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Gareth Nyandoro: "Westerners are racing for Africa, but we have always been here"

The Zimbabwean painter is the new star of contemporary art. His collage paintings at the Palais de Tokyo tell of the collapse of a country and a certain redemption.

By Roxana Azimi Posted on June 22, 2017



View of the exhibition "Stall (s) of fame" at the Palais de Tokyo. ANDRÉ MORIN

" *You know, people love your job, they feel it's not easy painting. We are very proud.* The African-born guards at the Palais de Tokyo take turns bowing to Gareth Nyandoro, who is exhibiting there until 10 September. That the Parisian temple of contemporary art honors an African is a rare event. Only Cameroonian Barthélémy Toguo was eligible in 2005.

If he receives these homage warmly, the Zimbabwean artist born in 1982 does not have a big head. He did not have it either when he represented Zimbabwe at the Venice Biennale in 2015 or when, the following year, he received the "Emerging Path" award from the *Financial Times*. " *All this attention will benefit the Zimbabwean art scene,* " he says. *Because, beyond me, there are many young and talented artists. What I am, I owe to those who preceded me and accompanied. I would like people to have a broader view of things.* "

Resourceful family

Modesty and collective spirit. " *I come from a family that does not know egoism,* " he smiles. From a resourceful family too. From his grandfather, master in recycling, able to shape traps, potteries or musical instruments, Gareth Nyandoro retained the art of improvisation. " *People in our village were creative,* " he says. *We made footballs with scraps. We built, dismantled, and then put things back together.* On the

advice of an uncle, he enrolled at the Harare Polytechnic School, Fine Arts and Print Arts Section. " *My family thought it was the right path for me ,*" he says. *I had no choice but to do art, no one saw me in a classic job, and myself, I had no idea what I wanted. "*

When he graduates in the early 2000s, Zimbabwe is plunged into a serious economic crisis that has only escalated. Many artists then migrate to South Africa or Europe. Not Gareth Nyandoro, who had neither the means nor the opportunity, except an ephemeral workshop in Cape Town in 2008. " *So, the galleries and exhibition sites were more likely to show us ,*" he continues. *We could set up projects that would not bring in money. "*



Gareth Nyandoro. DR

With five other students and teachers, he climbs to 25 km from Harare the center Dzimbanhete Arts Interactions, active from 2010 to 2013. The goal? Facilitate the access of artists to the most diverse techniques. From the beginning, Nyandoro has been trying to describe the changes in the way of life of his fellow citizens with urban development and the introduction of new "made in China" cheap objects. In a sculpture called *National Reconciliation* , he mixes shoes from the 1980s, other import plastic shoes, much less solid, and shoes made today by Zimbabweans from car tires. He also creates contemporary masks from found objects, then sculptures from yellow meters.

In residence in Amsterdam

A turning point came in 2013. Gareth Nyandoro was then in residence at the prestigious Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. He abandons found objects to reconnect with his first love, paper and print. He then develops the technique of *kucheca-cheka* , incision in the paper reminding the scratching of the engraving. The installation presented at the Palais de Tokyo after three months of residency at SAM Art Projects is a perfect example. In this impressive jigsaw puzzle composed of cutter paper strips, peeled and reworked in ink, the artist mixes the question of social interaction and commerce with portraits of African football stars like the Cameroonian Roger Milla. " *Football and the Bible is what prevented people from thinking during colonization, but it is also a tool for liberation and pride,* "he says. At the viewer to decide.

Gareth Nyandoro is not one of those who send you their truth in the face. At final judgments, he prefers dots. Distance is its key word, distance to history, but also to success and fiddling. " *Westerners are racing for Africa, but we have always been there ,*" he says without harghness. *Even today, they remain stuck in the software of the " African artist " . But this label removes the artist's creative dimension. It's like putting*

a classic art object under a showcase in a museum and forgetting its author. We drown people in the anonymity of a formula to not recognize their individuality . He claims to be Zimbabwean: " I am bound to a context, to a story, to the collapse of a country that I document in my own way. "

Gareth Nyandoro , Stalls of Fame, until September 10th at the Palais de Tokyo, 13, avenue du Président-Wilson, 75116 Paris. www.palaisdetokyo.com