



# WHILE THE HARVEST ROTS

*Possessing Worlds of  
Kudzanai Chiurai's Art*

EDITORS: ROBERT MUPONDE  
AND EMMA LAURENCE



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While The Harvest Rots: Possessing Worlds of Kudzanai Chiurai's Art  
Editors: Robert Muponde and Emma Laurence

Special thanks to Liza Essers and the Goodman Gallery.

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## INTRODUCTION

**T**his catalogue, which was initially inspired by *The Harvest of Thorns* exhibition (2013), which intriguingly referenced canonical texts in Zimbabwe and Africa, is the first of its kind in the sense that it seeks to collate and focus new critical and scholarly perspectives on Kudzanai Chiurai's internationally acclaimed and growing body of work. It proceeds from the premise that much of what has circulated by way of reviews, interviews and criticism has fixated on segmented (if not standalone), surfacing aspects of Chiurai's work. It has tended to generalise on specific aspects of a particular solo exhibition or group exhibition, and the theme Chiurai was developing at that point in time.

**KEY:** *Highlighted Artworks* (in essays)

While such reviews are helpful, and very often successful, in terms of announcing the arrival and direction of a new talent in visual arts in Southern Africa, they do not necessarily immerse themselves in a close, critical visual analysis and interpretation of his work, nor is there an attempt to find a new vocabulary for what the work itself (other than Chiurai himself) actually means and says. There is a tendency to glibly conflate Chiurai's own public statements and explanations of his biography, practice and vision with what the works themselves actually do and mean. Also, because of how and where he started, and how and where he practises his art, it has become a generally accepted discursive tropism to engage with Chiurai's work as chiefly about dislocation, social strife and violence in Africa. It is therefore easier for critics and reviewers to draw conclusions about the seemingly self-evident "Afro-pessimism" found in his works.

In this catalogue, we argue that such a critical and evaluative consensus forestalls what is possible to understand in this highly innovative and provocative body of work. It could even have the power to reduce his work to a kneejerk reaction to the tautology of experience that Africans and the rest of the West have constructed about postcolonial Africa.

We strongly believe that Chiurai's work could renew understanding and visual culture in Africa if fresher critical and scholarly perspectives were brought to bear on the styles, textures and voices he deploys, and the themes, concepts and arguments that he raises. This catalogue, in one sense, is therefore a reconstructive and restorative project. It is also, most importantly, a critical evaluation and celebration of the growing stature and contribution of one of Africa's most productive, versatile, creative and engaging artists.

Essays in this catalogue engage with issues, themes and concepts that have exercised Kudzanai Chiurai's imagination as an artist, activist and intellectual. His work is complex, escapes easy categorisations, and speaks in such a way that it is necessary to 'view' it with an inner eye. These concise essays were not written overnight. They demanded long hours and months of exposure to the absorbing intricacies of Chiurai's unpredictable depths. Some of the writers reported the 'possessing' quality of his work, which revealed to them hitherto unexperienced planes of feeling and insight after a descent into the underworlds (hidden in plain sight) which Chiurai imaginatively and inventively surfaces.

These essays are by no means exhaustive, but they do help to organise responses to the protean qualities of the evolving

body of work. Certainly, the unanticipated approaches, combinations and extensions, repetitions and transformations, fabrics and textures, sonicscapes and drama, rage and ritual, concepts and practices in Chiurai's work cannot be fully accounted for in this pioneering catalogue, but it is hoped that the essays will help to inspire long-term research into the visual culture of representation that Chiurai is tussling with and shaping. It is also hoped that the catalogue will fill a gap in the scholarly research into black visual art practices in Africa.

Below we list (not in any order of importance) the salient themes that Chiurai's work evokes. They may not necessarily all have been analysed in the current catalogue, but there is an aspect of each concern and concept in the essays collected here.

**AFRO-PESSIMISM:** various trajectories and arguments (history and its recurrence);

**VIOLENCE:** its representation, the subject and object that it represents, and the violence of representation;

**GENDER:** images of men and masculinities and women and femininities;

**FABRICS:** spaces, dress and identity (the elegance of horror);

**AFRICA:** constructions of Africa by the West, constructions of Africa by Africans;

**THEATRICAL** aspects of Chiurai's work;

**RACE:** being Black and Other;

**POWER:** questions around responsibility and agency;

**THE GOTHIC AND THE DYSTOPIAN:** the haunting, the haunted, the spectral;

**RITUAL:** cultures of dying and mourning in Africa, and in Art;

**THE FOREST AND THE GARDEN:** the primordial African forest and the English (botanical) garden, and various configurations of these seemingly mutually exclusive spaces;

**LANDSCAPES AND POSSESSION:** visual cultures and traditions;

**LITERATURE AND POSSESSION:** intertextual synergies in Chiurai's work; and

**POLITICAL POLITICS:** the grotesque, peace, reconciliation and violence.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**KUDZANAI CHIURAI** is an internationally acclaimed young artist born in Zimbabwe. He was one of the first black students to graduate with a BA Fine Art from the University of Pretoria. Born one year after Zimbabwe's emergence from white-ruled Rhodesia – Chiurai's early work focused on the political, economic and social strife in his homeland.

Chiurai has held numerous solo exhibitions since 2003 and has participated in various local and international exhibitions, including *Figures & Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and *Impressions from South Africa, 1965 to Now* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which acquired Chiurai's work for their collection. His *Conflict Resolution* series was included in *dOCUMENTA (13)* in Kassel in 2012. His film *Iyeza* was one of the few African films to be included in the New Frontier shorts programme at the Sundance Film Festival in 2013. Chiurai has held numerous solo exhibitions with the Goodman Gallery and has edited three publications with contributions by leading African creatives.

Born in Zambia (1988) and currently based in Johannesburg, **NOLAN OSWALD DENNIS** works in drawing, painting, installation, space, time and memory. Though research-based, his work emerges as a reaction – finding its form as he tries to process his thoughts and interests, which often relate in some way to (South) African history, popular memory and information systems.

**JESSICA HEMMINGS** is Professor and Head of the School of Visual Culture at the National College of Art & Design, Dublin. Her latest editorial and curatorial project, *Cultural Threads* (Bloomsbury: 2015), is a book about postcolonial thinking and contemporary textile practice accompanied by the travelling exhibition *Migrations*.

**EMMA LAURENCE** is a curator at the Goodman Gallery. She specialises in producing cross genre art performances, and initiating collaborations and projects that exist beyond the confines of traditional gallery space. Her projects have included performances by *The Brother Moves On*, *NTU* and *Vintage Cru*. During her tenure, she has brought artists, such as, *Nelisiwe Xaba*, *Tabita Rezaire* and *Nolan Oswald Dennis* into the gallery program. She has curated several important group exhibitions, including *Working Title 2013*, *Surfacing*, and *Other People's Memories* as well as co-ordinating the gallery's presence on the *Art Basel* and *Frieze* art fairs. Over the past five years, she has worked with established and emerging local and international artists, including *Alfredo Jaar*, *Liza Lou*, *Mounir Fatmi*, *Kendell Geers*, *Hank Willis Thomas*, and *Kudzanai Chiurai*.

