one of Queen Victoria's famous gowns. Five master weavers worked for forty days to accomplish this sculptural ensemble consisting on the gown and twenty additional elements. The concept was to include the Tonga traditional designs on the artwork. This piece will be on display in the Basket Case II. The whole group is very proud of what they created during the residency and claim to collectively own the art piece on behalf of Binga women.

Some of the designs reproduced on the gown represent waves of the mighty Zambezi River, which was the main source of livelihood for Tonga people before they were displaced to make a way for a hydro electric power plant and construction of the Kariba dam that gave the existence of Lake Kariba. The motifs are a reminder of once freely accessible waters that are now commercialized. Tonga women can still recall stories from the time they lived along the Kasambabezi the correct Tonga name for Zambezi River.

design workshop: sebastian herkner

Sebastian Herkner used locally available raw materials to design new baskets. His approach was different from previous workshops in that he added flour bags strands interwoven with *ilala* leaves. He also mixed pottery and weaving on one product. This added a new range of Binga baskets.

Matabbeki Mudenda

Manager

bulawayo home industries

Bulawayo Home Industries were sponsored by the City Council to assist families by providing full or part-time work opportunities. Priority is given to the unemployed, the needy, and the young people who are unable to continue with their education.

The adaptation of traditional skills to make products which are of use in the modern world and the use of indigenous materials is encouraged, including working with colour and design. Ideas and techniques are shared amongst women and given a truly African flavour.

What Is Being Produced?

- Weaving: this is done on hand looms with wool and cotton yarns. Sisal, *ilala*, imizi and other indigenous fibres are also used for table cloths, table mats, lamp shades, bags and wall hangings. Other woven goods include shawls, tops, sling bags and other fashionable accessories, as well as runners, cushions and floor mats.

- Boutique and Décor: a variety of articles are produced using different materials and methods. Bread baskets of different designs, waste-paper baskets and decorative animals are made from banana fibre. Hardanger embroidery is used for table cloths, table mats, napkins, cushions and chair backs. Florentine embroidery in fine wool yarns decorates cushions, oven gloves and tea cosies.

- *Ilala* Palm: the leaves of the palm are particularly light and strong and provide the raw material for making hard weaving and decorative baskets, trays, hats and bags.

In addition some women are producing a wide range of products, and baskets with different kinds of designs. There is now an exciting style of basketry which the women benefited from the residency and workshop facilitated by the British Council.

The artist and designer who came from Germany and France, Alexandra Bircken and Matali Crasset, made a difference in the way the women usually work. This time the women created items collectively, notably on Alexandra Bircken's art pieces. The designs developed in collaboration with Matali Crasset were keenly adopted by the weavers. These include, for example, mirror baskets, perfume baskets, trays, fruit baskets, and many more.

Bulawayo Home Industries operates under the auspices of Bulawayo Municipality. The centre can accommodate up to sixty skilled weavers and spinners at a given time.

Judith Mkwanda,
Chief Projects Officer, Bulawayo Home Industries



Lupane women's centre (LWC)

Lupane Women's Centre (LWC), an organization run by women for women, based in Matabeleland North in the rural district of Lupane, was started by 14 women in 1997. Current membership is at 3,460 comprising women from Lupane's 28 wards. The Centre serves as a focal point for these women seeking to empower themselves socially and economically. It provides training, information and marketing services to all its members, four hundred of which are weavers who have developed their traditional skills to the level of making contemporary basketry.

Since 2004, the Centre's main funding partner has been Liechtenstein Development Service (LED). Whilst LED funding has been the fuel running the Centre engine, other partners have come in to booster the Centre activities, especially crafts development.

Amongst the partners that the Centre has worked with is The New Basket Workshop (TNBW). TNBW laid the foundation for the partnership with EUNIC through Basket Case I. This was the forerunner of Basket Case II and raised the level of basketry through design interventions. Basket Case II is based on the success of Basket Case I that saw the Centre's products make a remarkable entry on the international market.

EUNIC creative zimbabwe project

In its strategic development plans, the Centre has sought other funding partners. The EUNIC Zimbabwe Cluster has provided the weavers in Lupane with an opportunity to work with Ifeoma Anyaeji, an artist from Nigeria. The weavers were able to use existing techniques to create new objects. They also experimented with joining different items to come up with a new piece. This has enabled the weavers to think out of the box. Ifeoma has been a teacher and facilitator in the field of art for many years. This was obvious in the way she was able to get the weavers' attention.

The Centre was able to create an art piece that combined wood, palm (*ijala*) and plastic. The use of plastic is very common in Ifeoma's work. Eye.on.art online resource says that: Ifeoma's work is about upcycling as opposed to recycling. Recycling consists in processing material to reuse it, in principle, as same material or close to similar. Upcycling is repurposing the material, in other words, reusing the material for something of a better quality without chemically processing it.'

Using plastics and *ilala* the artist and the women braided plastics with twine and then joined the resultant ropes to create pieces that were later combined with wood. The art piece created with lfeoma is a part of Lupane weavers' tradition. It was created in an ambiance of music and dance to which lfeoma warmed up. The artist also had an opportunity to attend the LWC annual centre show where the women compete on quality and innovation. This was a lively fair with songs and dance as the winners celebrated their success. As she was introduced, lfeoma sang one of the songs learnt at the show, 'asiwafuni amavila la', a Ndebele expression which means "we do not entertain laziness at the Centre".

Hildegard Mufukare,
Programme Manager, Lupane Women Centre

zienzele foundation

Zienzele Foundation and the community found the EUNIC Creative Zimbabwe Programme beneficial particularly to women because it exposed them to new techniques, applications and perspectives on weaving. They gained a deeper understanding of international standards and requirements on craft products; the most important of these was measuring. Prior to this collaboration, artisans basically measured with their eyes. Often when baskets were sold, comments from buyers were that diameter measurements were off, that the colours were uneven in some patterns, and the lines not straight.

The designs introduced by visiting artist Michel Paysant, clearly required precise measurements, evenness in colour, and working in a clean environment in order to produce clean objects. No one had ever seriously made them abide by this or enforce it. This was a very good and worthwhile opportunity to learn and adhere to new standards. It is something that the Foundation had addressed but the artisans had not really accepted it until then.



Basket Case I led to the recognition of sisal basketry in this country. Prior to this event, no value was placed on such crafts. One of the reasons for that was because these were made by people who lived in rural areas. Thanks to Basket Case I, nine women were selected to go to India and participate in a two-week workshop at the National Institute of Design. We hope that Basket Case II will further expose these crafts to the international community.

I was pleasantly surprised by how Michel Paysant interacted with the artisans. At first, I was not sure whether he would manage to engage with the rural women on an equal footing. I wondered if he would be patient enough and consultative with the women, some of whom had never interacted with an artist before, let alone worked with one. The interaction was amazing. Michel was very sensitive to their wishes and he welcomed their feedback. He gave them leeway to change things here and there but was always consistent about correct measurements, even colour, straight lines and cleanliness of the white fibres being used. By the time the workshop ended, these methods were embedded in the artisans' psyche.

