

MOSTAFF MUCHAWAYA

Mostaff Muchawaya (b. 1981, Zimbabwe) is one of the most innovative painters of his generation. Through the medium of paint, Muchawaya creates multi-layered landscapes and portraits of people drawn from memories of his upbringing in the mountainous Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe. Muchawaya's portraits are a complex confluence of portraiture and self-portraiture, autobiography, and fiction. In his work, the artist expresses a deep connection to his memories and experiences, which are inseparable from 'his people' and surroundings. He continuously refers to his rural upbringing; his art serves as a safe space, a home he reverts to.

"My work is centered on portraits of my loved ones. It's all about Nyazura where I come from, and the people and places in that area."

While the paintings are new in their material form, to Muchawaya they are deep-rooted, remembered renderings. His portraits are a combination of memories, a dream-like flash of faces that shape an impression of a half-remembered experience. As with memories, the works encompass all embellishments and subjectivities layered on top of one another. Muchawaya's method of eroding the surface mirrors the natural process of forgetting. His unsettling, faceless portraits make way for recognition.

"I don't put faces, but you can find your face. It's all about perspective. When I look at the portraits, I see a face because sometimes I create a face and then I conceal it with paint, so I leave room for the viewer to also find their face."

Muchawaya's energetic signature style involves the application and erasure of multiple layers of vividly colored paint. Once dry, each generous application of paint is then scraped in parts or removed from the canvas. Household cleaning agents and paint chips from derelict walls are also used to give the impression of erosion. Paint chips from prior works are added to the richly textured surface. Each new piece is thus also part of an old one, creating a very personal sense of continuity throughout his work.

"The scrapes in my work symbolize distant memories of my loved ones. I use processing ink and acrylic PVA to create layers on canvas and paper then I apply paint thinner to scrape the surface and reveal components of the layers underneath. The scraping technique produces an aged effect on the work representing passage of time or memory."

This cycle of application and eradication – almost like an exorcism – continues until each portrait reflects the shifting and uncontrollable nature of memory itself, where the processes



of remembering and forgetting converge to form abstract impressions of the women in his life. Once finished, the portrait he presents is one that eerily reminds one of a haunting - a haunting by places, by people and by what used to be or could have been.

Born 1981 in Nyazura, Manicaland, Mostaff Muchawaya works in Harare, Zimbabwe. A 2003 graduate of Zimbabwe's National Gallery School of Visual Art and Design, he joined the artist's collective Village Unhu art studio in 2012 when it was run by Misheck Masamvu, Georgina Maxim and Gareth Nyandoro. Muchawaya presented his first solo exhibition in South Africa "Memory/Ndangariro" at SMAC Gallery in Cape Town in 2017. This exhibition concluded his 2017 residency at Greatmore Studios in Woodstock, South Africa. Earlier solo exhibitions include his debut show, titled "My Entire People and Place"s, in association with Village Unhu and Alliance Française at the Old Mutual Theatre in Harare, Zimbabwe in 2013. In 2018, Muchawaya was included in the exhibition "Five Bhoobh - Painting at the End of an Era", curated by Tandazani Dhlakama and featuring twenty-nine artists from Zimbabwe, at the Zeitz MOCAA. The artist had a second solo exhibition at SMAC Gallery in 2018 ("Zviso Zvangu - My Faces") and participated at the 22nd Sydney Biennale in 2020.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2023 Pathfinder, Duende Art Projects, Antwerp, Belgium
2018 Zviso Zvangu, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa
2017 Memory / Ndangariro, SMAC Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
2013 My Entire People and Places, At Alliance Française in Harare, Zimbabwe

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2023 Group Show, Duende Art Projects, PAN, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
2023 Group Show, Art Harare Gallery, 1:54, Somerset House, London, United Kingdom
2023 On Lines and Lineages, Southern Guild Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
2023 Transient Beings, Duende Art Projects, Antwerp, Belgium
2022 Unsettled, Duende Art Projects, Antwerp, Belgium
2020 NIRN, 22nd Sydney Biennale, curated by Andrews, Sydney, Australia
2018 Five Bhoobh - Painting at the End of an Era, Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town, South Africa
2018 Zimbabwe Meets Italy, National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Harare



2016 Landmark, Gallery Delta, Harare, Zimbabwe
2015 Mharidzo, National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Harare
2014 Artists in the Stream V at Gallery Delta, Harare, Zimbabwe
2013 100 Hundred at Old Mutual Theatre in Harare, Zimbabwe
2013 Mharidzo, National Gallery of Zimbabwe
2013 Terra III, Gallery Delta, Harare, Zimbabwe

EDUCATION & RESIDENCIES

2017 Residency at Greatmore Studios in Cape Town, South Africa
2002-2003 National Gallery of Zimbabwe School of Visual Arts and Design

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