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**THABISANI NDLOVU** is a senior lecturer at Walter Sisulu University in the Department of Arts. He has a keen interest in literary studies and human rights, as well as popular culture.

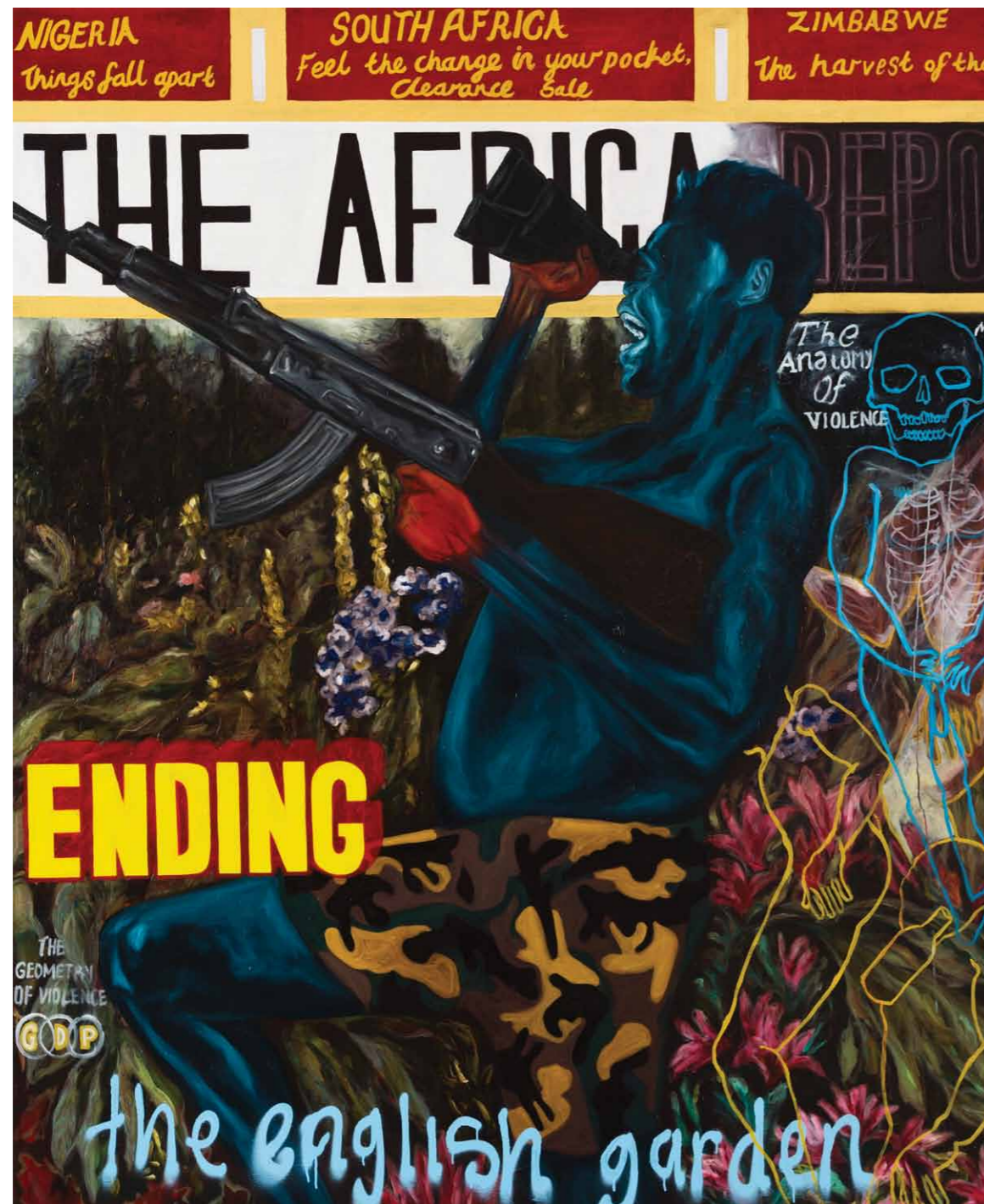
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the editors of the catalogue, we would like to acknowledge and thank the Goodman Gallery and Liza Essers for supporting the research and publication of this catalogue. Particularly we thank the gallery for not only supporting critical work as promotional work, but for their generous and strategic vision of addressing the research gap in black African visual arts. It is a sincere investment in imaginations of their present and the possible futures. We would also like to thank Kudzanai Chiurai for his quiet, inspiring and unintrusive encouragement during the research and production of this catalogue. It was such a privilege to work in the vicinity of such an immense talent and feel the rush of awe that must accompany all creations.

Last but not least, we would also like to show our gratitude to the contributors who stood by us when the project seemed to be stalling, or when a Dropbox of images crashed, or when we could not extend a calming hand each time a writer encountered haunting visions that are only possible when the scales are scraped off the eyeballs by Chiurai’s art.



UNTITLED (THE ENGLISH GARDEN) – 2013, oil and enamel on canvas, 222 x 180 cm

# TEXT AND TOKEN

## *Repetition and Transformation in Kudzanai Chiurai's English Garden*

BY ROBERT MUPONDE

### INTRODUCTION: REPETITION, RHYTHM AND RUPTURE

The painting *Untitled (English Garden)* (2013) can be viewed as movement and read as a network of conceptual metaphors and figures. To imagine the image as both viewable and readable is an acknowledgement of the net effect of Chiurai's compositional practices which include the combination of repetition and overlap to suggest a new way of seeing and reading, and to rethink the relation between texts and bodies, spaces and tokens in order to establish correspondences (cf. Teitelbaum 1992: 7-8).

My argument here is that the repetitions and overlaps exist not only in Chiurai's *English Garden* as an image, but are transported from earlier exhibitions, and transformed in the process, by the same artist, to the extent that I am persuaded to look at it as the final, unfolded destination of the visual narrative, the denouement — ENDING — of the cumulative tale of malevolent energy now succinctly and poignantly textualised and visualised as a riot of discourses. For example, the armed man who forms the focal point of *English Garden* performs the same posture as the armed man leading an onslaught in the junkyard of African freedom in *Revelations I* (2011, photograph) and *Revelations IV* (2011, photograph). The spectral female figures quailing in the corner of the *English Garden* are multiform and protean configurations of the woman/female in a male-centred world. You may consider the contrastive portrayal of female presence in the *Revelations* photographic series with that depicted in *Look Mom No Hands* (2011, oil on canvas); *Untitled (Mount the Nelson)* (2011, oil on canvas); *Untitled (Silent Noise)* (2013, oil on canvas) and *Moyo I-III* photographs (2013). The *English Garden* painting is therefore a depository of multi-layered texts/images that have travelled across exhibitions as well as through time. The energies inspired by these texts and images sluice through the destructively blossoming coarse life of the garden, and collect around the armed figure as spectral presences and discursive hauntings. There are two complementary ruptures in the process: one has to do with the garden, and the other with text.