Michel exposed the artisans to the importance of completing products in the stipulated time frame. However, as the workshop progressed, he also learned that the conceived designs took a long time to execute. The preliminary process includes scrapping the fibres from sisal leaves, washing the fibres, drying them, making the strings, dying and drying them. This takes place before one can even begin to make a basket.

This wonderful learning experience has resulted in the artisans having the courage to make new creations and move away from old patterns, designs, and the old way of doing things. They have gained confidence and changed their perception of basket making.

The EUNIC Creative Zimbabwe Programme has the potential of changing the livelihoods of these rural women.

Dr Prisca Nemapare,
Chief Projects Officer, Zienzele Foundation

STEP zimbabwe

The Bamboo weaving sector in Honde Valley has travelled a long but exciting journey in the last four years. Beginning with a handful of enterprising weavers, mostly men, who were weaving three types of traditional crafts, namely *Rusero*, *Tswana*, and *Saingwa*. Today the weavers boast of unique bamboo pieces with amazing designs. This is a radical shift in perception and skill, which one could not have imagined four years ago. Ideas from India and China, the veteran bamboo weaving countries, and South Africa's contact with contemporary markets cross-fertilised with Zimbabwe's own Honde traditional weavers, provided a launch pad for innovation.

The entrance of Tapfuma Gutsa on the bamboo weavers' scene transformed a "craft" practice into an "art" practice. As confirmed by Aaroni Sabondo who spent weeks working with Tapfuma on unique art pieces for Basket Case, "The time that I spent with Gutsa is the most precious time in my life as a weaver. We think craft not art, he thinks art. And if we are to grow as weavers, this is the thinking we should adopt – art". What a successful mentorship! The artist explored the metaphorical images out of bamboo combined with traditionally sourced natural materials. The man-size art pieces symbolising a number of traditional icons of the Manyika homesteads and forests – bird's nest, traditional hut, granary and insect cocoon— are both attractive and enigmatic to the eye and mind. Tapfuma also shared basic skills for weaving, joinery using natural materials and developing moulds for regular pieces that are produced en mass. The conclusion of the artist's residency marked the beginning of a career for 35 weavers from Honde. Close to 150 households from four wards are set to benefit from this experience.

STEP Zimbabwe, a local NGO, presided over this unique transformation. Acting as the community leader in the partnership, STEP equally enjoyed the association with the resident artist. It has been a fulfilling experience to see Manyika women, who were never at the forefront of weaving, create unique pieces in the same space as men. "Manyika crafts are low-tone, and could easily be passed without being noticed. Now these are imposing to the eye and mind," says Tsitsi Nyabando one of the ladies who spent four weeks with Tapfuma. Seeing these hands and brains works at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe will be a great achievement.



Basket Case II presents Honde weavers with an opportunity to showcase the diverse possibilities of bamboo art. We wish to attract and excite a wide audience, enough to sustain demand of bamboo products and continued investment into innovation. We also hope the exhibition will benefit the weavers' lives and stimulate their commitment towards sustainable management of the natural resource base.

STEP Zimbabwe is a tourism, environment and development NGO operating in Zimbabwe. Our calling is to transform the lives of local disadvantaged communities through facilitating their involvement in tourism and related value chains (such as crafts enterprises), as well as preserving landscapes through wide scale catchment management whilst supporting livelihoods and food security initiatives. STEP facilitates (1) the establishment of viable community-managed ecotourism enterprises through business skills development, partnerships and market linkages; (2) the management of catchments that support community-based ecotourism services, products and activities including conservation, rehabilitation, and preservation of cultural and heritage assets and skills (such as weaving); (3) the creation of a conducive an supportive operational environment through capacity building, awareness raising, lobbying and advocacy.

Anne Madzara,
Director, STEP

kuluka: contemporary meets tradition

raphael chikukwa (chief curator) national gallery of zimbabwe

This text is informed and inspired by the Basket Case II project and exhibition that has taken us two years to realize. Basket Case II comes after the success of the first Basket Case workshop that started in Bulawayo. Conceived by Francis Potter and curated by Heath Nash the first Basket Case exhibition opened at the National Gallery, Bulawayo in 2009, and 2010 saw the arrival of the same exhibition at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Harare. Basket Case I saw an improvement in quality and design in basket making; contemporary products designed to add style to home décor. Communities began weaving again.

The arrival of the first Basket Case exhibition coincided with my arrival at the National Gallery and I had an opportunity to work with the curator of the exhibition Heath Nash. This gave me an opportunity to meet some of the makers and the idea of having another exhibition was discussed. Conversations continued and in 2013 the idea started taking shape.

The particularity of Basket Case II was to invite international artists to work with basket weaving communities. The title of this piece is “Kuluka”, a Tonga word for weaving. Basketry is a long tradition for any community and Zimbabwe has a long tradition of basket weaving. This brings us to Basket Case II, a meeting point between two traditions, contemporary art and basket weaving, and out of the fusion of these two traditions is the creation of opportunities for contemporary artists to exchange new skills with women basket makers from Binga, Lupane, Masvingo, Honde valley, and Bulawayo.

Why is this encounter an important innovation? It created a knowledge transfer between the basket makers and all the artists that worked with above-mentioned basket communities. The exciting part of Basket Case II is the local element represented by our own Zimbabwean veteran artist Tapfuma Gutsa. As the Chief Curator of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe I had an opportunity to work with Tapfuma before and after I joined the gallery. When we started working for the Basket Case II project, armed with an awareness of the life that has sustained Gutsa’s development and experimentation for many years, I had no doubt that he was the right artist to represent Zimbabwe in this project. After his first appearance at the 53rd Venice Biennale’s Zimbabwe Pavilion in 2011, he embarked on a journey to Binga to work with Binga Craft Centre.

It was on this journey that he discovered basketry, a tradition that dates back thousands of years and has been passed from generation to generation. This was an eye opener for the artist and it started with Basket Case I in 2010. When the National Gallery of Zimbabwe was approached by the EUNIC Zimbabwe cluster to co-curate Basket Case II funded by the European Union, the artist who immediately came to mind was none other than Tapfuma Gutsa because of his ability to diversify and I knew very well that he would surprise not just me but the audience as well. He has always wanted to work with natural materials and used his home ground advantage to create major pieces for this exhibition.

Through his work, the artist also offers illuminating perceptions of the basket makers in Honde Valley (Hauna) whose work has profoundly influenced the way he sees art and the world around him. The artist’s experiments in basketry to give a new status to his work. The results of Gutsa’s experiments in basketry materials and forms are significant and can be seen through his symbols, designs and meaning in this exhibition. His basketry mission is simply to create another life out of Zimbabwe’s old basketry tradition that has always been looked down upon for many years and yet is a tradition that shaped our lives and links us with our ancestors.

For the visiting artists: Ifeoma Anyaeji (Nigeria), Alexandra Bircken (Germany), Delaine Le Bas (United Kingdom) and Michel Paysant (France), and two designers Matali Crasset (France) and Sebastian Herkner (Germany) basketry was a new culture, new terrain and their work gave us another perspective. Our guest curator Christine Eyene brought a strong curatorial element to this project, and she selected the above-mentioned international artists. They had something to give and got something in return. The fusion of their contemporary art with an age-old tradition gives this project a strong element that we see in this exhibition.

