

Nyandoro's time of international glory

11/14/2016



Gareth Nyandoro is the Financial Times Emerging Voices Award-winner. He has become a well-known name in the local as well as the international contemporary art scene. Gareth Nyandoro, the 2016 Financial Times Oppenheimer Funds Emerging Voices Award-winner, takes us through what it means to win such an outstanding award not just for him, but for Zimbabwean art and artists. His vibrant, abstract depictions of commercial life in Harare, not only rewarded him with the winning prize, but have also awarded him international acclaim.

“I cannot really explain the feeling, but I can say at this moment I am still absorbing the moment considering that this award just recently started. It is a big honour not just for me but for the continent of Africa in itself and Zimbabwe in particular. It is placing Zimbabwean

contemporary art on a higher level because many people around the world are now interested in Zimbabwean art and artists.

Many artists are now working with various international galleries. It has raised the country's flag high," said Nyandoro. Art has been in Zimbabwe for a long time and it has been celebrated for the internationally acclaimed stone sculpture which developed in the 50s during the time of the first director of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Frank McEwen.

In recent years there has been a shift from the stone sculpture era to contemporary art as new voices and young artists are coming up. There are a number of contemporary artists that are showcasing at big platforms like the Venice biennale, which has raised the curiosity of international galleries and collectors to find out more about Zimbabwean art.

"Winning such an award has given Zimbabwe a twist because Zimbabwean contemporary art is not all about the negative image that international media is projecting about our country.

"We are now projecting our own story which is not like a story that someone else is telling, so that is where the twist comes in because we are the ones living the life hence we should be telling the stories. As black artists we also have our own way of communicating things in a critical and balanced way. So through art, Zimbabwe is now getting an opportunity to tell its own stories from its own perspective," said Nyandoro.

Already in its second edition, The Financial Times & Oppenheimer Funds Emerging Voices Awards encourages and recognises talent from emerging markets that include countries in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Middle East.

Such efforts complement the hard work of African art institutions such as the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in promoting African art and artists. Nyandoro notes how pivotal the Gallery has also been in promoting him as an artist as well as many other artists.

“I have a very long relationship with the National Gallery of Zimbabwe. It has been a major outlet for artists and is like a temple for us.

“There are not many alternative places you can show your work in the country, but the Gallery has been doing a lot of work in trying to showcase local artists’ work locally and internationally , for example at platforms like the Venice biennale or Joburg art fair.

“It is now a place that every artist wants to affiliate with because you can get your work promoted. It is a very competitive space which challenges artists to do better because we want to be seen and promoted. Most of the opportunities’ that I have had have come through the National Gallery.”

Born in 1982, Nyandoro graduated with a Diploma in Fine Art from Harare Polytechnic in 2003 and completed his studies in creative art and design at Chinhoyi University of Technology, in 2008. He emerged the first prize winner in 2010 at the National Gallery’s Live and Direct Exhibition.

Since his debut solo exhibition “Mutariri” at the Gallery in 2012, other solo presentations have included: “Gareth Nyandoro” at Art Brussels in Belgium and “Paper Cut” in London, both in 2016; “Presentatie Gareth Nyandoro” in Amsterdam, Netherlands in 2015 and “Weaving Life in Harare”, in 2013.

He was one of three artists selected to represent Zimbabwe in the exhibition Pixels of Ubuntu/Unhu, curated by Raphael Chikukwa, at the 56th Venice Biennale in Italy in 2015. The unique technique that he uses has earned him international recognition.

“The technique that I use has now become more unique. It was Chikonzero Chazunguza who first introduced us to print making because at that time there was no material to use due to the economic challenges that the country was facing in the early 2000’s. In the print making class, we were improvising to make the print itself.



“I then realised that instead of using the surface for printing, that surface itself was a finished kind of piece of work so I started carving into the paper and boom — that how this technique started. I call this new technique “kucheka-cheka” which literally translates to cutting-cutting.”

He added: "What I have learnt from years of being an artist is that;what is important is to do what you like most. If art is what you like then develop it and be successful out of it there is nothing stopping you from succeeding," said Nyandoro.