## DESTRUCTIVE BLOSSOMING

The visible rupture of the metaphoric concept of the garden, in its various historical and aesthetic permutations, could evoke a prelapsarian Eden or a reconstruction of the ruin in lost times. It can be construed as a “single quest, a turning outward to the world, a search for an equilibrium in which mind and thing constitute one another in a creative blossoming like that of the first Garden” (Comito 1979: xi). Whereas the loss of Eden could be recovered through gardening art (cf. Cowell 1978) or the burial of the dead in manicured gardens (Coffin 1994: 148), Chiurai presents the climax of a series of the postcolonial subject’s inversion of the narrative of future redemption that Richard Drayton (2005: 3) believes is at the heart of the story of the loss of Eden. In Chiurai’s work, the garden simultaneously corroborates and upturns the two primary purposes that it served throughout the ages, which Marc Treib (1991: 106) defines “as a zone of modulated and intensified sensual experience; and as a vehicle for expressing symbolic, political and religious ideas beyond the realm of its tangible materials”. The sensual experience is that of intensified horror and recurrent haunting sights: of things falling apart; of revolutionary struggles and ideals being nothing more than a harvest of thorns (see *Revelations I-XI*, 2011); and a socio-political economy that places human dignity on the clearance sale rack (see *Money Back, Guarantee*, 2009, oil on canvas; *Tender*, 2010, oil on canvas; and *No One Likes a Bag of Bones*, 2010, oil on canvas). It is an unbounded zone of terror, and a vehicle for expressing malevolent energies. Pertinent examples are works such as *Safari Club*, (2013, charcoal and pastel on paper); *The Most Beautiful Boogie Man* (2013, charcoal and pastel on paper); *Rolex* (2010, mixed media on paper); *We Always Have Reason to Fear* (2009, lithographic print); *Sacrifice* (2011, charcoal on paper); and *Ritual* (2011, charcoal on paper).

Chiurai’s artwork presents an evasion of the wistful poetry of contemplation and contrition that the English Garden represents, and re-visions it as invaded by spectacles of disequilibrium and violent sensibilities. In his artwork, the boundary between garden and forest is blurred. It is the space of merging, transformation, and repetition. That which the garden is or was, the forest is or was. There is the fear of the destructive advance of coarse vegetation, which the untended garden represents, and the hope of concealing human tinkering with the power of nature through encouraging the regeneration of the forest’s vigorous, untrimmed growth (cf. Dutton 1937: 1-2).

In the undergrowth of this blurring and overlapping is a chilling notion of strife signalled by bone-white lettering flashing words such as ‘geometry’, ‘anatomy’ and ‘normalisation’. These terms relate to the quest for ordered knowledge of the human: the patterns of genocidal violence and its philosophical meaning (Praeg 2007), the biological roots of crime and the phenomenon of natural born killers (Raine 2013) and the mechanism for the clinical correction of malfunctioning psyches. The functional nature of these three fragments of discourses corresponds to the foundational utility of the garden: plants in gardens were originally meant for food, healing and ornamentation (see Dutton: 14). The function of these three textual fragments is to impose a crudely utilitarian epistemic order on a variety of human experience. This is meant to restore the vision of controlled (human) nature to the lost garden, comparable practices being the ones which were required by colonial governments to deal with the “shock of the world’s diversity” in botanical matters (cf. Drayton 2005: 24). Ornamentation is the motivation behind discourses that seek to correct, obliterate and purge human excesses, aberrations, deformities and malfunctions.

<i>Tender, 2010</i>	— p22	<i>Rolex, 2010</i>	— p71
<i>No One Likes a Bag of Bones, 2010</i>	— p62	<i>We Always Have Reason to Fear, 2009</i>	— p22
<i>Safari Club, 2013</i>	— p89	<i>Sacrifice, 2011</i>	— p95
<i>The Most Beautiful Boogie Man, 2013</i>	— p23	<i>Ritual, 2011</i>	— p94

The effective compositional device of foregrounding allows us to view and read the forest and the garden as metaphoric concepts and sites of practices which are intermingled and indistinguishable as they are focalised through the armed figure that seems to grow naturally and robustly from the colourful mulch and through the textual flotsam, in the same way the armed gang in *Revelations I* (2011, photograph) grows naturally from the junkyard. The feet of the armed man are firmly planted in the garden but his torso is an impenetrable black silhouette that looms above the tall trees in the background, making him an overwhelming object.

John Dixon Hunt views the garden as a cultural object. He writes: “Gardens, too, are jars, set down in otherwise untouched landscape, and part of their function and interest is that they alter their surroundings by their presence” (Hunt 1991: 19). However, what we see here is that the armed man who towers over plants, figures and texts is the token of the alteration of the environment. What is altered is the garden-into-forest and forest-into-garden. Thus the armed man in the garden-forest represents both what Ralph Dutton thought of as the conquest over cultivation which nature epitomises in its battle against the garden, and the struggle of the garden with the imminence of

obliteration by rampant shrubs (Dutton 1937: 2). He annihilates. He dominates plants, objects and texts. He is the reason the texts exist. He is the cultivar of imperial discourses and a symbol of the chaos of postcolonial memory and history; he is an offshoot (pun intended!) of different cultures of struggle over nature and power. He is also a product of the meeting and mating of hostile but different spatial and political cultures. (We must not forget that English gardening is a violent process, involving constraining species to grow together or apart, cutting their tops and branches, and ruthlessly chucking out other forms of nature). Like the cultural mutant that he is, he has grown larger than the sum total of his genetic influences.

## *What is altered is the garden-into-forest and forest-into-garden.*

The shape-shifting ghostly outlines of Western scientific and philosophical hypotheses that seek to contain him and assign him some quintessence, are dwarfed by his backward-leaning body (threatening to squash out of the frame what is behind him), and struggle to see and exist beyond him both as their monster and blind spot. In other words, he both confirms and threatens the coherence and the life span of colonial and post-imperial discourses. In terms of scale and proportion, the ghostly figures occupy only a quarter of the surface. And: they are a crowd quailing in a corner.

Ralph Dutton enthuses over certain garden plants that do not need trimming and shaping in order to register their ornamental presence. He writes: “only the best specimens can advantageously support complete exposure, the remainder are materially improved by the concealing cloak of adornment” (Dutton 1937: 7). So the rest of the objects, figures and texts in the painting are like annotations in the biography of the man who is towering in the middle of the image. As a solid jar, to linger a little on Hunt’s metaphor, he amends what surrounds him to the status of outlines and marginalia. The ornamentation he enjoys are tokens of violence and mastery. They are the army shorts, the gun and the binoculars. The latter is an instrument that bestows him with an expanded vista. The pair of binoculars, far from being a symbol of the belatedness of postcolonial modernity, marks him as a master who possesses his environment. His extended and enhanced sight, which penetrates through the clutter of the woods and weeds, and the riot of discourses that surround him, suggests heightened vigilance, a quality necessary for defining menacing presence in a place.