Basket Case II has seen artists working with basketry as a new medium to create artworks of beauty and celebration inspired by the old ladies in rural Zimbabwe. It is my hope that Basket Case II has seen the resurgence of this unique Zimbabwean craft through various artists and designers will take basketry into a new era. It is clear that with the innovative designs, communities’ range of objects have been redefined and enhanced. Furthermore I have always wished these



mapatya | Tapfuma Gutsa | 1650 x 1250 x 400 mm

basket communities to see beyond basketry and start thinking outside the box as echoed by the Honde Valley (Hauna Community). The meeting point between artists and basket makers' added value to a strong tradition. When I visited the basket makers' communities, it was clear that the exchange had inspired them. They intimated that they would want to exhibit alongside artists of renown in future.

Lastly I would like to thank everyone who made this endeavour

possible: our partners and sponsors, the basketry communities and their leaders for allowing us to work with them in the spirit of oneness, the visiting artists and the art students they worked with. It remains my hope that this is not a one-off event. What you have started is what the Zimbabwean art scene needs and the National Gallery of Zimbabwe will remain committed in the social engagement initiatives. I have always said: "When Words Fail Art Speaks".

weaving a common visual language

christine eyene

curator guild research fellow, university of central lancashire

Consider an object examined from every possible angle. Chances are its shape will lend itself to shifting perceptions. Basket Case II is one such object. It embodies multiple forms and meanings depending on one's position. It is a project which narrative is multilayered, a story told in languages specific to each of those who took part in its making.

When I was first invited to contribute to the development phase of the second edition of Basket Case, two years ago, two elements were crucial to the project. The first one was the preservation and dissemination of a cultural heritage: basket weaving; the second one was the sustainability, and possibly profitability of a practice that could contribute to the livelihood of predominantly women weavers often located in remote rural environment.

Before embarking on this project a process of translation had to be activated in order to figure out how a development project would translate into artistic terms. This led to more questions. Notably how does one bring good practice and ethics in management, together with artistic integrity and freedom? How does one reconcile institutional framework and structural grid with the unfathomable yielded by the grey matter, this unpredictable creative output that some still seek to format and tame?

The project had to make sense within the scope of a curatorial practice. As it happened, three points echoed with my own approach. The first one was the collaboration with women weavers and the emphasis on their empowerment. Indeed, since 2007 female representation in arts and culture has been a key focus of a number of editorial and curatorial projects I have developed. This has been the result of my interrogation of margins and more precisely what it is that one finds within the artistic mainstream and, who and what remains excluded from these platforms. In this respect, showcasing work produced in rural environment was a way to challenge the predominance of the urban/contemporary paradigm, often perceived as antagonistic to the rural/traditional tandem; an aspect also reflected in my curatorial vision. Finally, the cross-cultural and multidisciplinary setting required by the project allowed to break down a number of boundaries and

hierarchies both applied to North/South relationships and to mediums such as craft, design and visual arts, that are usually separated and loaded with their own sets of values.

Once all these elements fell into place, within a curatorial narrative, came the moment to select artists and designers whose practice showed signs that it could engage in such creative dialogue and embrace the project's philosophy. Years in the field have facilitated the identification of a number of possible participants, at which point Basket Case II became a concept articulated in the relevant vernacular.

The curatorial concept developed during the selection phase consisted in apprehending the basket as an object encapsulating both the notions of container and content. This dialectical approach extended to looking at weaving as both a technical and conceptual process. These two sets of understanding also extended to metaphorical interpretations such as weaving as a form of writing, the "thread" as a narrative and intertwinement as a physical, emotional or cultural entanglement. Other aspects informing the project involved playing around notions of solid and empty surfaces, as well as the surface as form and medium.

The artists and designers brought together in this project are all conversant in these forms of conceptual language. Each of them was selected for their innovative and original creative practice. Additionally, every single one of them gave their own distinctive touch to the project. Although commissioning new pieces always entail an element of uncertainty, the artists and designers' existing body of work pointed towards exciting features bound to be present in the new work. These include Ifeoma Anyaeji's upcycling of material, notably plastic bags, and the repurposing of hair threading, a traditional hairstyling that is part of most African women's experience. With Alexandra Bircken, one could expect the combination of her semi-abstract, organic pieces with her experiments with fibre and fabric. In the words of Raphael Chikukwa, Chief Curator of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Tapfuma Gutsa has expressed an interest in basket weaving since the first edition of Basket Case in 2010. A versatile artist, Chikukwa writes, he "has always wanted to work with natural materials".

In the course of her career, British Romany artist Delaine Lebas has shown a keen interest in oral history and traditions of cultures that continue to be marginalised by dominant discourses. She has also developed a multidisciplinary and collaborative approach that makes no case of the distinction between art and craft. Versed in the same vision, Michel Paysant pushes the boundaries of this kind of collaboration by linking the two extremes that are craft and science (or new media). His horizontal approach creates the most unusual creative dialogues.

matali crasset and Sebastian Herkner, two of the foremost internationally acclaimed designers of their generations, had already expressed an interest in engaging with the African continent through architectural and design projects. In addition to their flair and innovative eye, both brought to the project their breadth of knowledge and a pragmatism that one has to remain aware of when designing products.

But the most important part in this creative conversation was the five participating weaving communities, our hosts and interlocutors: Binga Craft Centre (Binga), Bulawayo Home Industries (Bulawayo), Lupane Women's Centre (Lupane), STEP Trust (Honde Valley) and Zienzele Foundation (Masvingo). Each community was visited by the curators and organising team in 2013, in order to initiate a dialogue, understand the challenges they face, and develop a mutual understanding leading to a fruitful collaboration.

Basket Case II was delivered in two phases: artists residencies and design workshops held during autumn and winter 2014; followed by an exhibition of the newly commissioned art, design and craft pieces. While non-prescriptive principles have guided the commissioning process, the stated curatorial intention was to foster a creative and practice-based dialogue between groups of weavers and the invited artists and designers; allowing both parties to share knowledge, experiment, push the boundaries of their medium, and come out with newly acquired techniques and a reinvigorated set of creative ideas. One key aspect to this project was to contribute to the sustainability of the weaving communities by creating pieces destined to be showcased internationally, with the potential to reach out to both the visual arts and design worlds.

As we prepare to inaugurate Basket Case II in the renovated National Gallery of Zimbabwe, one cannot preempt the success of this project. At this stage, one might consider as an achievement the fact that, thanks to the EUNIC Zimbabwe Cluster and all the partners involved, we have managed to create a cross-cultural encounter in a country which realities are often pointlessly distorted in the outside world. The feedback from each participant whose first time it was to visit Zimbabwe has proved it to be an enriching experience filled with curiosity, discovery and mutual understanding. For this I thank the artists and designers who accepted this invitation to take part in Basket Case II, and the weaving communities for welcoming us. Both have shown a cultural and creative openness. Most importantly, this was and still is a collective human-to-human adventure. As a collective enterprise, Basket Case II has shown that craftsmen and women, designers and visual artists from different parts of the world are able to weave a common visual language.