## TWO-HEADED MENACE

Yet, it seems to me, by the act of splitting the focal point, his soaring and memorial-like dominance is transformed by being demoted to that of a two-headed beastly menace.

He is scary as a man who possesses a dangerous powerfulness, a human being with the wrong use of the kind of power that he has which is represented by his blood-red hands. This power, because it is associated with bush-craft, has animalistic connotations.

The unusually elongated simian-like visage of the man, stretched to the limits by the war-scream issuing out of his wide-open

mouth, recalls the predatory face imprinted on his brown pair of shorts. The presence of the second face is adroitly concealed by the use of the bifurcated focal point: as viewers we are compelled to divide attention between the lower body and the torso of the armed man, with the upper body exhibiting an inordinate amount of distracting attention-seeking theatrics. However, once the transfixed eyes of the trained viewer climb down the upper trunk of the man, it is not hard work to find that in fact his camouflage shorts have the appearance of the head of a crouching, malformed feline creature with an askew visage: the right eye has the look of an owl's, and the left eye has the eyeball of a lion or leopard, and the nose is obviously that of a big cat (lion or leopard). He is a two-headed changeling, a hyper-

vigilant four-eyed simian-cum-feline creature, a shape-shifting supernatural hunter (armed with tooth, claw and gun). Is he the protector of the garden? The fire-yellow eyes of his lower head hold vigil over the huddled female figures, while the inscrutable eyes of his upper head are gripped by a scream-inducing vision beyond the frame of the image. The feline-simian creature leers threateningly at the female forms. Are the stooping and huddled outlines of female figures members of his pride, his shrewdness or his harem? Or are they the damsels in distress, waiting to be

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raped and slain by the archetypal villain of a Gothic narrative? Or, do they represent his repressed libido which he confronts by the erection of himself as a formidable landmark in the garden? There in the garden, tall and tilting, solid blue-black, four-eyed: he is a timeless allegory of ambiguity, power and terror.

He is, however, not a dawn-of-the-planet-of-apes apparition gone wrong. If forests in narratives and experiences of African liberation struggles have turned up murderous thugs as many times as they have created revolutionary liberators, the English Garden, produced during periods of high civilisation (Cowell 1978: 8) has, as a location, also had its fair share of gloom and horror. As a setting for Gothic tales, it depicts a declining world characterised by ruins and decay (a world of things falling apart!), uncanny creatures, vampirism, rape and murder, madness and barbarism. It hosts putrid remains of slain bodies in manicured gardens, haunting dwellers of estates, castles, mansions or cottages, as well as producing the unbelievably sublime revelations created by numerous visionary artists such as Cowell (1978) and Beardsley (1995) examine.

So, for me, standing in Chiurai's garden, viewing and reading his garden-based artworks as Gothic might make good sense if only it is in order to establish enduring correspondences and repetitions without flattening the differences that space and time — and historical origins — make to the content and interpretation of genres. There is obviously the danger of African cultural productions being muffled in the rucksack of European genres, their uniqueness interpreted as adding exotic ingredients to the pleasurable terror of the long-predicted narrative of the violent ruin and decay of former outposts of the empire. But if the impulse behind reading his garden art as Gothic, which includes here *Moyo I-III* (2013, photograph), is to corral it into interpretive frameworks that would guard it against either straying into Western theoretical formulations of “the New Barbarism” which describe African postcolonial violence as “a throwback to some African Dark Age” (cf. Richards 1996: xiii-xxix), or prevent it from irretrievably drifting into the whirling currents of afro-pessimism and afro-centrism, I would suggest that his *English Garden* is a critical presentation. It invites readers and viewers to fashion new and untried visual idioms in order to texture minute but indelible shifts in his artistic vision, much of it concealed in the prickly cactus, floating forms and texts in his garden.

## RIOT OF TEXTS: AFRICA ENDING THE ENGLISH GARDEN

Chiurai's *English Garden* painting presents an invasion and laying to waste of the discourses that power the English Garden, once again illustrating what Ralph Dutton observed nearly 80 years ago, that, "Architecture can be stimulated by strife; some of the finest Norman buildings, indeed, were produced by the necessity for defence, but the peaceful art of gardening can only thrive under orderly circumstances" (Dutton 1937: 22-23). In times of strife, therefore, the forest-garden flourishes like architecture in disorderly times. In African history and narratives of anti-colonial struggle, the armed guerrilla ensconced in the dark forest-garden, is Ogun or the African Prometheus (Pepetela, *Mayombe*). The forest-garden is therefore a much more accommodating conceptual structure for both the ghosts and realities of Western science and philosophy about Africa, and the shaping of African postcolonial politics by Africans. It is a natural wilderness, capable of transcendent revelations of human insight and capacities, as well as revealing the decrepit and repetitive nature of its political processes and critiques. In this wilderness, the hyper-presence of the armed figure embodies the currents as well as the point of the critique of New Barbarism, which views African conflicts as proof of the resurgence of "essential African savagery" (Richards 1996: xvi).

Texting, as a compositional device, helps Chiurai to reveal the network of symbols that precipitate the dysphoria registered across the continent. *The Africa Report* represents the inexorable erosion of confidence in African hope as it repeats narratives and discourses that conjure up incorrigible savagery. This erosion is a result of repetition of cycles of disorder. But that would be one of the many versions of the African image told by Chiurai's *English Garden*. Here, text is a significant spot of meaning, a flash of history. It is an incantation which brings into sharp relief the topoi of social and political life in the African world. Texting is one of the ways that Chiurai uses to depict the precarious syntheses of troubled legacies and urgent futures. Text-dropping signifies the leakages of meaning, the uncontainable pressure to explode the much-predicted apocalypse conjured in the ENDING, the geometry and anatomy of violence. Text has spectral qualities,

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like a visitation. It functions as an aide memoire, an insistent reminder of destiny, and forgotten promises. Like a ghost, it "operates as a particular, and peculiar, kind of social memory, an alternate form of history-making in which things usually forgotten, discarded, or repressed become foregrounded, whether as items of fear, regret, explanation, or desire" (Richardson 2003: 25). Therein lies the complex revolutionary nuances of Chiurai's message-bearing spectres, often misconstrued as the essential elements of Afro-pessimism.