But this should not stop here. Basket Case II is not a self-congratulatory exercise which success would be measured by the one showcase in Harare. This project should aim for a long-term life changing impact and sustainability for the women who live in the most remote corners of Zimbabwe; for those young women I have seen in Bulawayo and Lupane who continue a tradition passed on to them from one generation to the other. Young women who should be given the opportunity to own, appropriate and experiment with these traditions; and engage with their peers on the continent and why not, in the diaspora.

These are the local creative minds that can show the world that our traditions are part of the contemporary in more ways than is actually acknowledged. It is time for these creative expressions to take centre stage.

Asiwafuni Amavila Ngobathina Siyazenzela

asiwafuni amavila (ngobathina siyazenzela)

Made mainly from *ilala* leaves, sisal, plastic bags, discarded plastic bottles, found wood, *Asiwafuni Amavila* is a four-panel room divider that could also be appropriated into a small booth, like the makeshift outdoor bathrooms I saw in some of the homesteads in Lupane. The simplicity of these architectural structures made with dried *ilala* leaves inspired the form of the piece. However, I chose to combine my material and process, threading and braided plastic bags, *Plasto-yarns*, with the *ilala* leaves and weaving techniques used by the weavers. I also played with the elasticity of the organic *ilala* leaves. The replication of both materials and techniques makes the entire piece very organic. On one side of the panel is a window through which the viewer is invited to experience the Lupane Women's Center (LWC) in an industrious and lively mode, publicity I felt was much needed. Each panel has a different design, constructed and created together with the weavers. Added to the room divider, is a chair that was broken and thrown away but repurposed using the *Plasto-yarns*, dyed braided *ilala* yarns and woven coasters. The idea to display the chair and the divider together is to recreate a domestic ephemeral space.

The work *Asiwafuni Amavila (Ngobathina Siyazenzela)* means, "we don't want lazy people because we can do it ourselves", as translated by the wonderful artist Bhekitshe Ntshali, who worked with me during the residency. I adopted

the title from the theme song, sung by the members of the LWC, during my stay as a resident artist there. "Asiwafuni" became my favorite song and each time it was sung (and danced to) during break periods there emerged an overflow of strength just like the organic movement of the coasters on the works. The song generated a vibe of creative communal bond – a bond between people, cultures, ideas, techniques, bio and non-biodegradable materials. The synthesis formed between work and play built a permutation of ingenuity in ideas between each basket weaver and myself and our environment. As the days progressed, I found myself needing to translate, into what would be the final product of our collaborative process, that positive energy of possibilities in a secluded environment, such as a village.

Designed to encourage a self-sufficient and creative independent economic hub in a rural setting, the LWC, run largely by women most of whom are in their late 50s, proved to me that creativity does not give room to idle excuses like the "no-job" syndrome. I used the term *strength* not in its literal meaning of exerting physical power, but rather as a more conceptual teamwork that exists among the members of the LWC. A kind that blossoms further through collaborations with individuals of similar creative processes such as artists and designers. Indeed in Lupane, "we don't want lazy people".





Ifeoma anyaeji | variable dimensions



asiyafuna amavila (ngobathina siyazenzela) | Ifeoma anyaeji | 1700 x 1020 x 820 mm
Ifeoma anyaeji | 980 x 460 x 440 mm

delaine le bas

hear her roar

A collaborative work made with the Master Weavers at Binga Craft Centre and Aubrey Bango. Soundscape by Justin Langlands.

In preparation for her residency at Binga Craft Centre, Delaine Le Bas developed a number of exciting ideas including looking at the link between traditional hairstyles and weaving, or the possibility to incorporate various materials into the basket making process. But the idea that stuck was a life-size figure, a body and dress made out of a mixture of different processes of basket making, maybe incorporating beadworks. She also knew that the figure's head would use basketry to create the patterns of a leopard skin.

Delaine opted for a regale gown using Tonga weaving techniques and patterns. She took the emblematic Queen Victoria's dress in a sculpture that addresses the history and legacy of colonisation, the suppression of cultures and how these then turn full circle. Delaine also drew parallels between a phenomenon experienced by Africans under the British Empire and the forms of exclusions and derogatory attitudes still experienced by Romany communities at the hands of mainstream British and European communities.

The artist worked with five master weavers whose knowledge of Tonga representations of Nyaminyami, the Zambezi River God, as well as traditional designs, notably Maluba, Mayuwe, Mbizi and Mbanylna, is reflected on the sculptural ensemble consisting on the gown, twenty additional elements and a sound piece.

In her acknowledgements, Delaine states that:

"This installation would not have been possible without the creativity, knowledge, skill and care of everyone at the Binga Craft Centre and the Museum. The collaborative process that everyone embraced with me has allowed this installation to be made real. I would also like to thank Aubrey for his help with translation and being a great artistic partner in interpretation through language, drawing, and his practical skills in the construction of the pieces. As well as Justin for his work with the sound that I recorded while in Binga. And all the partners who have supported the project."





kumwa kukumuna kwakwe (hear her roar) | Delaine Le Bas | 1850 x 1030 x 2770 mm



sound scape | Delaine Le Bas | H 2370 mm W variable

Alexandra Birncken

B.U.F.F.

B.U.F.F. is a group of four oval shaped objects made by employing four different traditional weaving techniques using *ilala* palm. The aim was to produce four equally sized objects and reveal in what way the different weaving techniques influenced the final shaping of the objects. The difference between the shapes draws attention to the handmade quality and characteristics of each of the weaves and weavers. The material, whilst staying the same, shows off different aspects and the variety of usage of *ilala*.

Undertones of conflict are made explicit in the work's title *B.U.F.F.*, standing for 'Big', 'Ugly', 'Fat' and 'Fellow'. This refers to the name given to 'B-52' bombers by American Soldiers. The *ilala* made pieces extend Alexandra's pre-existing reflection on notions of divergence. Here the objects encapsulate the contrasting ideas of harmless organic cocoon-like forms and the shapes of threatening artillery shells.

Scania

The work *Scania* is a mobile home. Observing the central importance that the possession of a two-wheeled cart holds in Bulawayo, Alexandra acquired a two-wheeled metal cart called *scania* and constructed a traditional Zulu hut on top of it. The former open metal grid walls, making up the sides of the loading bay, are carefully interwoven and closed with the same grass that is used for the thatching of the hut's roof, suggesting solidity and security.

Most two-wheeled carts appear in a wide range of interesting designs and dimensions. They are welded together using a vast mix of scrap metals, perforated and left over grit metals from industrial production. The constructions of these trading minivans have an intriguing quality of multi-textured and multi-layered compositions where necessity and function decide upon form.

This piece reflects upon reality in which the ownership of a *scania* enables self-employment; as salesperson, craftsmen or otherwise. It opens up ways to secure an income, to afford a living, a home or to provide for one's family.

As a mobile home, the hut on wheels also makes settlement unnecessary. It combines an income and a home under one roof by way of mobility.





scania | Alexandra Bircken | 2250 x 1030 x 2150 mm



1



2

- 1 | **fat** | Alexandra Bircken | 850 x 320 mm
- 2 | **big** | Alexandra Bircken | 900 x 750 mm
- 3 | **ugly** | Alexandra Bircken | 840 x 620 mm
- 4 | **fellow** | Alexandra Bircken | 900 x 800 mm



3



4





matali crasset

seeds

matali crasset's design workshop took place at Bulawayo Home Industries. The French industrial designer has been inspired by the gourd basket, an iconic shape recurrent in Bulawayo weaving style. The workshop focused on using the gourd as a foundation basis and explored the multiple forms and objects that could derive from it. In other words, using the weavers' skills and knowledge, she sought to develop a range that would transform these craft objects into pieces of contemporary design.

Talking about the gourd baskets, crasset appreciated their irregularity, which she saw as a creative twist reflecting the weavers' ability to extend or reduce their form in a flexible manner. "They are almost like sculptures" she says in an interview filmed by Eric Gauss.

Alongside the weavers, crasset has developed several objects that almost seem like natural evolutions of the gourd basket. Adding a corolla, she enhanced the appeal of a piece

but also saw its potential functionality by placing a mirror in its centre. Most objects translate the idea of organic morphing in a sort of continuity and blending as opposed to forced additions. The resulting visual language remains close to nature.

A number of objects use small gourds combined with an existing one in order to form a unique piece. The designer and weavers have also extended the gourd shape and made it evolve into a bag. Three forms have been experimented leading to two different hard and asymmetrical bags made up of *ilala*, and a soft bag made of sisal.

Other formal developments include a vase and Matopos sculptural shapes that are both decorative and functional, such as a bowl. It was also important that the weavers applied their personal touch to this common weaving language. Each woman has adopted a colored piece of wool that was integrated in the finished product.





seeds | Matali Crasset | 280 x 450 mm



matopos | Matail Crasset | 530 x 580 mm



seeds | Matali Crasset | 250 x 365 mm



1



2

- 1 | seeds | Matali Crasset | 320 x 325 mm
- 2 | seeds | Matali Crasset | 340 x 335 mm
- 3 | seeds | Matali Crasset | 380 x 680 mm
- 4 | seeds | Matali Crasset | 150 x 455 mm



3



4

tapfuma gutsa

It is hard to regard myself as an artist anymore as I hardly sell any work and therefore consider myself and my two assistants, Ron Mutemeri and Dan Chimurure, as Situationists.

In 2010, I set out on my basket journey with these young artists knowing what each is capable of. I am the ideas person, Ron is very technical and Dan is a geek. Each one plays their role instinctively depending on the situation, hence the Situationist label. A Situationist has financial, material, space, time, and many other limitations and therefore has to produce art by all means necessary. The practice can verge on the illogical but the focus is solely on the desired outcome. Interestingly, other associate artists now refer to themselves as Situationists.

The invitation to participate in Basket Case II was very welcome since my team has experience working with Tonga women weavers in Binga. The residency took place in Honde where Bamboo is commonly used. Bamboo is a rigid material compared to Binga's *ilala*, so initially we followed the methods of the weavers and spent a disgruntled two weeks out. However, on the last day, I discovered that the very act of splitting bamboo was the key. It is both rigid and supple, linear and spirally, it is circular.

Honde became my personalised studio on the second visit. We worked in frenzy with my boys and the Honde weavers, Sly Chisuko, Tsitsi Nyabando and Aaron Sabondo and later with Lastborn Jeranyama. We wove nests, pupae, igloo/cave (audiences unwittingly supplied the titles) and went on to finalise some of the work from the first visit.

Patterns are fascinating, whether large or small. They are abundant in nature. What is most striking are the intricate patterns on the Tonga/Binga baskets coming out of the hands of peasant women that would baffle a seasoned mathematician. So would the rigid gridding found in Honde baskets woven by men and women. I am aware of baskets from other areas too which have their own peculiarities. When I look at baskets I see ancient tradition and I aim to act as catalyst to bring new forms and economically empower the weavers.

Being home ground was a strong advantage and I took it! I produced work derived from nature, especially that of bamboo and other fauna. I interrogated a new material, giving and receiving hints until I found mutual harmony. I then went back to my uninformed work and added the new knowledge, reinforcing it with my past. On the field I do not only look at art possibilities but also at life holistically. Honde is a banana country so I have gathered info on how to grow them. I have started a plantation in Murehwa where I come from.

I have been back to Honde several times since June and have built great friendships all over Honde. Art is about questioning, delving, listening and planting ideas therefore I hope my presence has made a lasting difference to lives and practices of Honde weavers.





1



2

- 1 | **dura rakamba** | Tapfuma Gutsa | 173 x 780 x 2770 mm
- 2 | **dendere 1** | Tapfuma Gutsa | 2020 x 780 mm
- 3 | **column 1** | Tapfuma Gutsa | 2370 x 650 mm
- 4 | **dura rakamba** | Tapfuma Gutsa | 173 x 780 x 2770 mm



3



4

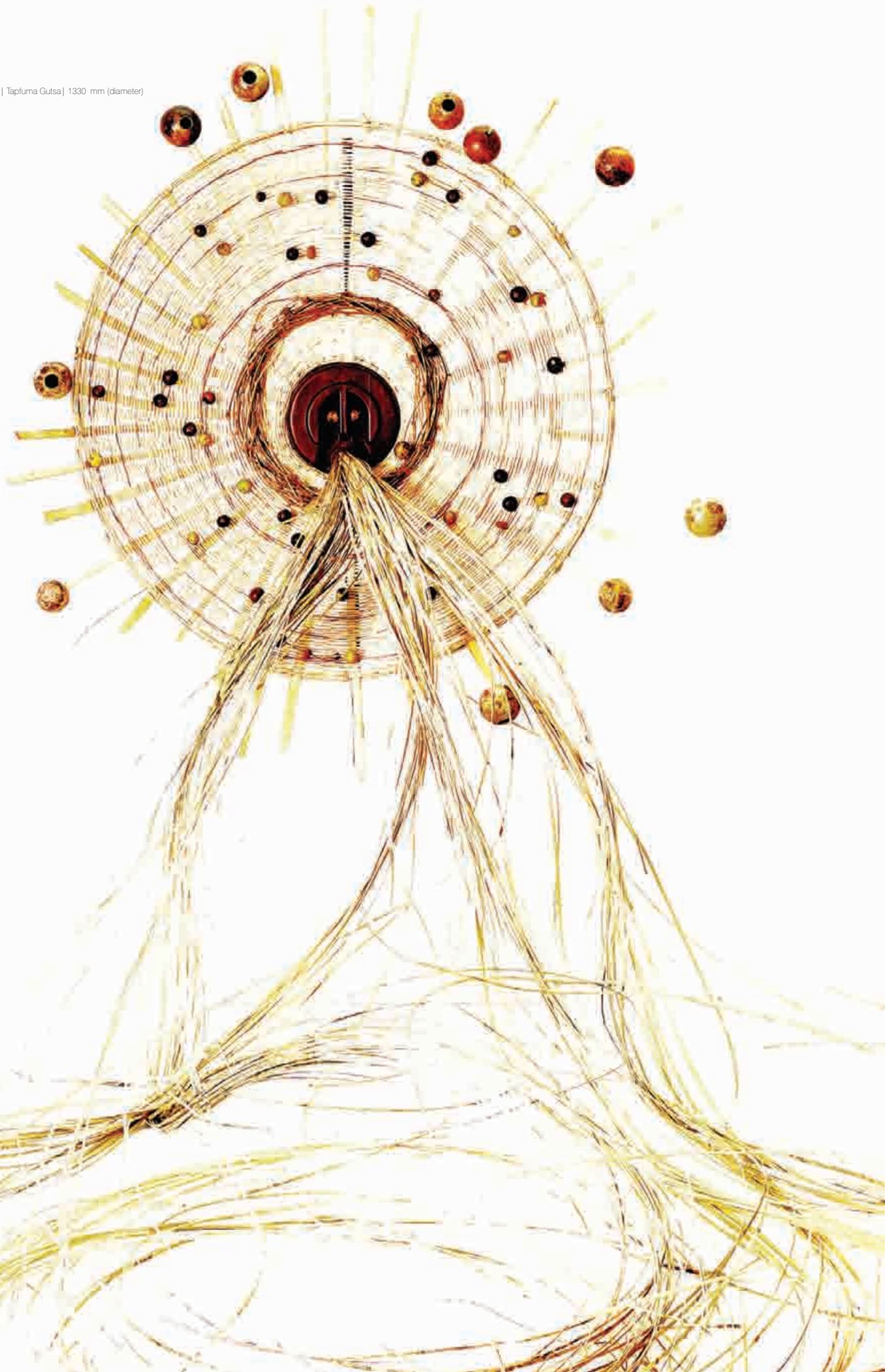
dendere 2 | Tapfurna Gutsa | 480 x 160 x 5200 mm