This way of sifting grains of meaning from the sediments of volatile histories provides one example of how objects and images may engage viewers in ways that stray from the

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cultural agenda of either the critic or the artist, and "outrun the meanings attributed to them by generations of interpreters" (cf. Moxey 2008: 135). It urges us to look at the capacity of images and texts to mingle and produce what Mieke Bal, in her analysis of exhibition practices, called "novel coherences" which do not fall back on predictable models (Bal 2010: 10). Here, in the garden, meanings overflow and shift as objects and texts collide and collude. At face value, bodies and texts are caught in stagnation of meaning, if we go by how they are positioned in relation to each other: the signifier having an isomorphic, one-dimensional relationship to the signified. However, if considered as a semantic hot spot, an ever-shifting place of socialisation and dissociation, the garden depicts bodies and texts in motion, and presents both the pathology inscribed in the medical discourses and the conviviality that shared pathologisation

produces. The skeletal figure whose head is wedged between violent medical discourses is just as forbidding in the company of the simian-feline faces of the armed figure. The garden itself, brown-grey-red-yellow, offers a multisensory experience of smoke, ash and fire, and the blossoming of passion (in the red of roses?) and the steadfastness of blue (of violet?). Yet the red also relates to the shedding of blood signified by the gory hands of the armed man (is this the Fanonian anatomy of liberatory violence, or violence of a natural born killer?), and the violet blue invokes the outline of the phantom staring with ghostly propriety, hiding its double nakedness in its own hands.

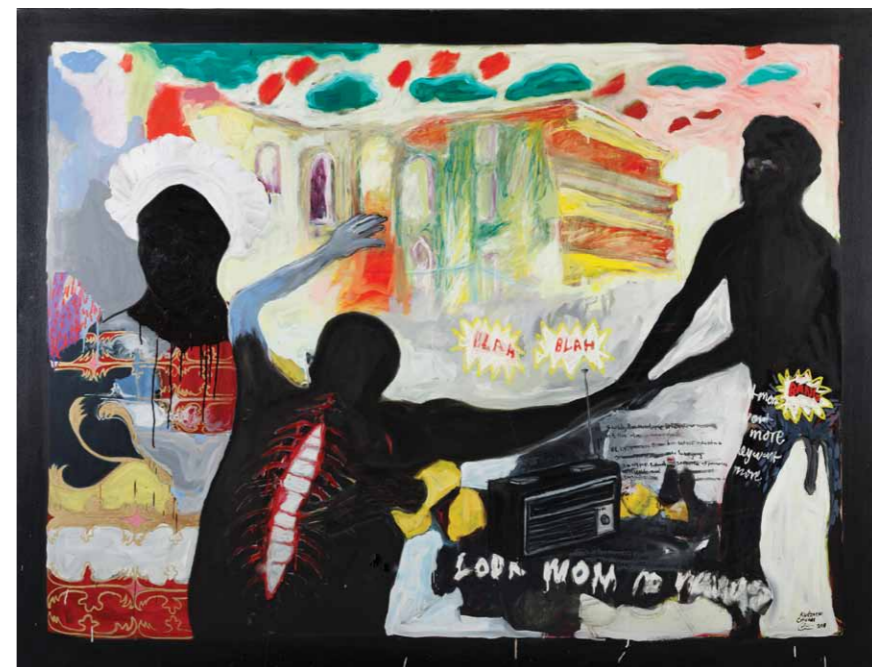
The novel coherence of the image and its jostling meanings point to the complicated plurality that is often sacrificed by interpreters of Chiurai's art in their quest for easy descriptions. Visual and interpretive distance fades out and elides detail to the extent that as the viewer physically moves away from the image, only three texts stand out as a coherent and triumphant narrative of struggle: *Africa Ending the English Garden*. It is such a relief to be standing in the garden in which the riot of colonial and postcolonial discourses turns up intellectually and visually enriching ambiguities.

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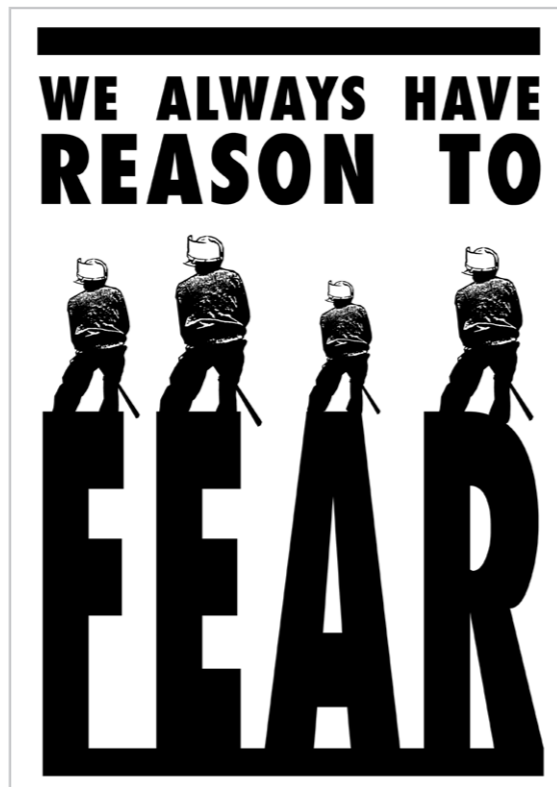
UNTITLED (SILENT NOISE) – 2013, oil on canvas, 200 x 160 cm



LOOK MOM NO HANDS – 2011, oil on canvas, 180 x 200 cm



**TENDER** – 2010, oil on canvas, 160 x 200 cm



**WE ALWAYS HAVE REASON TO FEAR I & II** – 2009, lithographic print, unsigned, each 64 x 45 cm



**THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BOOGIE MAN** – 2013, charcoal and pastel on paper, 163 x 125 cm

# CITY FABRIC

*Kudzanai Chiurai's Paintings  
of Inner-City Johannesburg*

BY THABISANI NDLOVU

**M**UCH AS KUDZANAI CHIURAI'S RECENT WORK is fascinating and has grabbed the attention of critics, it is his earlier paintings of Johannesburg's inner-city that I find riveting, particularly work from 2008. Taking a cue from one of his paintings, *City Fabric* (2008, oil on canvas), each of the paintings discussed here weaves rich stories of the psychic burden of migration to, and existence in, inner city Johannesburg. His paintings of cityscapes evoke the smells, sounds and 'spirit' of these places. The intertextual representations of cityscapes in the paintings *The Best Movers* (2009, oil on canvas), *I Write What I Like* (2008, mixed media on canvas), *Fast Trak Communication* (2009, oil and spraypaint on canvas), *Item One on Communication* (2009, mixed media on canvas), *Fabulous while Answering the Phone* (2009, oil on canvas) and *City Fabric*, explore the warp and weft not only of the inner city but of Johannesburg as a whole.