ruva / flowering bulb | Tapfuma Gutsa | 1850 x 760 x 1000 mm

hondo yetsemho | Tapfuma Gutsa | 1330 mm (diameter)



sebastian merkner

“Binga was, and still is, a great experience for me and my assistant. It was an amazing and intense time, and we had a fantastic exchange with the people. Our immersion in this beautiful country, with the plants and animals, the stars, even the Milky Way at night, was an ideal setting to develop the design workshop.

Our collaboration with the women weavers was very inspirational and we developed the project together. Our approach was to use their knowledge and tradition in basket making and add my design language. We combined their skills and passion for weaving and added new details. For instance in some cases we used coloured plastic fibers from maize meal bags and added them to the baskets in order to enhance their appeal. During my stay I also saw clay pots at Binga Museum. This gave me the idea to ask a local potter to do some bowls; we subsequently combined those two techniques that are part of Tonga crafts culture: clay pottery and basket making.”





fara (happy) | Sebastian Herkner | variable dimensions



1



2

- 1 | **pamwe (together)** | Sebastian Herkner | 140 x 310 mm
- 2 | **pamwe (together)** | Sebastian Herkner | 70 x 265 mm
- 3 | **pamwe (together)** | Sebastian Herkner | 190 x 160 mm
- 4 | **pamwe (together)** | Sebastian Herkner | 155 x 480 mm



3



4



fara (happy) | Sebastian Herkner | variable dimensions



michel paysant

in collaboration with josiane paysant

the blake project

“To make art, but first and foremost, to create a context that allows a better understanding of the art one makes.” MP

first wishes and other intentions

This workshop was undertaken with weaving communities in Masvingo in the hope of an encounter, of a dialogue between two cultures, two continents, two worlds (art and crafts), and knowledgeable knowledge. In that, it was faithful to the idea of frontier project that I have attempted to develop in all my actions.

It is this in-between that generally matters, this middle ground, this interstitial space whereby, in these types of cooperation, nothing is pre-established, nothing is decided beforehand, nothing is written, nothing is programmed, besides frameworks and calendars. We know the pitfalls of brief collaboration projects: the applied concept, the provision of a service, the master class, the demonstration, the instrumentalisation, the colonisation of techniques...

This is why I spent a long time observing and understanding the women artists who shared their open-air workshops with me: their gestures, their organisation, their stories, their temporality... This phase of productive withholding, of “active wait”, where porosity has to take precedence above all is, from experience, delightfully fragile. [...]

The idea to conceive a useful and friendly project remained throughout my journey; a certain idea of conviviality and of making together. Right away, the generic theme we kept was typography – and inscribed within a larger frame, the motif, with

the objective to find a middle ground between typography and weaving. The digital/weaving interface became an interesting space to investigate. [...]

After trying out a first idea based on sign language, I opted for an alphabet composed of pixels that radiate in a circle to match the shape of a basket. These forms are simple, quasi abstract, on the edge of legibility.