<i>City Fabric, 2008</i>	— p33
<i>The Best Movers, 2009</i>	— p37
<i>I Write What I Like, 2008</i>	— p34
<i>Fast Trak Communication, 2009</i>	— p39
<i>Item One on Communication, 2009</i>	— p36
<i>Fabulous while Answering the Phone, 2009</i>	— p38

*Chiurai's earlier loose  
brush paintings are  
absorbing because of  
the way they understate  
the psychic burdens of  
migrancy in inner city  
Johannesburg.*

Chiurai constantly references songs, adverts and parlance to express multiple layers of irony. Each picture is a rich and colourful fabric that challenges rash labels of Chiurai's work like the now threadbare 'Afro-pessimism'. In their sparseness, these paintings play on the idea of surface and depth, exterior and interior, visibility and invisibility. There is more to the fronts of the buildings, and similarly, the streets, beyond providing a context. The graphics on the buildings, particularly exotic ones, announce diverse routes into the inner city, the jostling for business and space, the nervous energy in this place as well as dreams of escape not only from one's place of origin (both inside and outside South Africa) but also fantasies of partaking in the city's consumerist culture. In short, the inhabitants are also writing themselves on the city's canvas, working towards their moment of 'arrival'. In many ways, through graphics that suggest the plurality of cultures, nationalities, 'trades', and a desire to 'make it' in Johannesburg, the paintings call to mind the fluidity of Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001) with its constant traffic and weaving of humanity. In some of the identified paintings by Chiurai, such fluidity is indicated by dripping or flowing paint.

Chiurai's earlier loose brush paintings are absorbing because of the way they understate the psychic burdens of migrancy in inner city Johannesburg. These inner city scenes are either devoid of people or are represented by shadows or a few faceless figures, with the exception of *I Write What I Like* and *Fabulous While Answering the Phone* among the works chosen for this essay. The main challenge appears to be that of inserting oneself in the city of gold, to be part of its fabric. Can one write what one likes on the canvas that is inner city Johannesburg?

Not if you notice that the man in the painting *I Write What I Like* is squatting (literally) at a street corner. The graffiti wall behind him, and the block of flats around the corner, dwarf him and challenge his assertion. The tension is in whether his claim to self-determination can go beyond acts such as writing graffiti on a wall. But it could also be that the phrase *I Write What I Like*, made popular by Steve Biko in his collection of essays with the same title, is an expression of defiance. In this case, it is possible to read the proclamation as saying that in spite of the difficulties of living in the inner city, the squatting man is determined to make an imprint, to wrestle with the city, to become a fibre in its fabric. If one puts it in the context of the xenophobic attacks of May 2008, this could be a defiant resolve by a foreign immigrant not to leave, not to be intimidated as he is aware of how xenophobia aims to reduce the richness of the city's fabric, indeed, to bleach its colours. When one recalls that Biko's philosophy was Black Consciousness, it is also possible to read the painting as an indictment of Africans killing each other through enduring self-hate.

As pointed out already, *City Fabric* depicts not only the diversity of people and activities in the inner city but also their connectedness. Beyond the idea of the weaving of different cultures, nationalities, languages and indeed distinctive personal stories, there is the idea of 'fabric' to refer to the underlying structure of something. The inner city as the basic warp and weft of Johannesburg calls to mind other places outside it, some of which are its flipside. There are the townships and the affluent northern suburbs with fancy restaurants, orderly and secure shopping malls. Of course, next to some of these fancy places are squatter settlements. The inhabitants of the inner city move between these places, usually for work and sometimes to visit. The chequered grids of the cloth in the painting are reproduced in the burglar-proofed windows to suggest uneasiness in connectedness, with this time, a hint of criminality. The linen and fabric shop, Habby Linen Fabric Centre, is next to a public phone shop and on one side of these two shops is what looks like a block of residential flats, with a "To Let" sign on the far right. There is a medley of purposes for the units in this building, something we also see in the painting, *The Best Movers*. The sign for the curiously named "Trust Me Tavern" has the Dickies insignia next to it. Dickies is a South African clothing brand that also makes bags. Beneath these two signs is one that announces "Micro Busiess [sic] Solutions". The 'solutions' are listed as "laminating, letter head, flyers, printing". The mention of flyers, conjures the ubiquity of flyers on healing and penis enlargement. Next to "Micro Busiess [sic] Solutions" is the exotic sounding "La Renommee Fast Food Restaurant", pointing to a Francophone presence in the inner city. In the foreground is an example of micro business in the form of a removals van, its manufacturer's logo, Mitsubishi Motors, very distinct. A Panasonic box has been loaded and the name of the removals company is written in dripping scrawl, "The Best Movers". A faceless figure stands behind the van whilst three darker forms can be seen inside.

The faceless figures and shadows represent the ironic style of the paintings as do the scrawls on the buildings — names of restaurants and shops that suggest various routes and places of origin on the African continent; names that announce small informal businesses such as television and radio repairs, as well as hair salons. These exist alongside international brand names that stoke the fire of fantasy: of scaling the social ladder, of escape from war, hunger, and perhaps crippling familial responsibilities — in fact, a combination of all of these factors. Multinational and national brand names announce the muscle of capital as well as the promise of economic success, or at least a tolerable life. The inner city beckons and disconcerts simultaneously. There is always the constant reminder that one is a sojourner and Janus-faced, hoping for better future in a difficult city and looking back to the place of origin with a need to stay in contact as seen through the ubiquitous phone shops and public phones. Thus one is embedded in the inner city even as one is alienated from it. The inhabitants of the inner city, in different degrees of woundedness, must re-invent themselves in this place that is on the decline or has decayed, depending on one's point of view. This place of 'urban decay' becomes a zone of self-reinvention and optimism. It is a place of constant motion and many hope that it will not be long before they leave Hillbrow, Berea and other parts of the inner city.

Chiurai's paintings of the inner city work through suggestion, as illustrated by the sign "Tavern" in various paintings. This sign's multiple folds of meaning may remain hidden to those who have not been to these taverns or heard first-hand accounts of 'when I first arrived in Johannesburg'. The tavern is emblematic of the multi-purpose nature of the places that Chiurai paints. The tavern is a social space whose common denominator is the consumption of alcohol. Hillbrow and parts of the inner city are (in)famous for the inordinate number of bottle stores (liquor outlets) and taverns. The tavern is a pick-up spot for commercial sex, a place where deals of all sorts (legitimate and otherwise) are struck, the place of loud jukebox music and dancing. But the significance of the tavern goes beyond relaxation, work and organised crime. It also speaks of dissipation, addiction, disease and death. This is where one gets 'swallowed by the city' as they say in the Ndebele language. But taverns are also homes for some 'new' arrivals with nowhere to stay in the inner city. It is not unusual for people in such a situation to hang out at taverns until closing time, catching whatever sleep they can before they are 'swept out'.

Another telling sign is found in the painting *Item One on Communication*. Amid layers of inner city features and two human figures, parts of the word "Methodist Church" peep through. The Methodist Church in central Johannesburg became synonymous with homeless people in the city, particularly

*This place of  
'urban decay'  
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of self-reinvention  
and optimism.*

Zimbabweans. The overcrowding in the church caused concern, and combined with poor ablution facilities, gave the church a persistent musky smell of sweat, urine and other indescribable smells. In the painting, the unsanitary conditions in the church are emphasised by an ample proportioned woman in the foreground carrying a bag with letters DG on it, standing for the Director General of Home Affairs, who also happened to be the Minister of Home Affairs in 2008 — Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. Her attire is sophisticated and she has a hat to match. One is forced to imagine the kind of sophisticated perfume she could be wearing versus the smell of the church that she is striding past. Her face is in shadow and it is not clear whether she is looking sideways at the Methodist Central Church or avoiding it by looking straight ahead. In 2008, the Central Methodist church was full and spilling over with people after the xenophobic attacks in May that year.