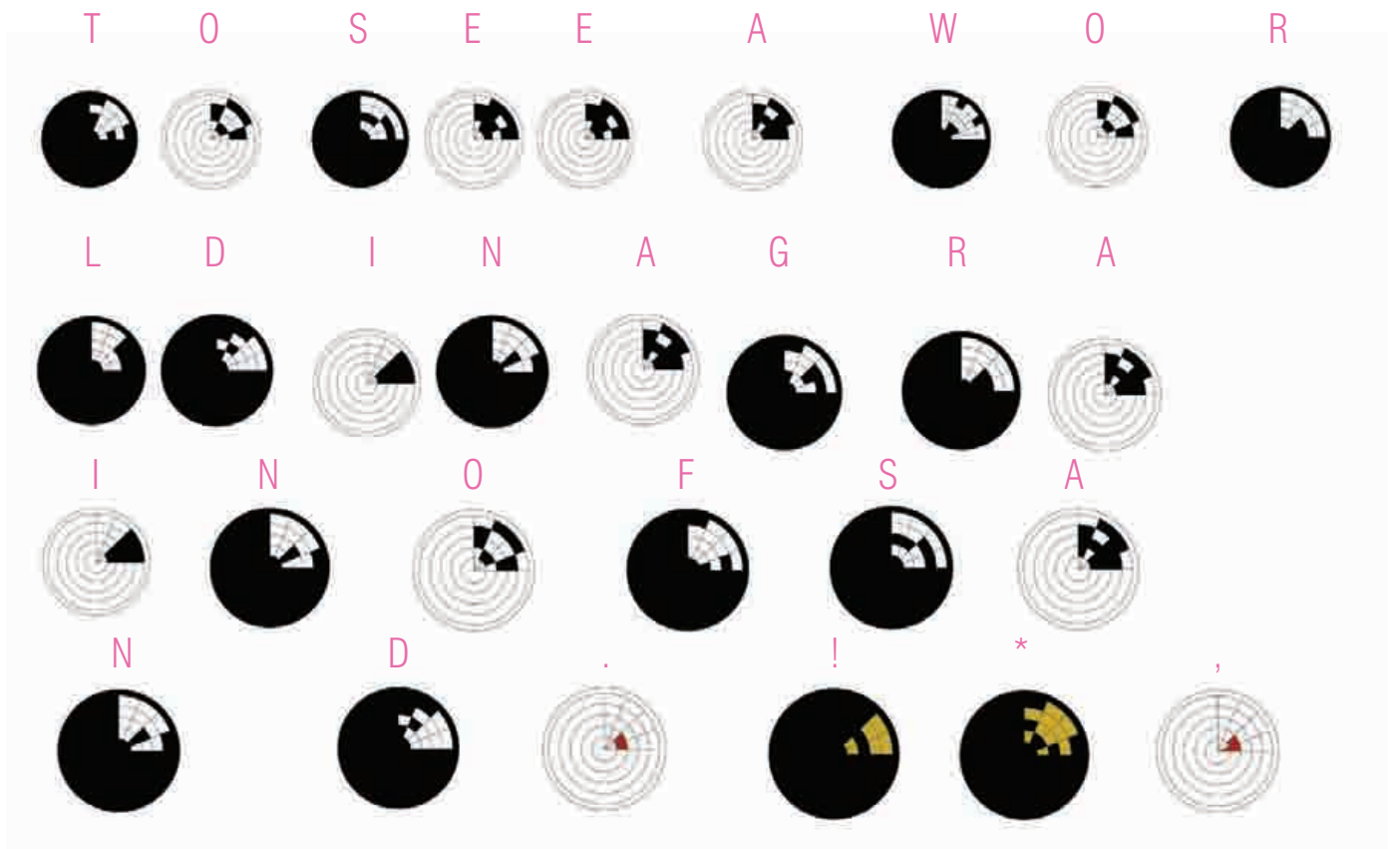
drawing as a common language

The group communicated in several languages: English, Shona and French. Intermediaries (assistant, community coordinator) also served as interpreters. However it is drawing in all its forms (informative drawing, freehand sketches, structure drawings, plans, patterns, infographic finish ...) that were our common language. It is around this centre of drawn images that the residency revolved.

william blake's poem

By creating the woven letters and juxtaposing them so they made sense, we had to choose a quotation as working basis, just like a pedestal. Among the many poems that the landscape (notably Balancing Rocks), the philosophy, the spirit and the content of this workshop evoked in me, I chose the first verse of *Auriges of Innocence*, one of the most famous poems by William Blake (1757-1827): “To see a world in a grain of sand...”





to see a
 world in a grain
 of sand. !* ,







ifeoma anyaeji

b. 1981, Benin City, Nigeria; lives and works in Benin City

Ifeoma Ugonnwa Anyaeji gained her undergraduate training from the University of Benin, Benin City, where she received a B.A in Painting. However, growing up in a society fueled by the dualities of excess and repression and where art was yet to be accepted as a career, she decided to continue in this direction and explore her boundaries, as a female artist, beyond her undergraduate training. In 2009, she was awarded a Ford Foundation Fellowship to pursue a Master's in Fine Arts degree at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, USA. While there, she pursued her initial interest in sculpture exploring further her idea of repurposing discarded materials into art mediums and forms, especially her new found medium, plastic bags and bottles, which she had started working with in Nigeria. Ifeoma had always wanted to sculpt but found traditional materials sometimes both strenuous and unwieldy. She transferred her crocheting skills, her experience of traditional hair plaiting techniques, fabric weaving and passion for up-cycling into her new medium, and developed a form/style of art she calls Plasto-art. While her sculptures are bold and assertive, in contrast her paintings are delicate, and sometimes spontaneous, observing the fragility of humanity and beauty of the human race. Ifeoma has had several solo exhibitions and participated in group shows both in Nigeria and internationally. Her works are in several collections in Africa, Europe and the US. She teaches at the University of Benin, Benin City, but is currently pursuing a PhD program at Concordia University in Montreal.

solo exhibitions (selection)

2014 Transmogrification, Skoto Gallery, Chelsea, New York, USA (Solo). Plasto-yarnings: a conversation with plastic bags and bottles, Alliance Française, Nairobi, Kenya (Solo)

2012 Reclamation, The Craft Studio Gallery, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO, USA (Solo)

2013 Okilikili, Lewis Center, Washington University, St. Louis, MO, USA (Solo)

group exhibitions (selection)

2014 La Parole aux Femmes, Fondation Blachère, Apt, France
MULTIMEDIA ART: A tool for environmental awareness. IICD Center, Maitama, Abuja, Nigeria

2013 Diaspora, New Century Gallery, Chelsea, New York, USA
Plight of Women, French Cultural Institute, Wuse 2, Abuja, Nigeria

2012 Art for Display, Regional Arts Commission, St. Louis, MO, USA. Consumer Culture, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, Illinois, USA. Now I'm born this way will you still see me as..., Lewis Center, Washington University, St. Louis, MO, USA

delaine le bas

b. 1965, United Kingdom, lives and works in the UK

Delaine Le Bas is a part of large family of English Romani Gypsies based in the South of England. As an artist, she lives and works in various locations across the UK and Europe. Her artistic practice consists of various sized installations that combine mixed media and include the use of sound and performance. Her work deals with issues of exclusion and stereotypes that are far-reaching and ingrained into the human consciousness. Untold histories, exclusion based on difference and misrepresentation loom large in her pieces. So do bilingual texts produced with her son Damian James Le Bas. Her work also explores cultural symbols that make reference to 'others' whoever 'they' may be, and how forms of 'inclusion' of difference have resulted in destroying the culture of 'others'. Delaine also collaborates with her husband the artist Damian Le Bas on the ongoing project Safe European Home?

solo exhibitions (selection)

2014 Local Name: Unknown Gypsies? Phoenix, Brighton, UK
To Gypsyland, Bolton Museum and Art Gallery, Bolton, UK

2013 To Gypsyland, A Studio Practice and Archive Project, Metal, Peterborough, UK

group exhibitions (selection)

2014 Navigations, Urban Dialogues, Red Gallery, London, UK
Sites of Collective Memory, CGP, London, UK. Portrait of The Artist, Delaine Le Bas and Tara Darby, Transition Gallery, London, UK. To Gypsyland, 198 Contemporary Arts & Learning, London, UK. Akathe Te Beshen - Heir Um Zu Bleiben, Kunststation, Kleinassen, Germany. Have A Look Into My Life! Stadtmuseumgraz, Graz, Austria. Safe European Home? MART, Dublin, Ireland. Tajsja, BMW, Tarnow, Poland. Have a look into my life! Aubette, Strasbourg, France.

2013 Safe European Home? No: 5 Berliner Herbstsalon, Gorki Theatre, Berlin, Germany. Safe European Home? No: 4 Past, Present, Future. Galerie Kai Dikhas, Berlin, Germany. Other Sisters, Dialogue with iwona Zajac, Gdanska Galeria Miejska, Poland. Houses as Silver as Tents, Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland. Me, You and The Others, Savoy-teatteri, Helsinki, Finland. Safe European Home? No: 3, The Dandelion Project, Trane Udstillingen, Copenhagen, Denmark. Safe European Home? No:2 CHB, Berlin, Germany. Video.Art.Activism. Galerie Kai Dikhas, Berlin, Germany. Me, You and The Others, The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas, Tampere, Finland.

alexandra bircken

b. 1967, Germany; lives and works in Cologne

Alexandra Bircken studied fashion at St Martin's College, London, graduating in 1995 before embarking on a career as a fashion designer in London and Paris. In 2004 Bircken began making art objects and has since exhibited internationally.

Bircken's work engages with key oppositions within twentieth century culture such as the organic versus the man-made, or the domestic and hand-made versus the mechanical. Using a range of media and with a particular focus on textiles, her work reveals compelling complexities within commonplace ideas and objects, displaying a nuanced interplay between divergent concepts.

solo exhibitions (selection)

2014 The Hepworth Museum, Wakefield, UK. B.U.F.F., BQ, Berlin, Germany. Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Netherlands

2013 Inside out, BQ, Berlin, Germany

2012 Recent Works, Herald St, London, UK. Hausrat, Kunstverein Hamburg, Germany. Ganzjährige Präsentation im Foyer, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, Germany

2011 Studio Voltaire, London, UK. Think of me, Kimmerich Gallery, New York, USA

2010 Storno, BQ, Los Angeles, USA. Blondie, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, Germany

group exhibitions (selection)

2014 Blicke! Körper! Sensationen!, Deutsches Hygiene Museum, Dresden, Germany. Fiber in Form, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, USA. Humanonhuman, Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, Paris, France. Ökonomie der Aufmerksamkeit, Kunsthalle, Vienna, Austria. Die Antwort der Dinge Lothringer13_Halle, Munich, Germany. The Great Outdoors, Awst & Walther Schaufenster, Berlin, Germany

2013 Kunsthalle, Münster, Germany. Nur hier – Sammlung zeitgenössischer Kunst der Bundesrepublik Deutschland / Ankäufe von 2007 – 2011, Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, Germany. Days in Lieu, David Zwirner, London, UK

2012 Made in Germany Zwei, Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany. Neuralgie, Kunstraum, Düsseldorf, Germany

matali crasset

b. 1965, Châlons-en-Champagne, France;
lives and works in Paris, France

Matali Crasset graduated as an industrial designer from Ateliers – E.N.S.C.I. (Workshops – National Higher School of Industrial Design). Early 2000, after a first experience with Denis Santachiara, Italy and Philippe Starck, France, she set up her own studio in Paris called Matali Crasset Productions.

Matali Crasset considers design as research and works from an off-centred position allowing her to address daily routines and map out future scenarios. With both a knowledgeable and naive outlook on the world, her practice questions and challenges the obviousness of codes as shown in her symbolic piece *Quand Jim monte à Paris* (When Jim goes up to Paris) (2000) focusing on hospitality and reinventing our relationship to everyday space and objects. Her proposals are never geared toward a mere improvement of what already exists, rather they develop typologies structured around principles such as modularity or interlacing networks. Her work revolves around searching for new coordination processes and formulating new logics to life.

Always looking for new territories to explore, she has collaborated with eclectic worlds—from crafts to electronic music, from the textile industry to fair trade—realizing projects in set design, furniture, architecture, graphic design. She has also worked with artists, including Peter Halley, as well as with local and municipal authorities.

The experience acquired over the years has led her to become involved in participative projects, on a local and global scale, both in rural and urban settings. Whether encounters, creative workshops, discussions or addressing common desires, Matali Crasset has worked with numerous project leaders who all share the same conviction that these collective processes result in plausible social bonding. Ultimately, it is the core question of living together that defines crasset's imaginative designs, writings and overall work.

tapfuma gutsa

b. 1956, Harare (formerly Salisbury), Zimbabwe,
lives and works in Harare

Tapfuma Gutsa began his career as a sculptor at Drienfontein Mission. He is a former BAT art school student and he was the first Zimbabwean to be awarded a British Council Scholarship to study at the City and Guilds of London Art School from 1982-1985. During his studies in London Gutsa graduated with a Diploma in Sculpture. His return to Zimbabwe changed the practice of sculpture in the country. Gutsa has won several awards that include the presidential award of honour in 1995. Gutsa worked as Deputy Director of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare, for almost a year before returning to his studio work. His work has been included in major national and international exhibitions.

selected exhibitions

2011 Seeing Ourselves: Questioning our Geographical Landscape and the Space we occupy from Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow. Zimbabwe Pavilion, 54th Venice Biennale, Chiesa Santa Maria della Pietà, Venice, Italy

2008 ANGAZA AFRIKA, October Gallery, London, UK

2007 Voyages – Crossing the lake of fire, October Gallery, London, UK. Uncomfortable Truths, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK

2006 Tapfuma Gutsa, October Gallery, London, UK

2005 Transitions, Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studied, University of London, London, UK. Wasser Brent – Gallery Habari, Vienna, Austria

2004 Visions of Zimbabwe, Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester, UK, Dak'Art: Biennale of Contemporary African Art, Dakar, Senegal
STEP INSIDE - Group Exhibition, Gallery Dieleman, Chateau de Petit Leez, Belgium

sebastian herkner

b. 1981, Bad Mergentheim, Germany;
lives and works in Offenbach am Main, Germany

Sebastian Herkner studied product design at the HfG Offenbach am Main, already focusing during his studies on designing objects and furniture merging various cultural contexts, combining new technologies with traditional craftsmanship in order to highlight the multifaceted beauty of the materials and draw renewed attention to small details. Whilst still a student, Herkner did an internship with Stella McCartney in London, which helped to hone his feeling for materials, colours, structures and textures. Since founding his own design studio in Offenbach am Main in 2006, he has designed products for manufacturers such as ClassiCon, Very Wood by Gervasoni, Moroso, Sancal, La Chance and Rosenthal, as well as working on interior design projects and for exhibitions and museums. Since 2007 he has taught several courses at HfG Offenbach am Main as visiting lecturer. His designs have received multiple prizes, for example the 2011 German Design Award in the Newcomer category.

michel paysant

b. 1955, Bouzonville, France; lives and works in Paris, France

Michel Paysant is an experimental artist whose work brings together art, science and technology. A skilled sculptor, artist, participant and specialist in nanoscopic works, Paysant places an emphasis on the fusion of crafts, arts and science. He believes that the “world of science and the arts never cross” and works towards “building bridges between these worlds”. Passionate about classical and experimental drawing, he is currently developing research projects with scientific teams specializing in cognitive sciences notably through the DALY project (Drawing with the eyes), and nanotechnologies, OnLab project.

Paysant has been exhibiting his work for thirty years in various international venues including Centre Pompidou, Paris; Musée du Louvre, Paris; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Centraal Museum, Utrecht; MUDAM, Luxembourg, Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna; Museo Nacional de Artes Visuales, Montevideo, DADU Museum of Art, Beijing, as well as art centres such as Brooklyn Bridge Space/Creative Time, New York; Mercer Union, Toronto; Bétonsalon, Paris. He recently featured in 'Monacopolis' at Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, Villa Paloma, Monaco (2013).

solo exhibitions (selection)

2012 OnLAB, Le Musée des Poussières, MUDAM, Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg. Nusquam 1.2, Musée de Picardie, Amiens, France

2010 Du dessin, Galerie Frédéric Giroux, Paris, France

2009 OnLAB, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France

2007 Inventarium 05, Galerie Frédéric Giroux, Paris, France. Nusquam, MUDAM, Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg

group exhibitions (selection)

2013 Monacopolis, Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, Ville. Paloma, Monaco. Rhythm/Presence, The Center for Recent Drawing, London, UK. Rhythm/Presence, Project Drawing, IADT, Institute of Art, Design & Technology, Dublin, Ireland. Rhythm/Presence, Cube Gallery & RIBA Hub (Royal Institute of British Architects), Manchester, UK. La main invente le dessin, FRAC Picardie, Abbaye de Saint-Riquier, Saint-Riquier, France

2012 Le Mont Analogue, Galerie Florence Léoni, Paris, France. Fruits de la passion, Dix ans du projet pour l'art contemporain, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France