The DG's solid and voluptuous figure, in combination with her confident stride, seem to say that she belongs to a different world, one that stands in contrast with the destitution of the Central Methodist Church to which the sketchy figure behind her seems to belong. Also foregrounded is a Vodacom advertisement that exhorts consumers to get a Nokia phone and "Roam Africa" on the company's mobile phone network. Information technology of the sort being advertised is out of reach for the church dwellers but readily available for the DG. Linked to the Vodacom advertisement is another for "The best fashion whether you choose to impress for the day or make a statement in a suit." The shared space between the Vodacom advert and that of fashion suggests that a smartphone is being used as a medium to both advertise



*The city is not without  
its possibilities of  
reinvention, exuberance  
as well as promises and  
realities of partaking  
in consumerism.*

and buy fashion. In fact, the two complement each other — the best (latest) phone must go together with the best (latest) fashion. In the background are little shops represented by numbers: “Shop 12”, “Shop 13” and “Shop 14”, whose roller shutter doors are closed as if to confirm the financial muscle of big companies like Vodacom and others that can sell online. These little shops belong to foreigners and are not open for business, possibly for two reasons. The first may be out of fear that another wave of xenophobic attacks may erupt. The second is that big business faces no threat in South Africa, is always open and prospering, whereas informal businesses run by petty traders in these cell-like shops where the prospect of growth is small and fear rules, shut down each night.

If *Item One on Communication* is a cellular phone, it has different purposes for the Director General, who turns a blind eye to the vulnerable refugees that inhabit the Methodist Church. Whereas the DG may enjoy ‘roaming’ Africa on her phone as well as using the same phone to connect to the internet and shop, for the dwellers of the Central Methodist Church, ‘roaming’ refers to their homelessness and quest for shelter, even if temporary. Here, Chiurai may have been condemning the police raids at the church, aimed at flushing out illegal immigrants. The homeless refugees who would really want to roam on their phones, to connect with their loved ones left behind, cannot. Such are the ironies in this painting.

I find *Fabulous While Answering the Phone* the most expressive of all the selected paintings. A couple appears to be posing for a photograph and immediately, the theme of self-image and representation becomes apparent. The girl is wearing a skimpy red and white

polka dot outfit over a pair of black leggings. She appears self-assured and almost eager to be seen in this pose with the young man. He, on the other hand, looks rather demure. In fact, the young man looks out of place and very self-conscious in what appears to be an ill-fitting shirt (perhaps a hand-me-down?) because the sleeves go as far as the forearms and the collar is visibly too big for his neck. Something that looks like a thin tie dangles all the way down and is tucked into his trousers. He appears to be the Themba-comes-to-town stock figure or the village bumpkin dazed by city lights. The contrast between the two is what gives the picture its expressive force. The young man bashfully clasps his hands and his lover holds on to one of his arms. The hat that the young man wears does not make him look any more confident.

The girl’s self-image is clearly mediated by popular culture and what she yearns for is more than just visibility; it is the glamour of stardom associated with being in a big city. This is clear from the text, “Not only will I look fabulous while answering the phone I think I spice up the office”. Her dreams of grandeur are set so low that her fantasy, garnered ironically from middle class magazines, does not go beyond being an office receptionist or clerk. She is a product of her environment as seen through the two adverts on either side of the couple. The one on the right advertises radio and television repairs and public phones, and on the left, mattresses. Radio and television repairs are for the most part associated with those who cannot buy these two gadgets new — in short, the poor. It might not be immediately clear for some that the “Sleep Time Mattress Factory Shop” manufactures thin, small mattresses that can be rolled and stored away easily by inner city flat dwellers who can only afford to pay rent for a ‘space’. In this arrangement, as many as eight or ten people can share a room. Here, one is reminded of Kgebetli Moele’s novel, *Room 207* (2006) in which seven young men share one room. Renting of space is normal in inner city Johannesburg so there is a ready market for these small mattresses. However, the girl in Chiurai’s painting refuses to be crushed by these circumstances, in the manner reminiscent of Kopano Matlwa’s character Fikile in *Coconut* (2007). Through her confidence, the girl appears determined, like Fikile, to ‘fake it’ until she makes it. The dreary surroundings inspire her to thrive towards a low level job which she associates with the ‘fab and glam’ of glossy magazines. If she fails, then she can still rely on her imagination to transport herself beyond her dreary reality. That has its limits and she might suffer psychological anguish indicated by the runny white paint on her arms.

*Fast Trak Communication* shares a lot of features with the other paintings discussed here at a stylistic and thematic level. In the foreground is an old-style telephone booth. In the background is a two-storey building. The first floor houses a telecommunications company called Fast

Trak. On the ground floor are various shops which include Chama Unisex Hairdressing Salon, General Hair Complex and Buiya Trading that exhorts customers to “SHOP 'N SMILE.” In the foreground, text reads, “No Agreement Today”, a reference to Fela Kuti’s song *No Agreement* (1977). Reference to Fela Kuti represents the presence of West Africans in the city whilst Buiya is likely to be a Bangladeshi name representing the presence of Indian migrants.

There is no sign of human beings in *Fast Trak*. The shops appear closed and the interior is dark. Darkness here works in the same way that faceless figures express self-effacement, self-exclusion — a kind of calculated visibility for one practical reason or another, or perhaps loneliness. Modernity, represented by newer, faster and better forms of “fast trak” communications, is unutilised, like its old counterpart, the coin phone. General Hair Complex which sells “all types of hair pieces” suggests through its name that there is a ‘complex’ in the psychological sense of the word. This makes more sense when we consider Fela Kuti’s *No Agreement*. In the song, the singer refuses to do anything that will make his brother (any black person) hungry or homeless. The closed informal shops, likely because of xenophobic attacks, talk to loss of livelihood and possibly life. Africans have a ‘complex’, the painting seems to suggest, that of self-hatred, which harks back to the painting *I Write What I Like*. As a result, there is no agreement between Johannesburg’s image of “A World Class African City”, as the city authorities dub it, and the kinds of inhumane tendencies such as xenophobia. “No agreement” in this sense talks of incongruence — the most ‘advanced’ city in Africa turns out to be barbaric.

Chiurai’s paintings of inner cityscapes afford us an opportunity to think of the ways in which both internal and external migrants flow into Johannesburg’s inner city to weave the fabric of the city as a whole and colour it in spite of its restiveness and insecurity. The sense of fabric includes surfaces, locales and expressions of stubborn hope on the one hand, and nervousness on the other. The city is not without its possibilities of reinvention, exuberance as well as promises and realities of partaking in consumerism.

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**CITY FABRIC** – 2008, oil on canvas, 200 x 180 cm



*I WRITE WHAT I LIKE* – 2008, mixed media, 120 x 220 cm



**ITEM ONE ON COMMUNICATION** – 2009, mixed media on canvas, 170 x 220 cm



**THE BEST MOVERS** – 2009, mixed media on canvas, 120 x 220 cm



**FABULOUS WHILE ANSWERING THE PHONE** – 2009, oil and spray paint on canvas, 170 x 220 cm



**FAST TRAK COMMUNICATION** – 2009, oil and spray paint on canvas, 170 x 220 cm

# NARCISSISTIC RAGE AND HISTORICAL RECURRENCE

BY JOSIAH NYANDA

**I** BEGIN MY CONTRIBUTION, like Sturken (2012: 152) lauding his hero, John Berger (1972), by making a declaration that Kudzanai Chiurai's artistic images are "assured, unapologetic, and bold [with a] declarative voice". Embedded in historical recurrence and narcissistic rage, the images expose the artist's radical nature and in some way ask the viewers to come up with their own interpretations of them, without so much as a proscribed narrative. For purposes of my discussion, I have chosen to focus on Chiurai's photographic series, *Dying to be Men* (2009) the exhibition *Communists and Hot Chicken Wings: The Birth of a New Nation* in 2010 and the *Revelations* (2011) photographic series. This selection places Chiurai's art "at the intersection of painting and photography" (Wallace, 2012), as he mixes the two genres to create images that cut across disciplinary boundaries. I could also add that a unique characteristic of his images is that they are full of drama and theatricality that show the artist's "acute awareness of history and his relentless attentiveness to the current conditions of art and society, activities that have in turn been essential to his further pursuits as a critic, pedagogue and art historian" (Augaitis 2012: 17). It is Chiurai's "increasing consciousness of individuality, accompanying an increasing awareness of history" as Berger (1972: 10) says, and how his "dissatisfaction and discontent" with history have resulted in the violent eruptions of narcissistic rage, that is the motivation of my discussion (Wind 1963: 1). I will, therefore, pursue his art as if it were a coherent representation of his life and times.

In so doing, I seek to highlight the fact that there is evidence of an existing relationship between historical recurrence and narcissistic rage in Chiurai's selected works. In *Ori Gersht: History Repeating*, Al Miner (2012: 25) argues that "[l]ike William Faulkner, who famously wrote 'The past is never dead. It's not even past,' Gersht [and I would add Chiurai here] sees history as an ever-evolving and self-referential story, one dominated by tragedy but also by beauty". This paradoxical view of the trajectory of history suggests that "history may be cyclical" and has the potential of repeating itself (ibid). Trompf (1979: 1) calls this "the idea of historical recurrence" or the transmutation, rebirth and reenactment of history. However, it has been observed that great art and creative energies emerge when history is replete with turmoil and confusion, and when circumstances are far from reassuring, but full of discontent and dissatisfaction.

Such observations, avers Wind, "encourage the completely mistaken view that the best artists [...] are those who are disgruntled" (1963: 1). Mistaken or not, it is patently clear that in Chiurai, we encounter an exiled artist whose art has been shaped by historical recurrences, is closer to life and is representative of "a traumatized generation" and its quest for a return to order (Eastham 2014: 18). The anger, bitterness and rage that manifest in and through his art are symptomatic of an artist who has been plugged into the anxieties of his day.

One thing we cannot ignore when dealing with visual art, according to Moxey (2008), is the fact that in visual art, we encounter the image in the present. This, he adds, is "regardless of the period in which it may have been created, it is necessarily alive in our own time" (ibid, 135). Drawing on Moxey's idea of the present in art, it is my argument that Chiurai draws on history in order to critique the present. This places the viewer in a position where he encounters history through art images in the present. Thus, when we encounter an image, we see an artist's attempt at inventing history in a manner that portrays the past not as a place and space to live in, but "a well of conclusions from which to draw in order to act" and to shape our perceptions and ways of seeing (Berger 1972: 11).

A bit of background would help clarify why Chiurai's images are emotionally charged and imbued with a spirit of bitterness. Born in 1981 in Zimbabwe, Chiurai belongs to the "Born free" generation of Zimbabwean artists who have found themselves in exile, inadvertently as economic refugees or in pursuit of further education (Zvomuya 2010). Among the host of self-exiled Zimbabwean artists are Chenjerai Hove (now deceased), Christopher Mlalazi, Petina Gappah, Brian Chikwava, Thomas Mapfumo and many others. Like other Zimbabwean artists, Chiurai looks back at his mother country and how it has been run down by the leadership of Mugabe and the Zanu-PF since 1980. It seems pertinent, therefore, to uncover and make an expose of some of Zimbabwe's socio-political and economic dimensions that he was immersed in that were, and still are, instrumental in determining his responses, reactions and subjectivities in the creation of the *Dying to be Men* series.

The *Dying to be Men* series is a repetition (series) of revelatory photographs that are politicised and encompass

highly pragmatic criticism that has been adopted by Zimbabwean artists in exile today — whether literary, musical or visual. Through biting irony and satire, Chiurai embraces the method of social engagement which is so typical of most young Zimbabwean artists today. His pictorial depiction of Zimbabwe as a nation that has been militarised ironically under Mugabe’s civilian rule (Nyanda 2013), betrays narcissistic rage. Describing the pain of being in exile as “sulphurous torture”, Zvomuya observes that “what oozes as if from an open, suppurating wound, is the pain that derives from being a citizen of a troubled (and troubling) country” (2010: 177). This is the pain that we encounter in the recurrent images of self-aggrandising, gun-toting ministers in Chiurai’s *Dying to be Men* photographs.

What one might find obvious and repulsive is the flamboyant and extravagant lifestyles demonstrated by the Ministers of Enterprise, Finance and Foreign Affairs through their taste for expensive attire that include among other things gold jewellery, cellphones and fur coats.

While this has become typical of politicians in Africa, what may not be familiar are the menacing, gun-toting images of the Black President, and Ministers of Defence and Education respectively. After the fall of Muammar Gaddafi, African countries are by and large headed by civilian and democratically elected leaders. Or at least they claim to be. This seems to be the claim that Chiurai is challenging, and ridiculing even, through the *Dying to be Men* series. The images are as revealing of a society that has been militarised as they are of Chiurai’s artistic, political and personal struggles placed in the context of Zimbabwe. The caricature of a minister of education carrying a revolver where everyone can see it, and the minister of defence carrying an AK-47 rifle, is telling. In the context of Zimbabwe, “the military has entrenched its power in strategic socio-political and economic institutions such as government parastatals, commissions and companies in which government has a stake” (Nyanda 2013: 8). This deliberate militarisation of key socio-political and economic institutions goes beyond national boundaries. The recent threats of a military coup in Lesotho and the coup in Burkina Faso are telling examples of what the gun can do in African politics.

The repeated images of guns, contends Miner, have the “power to shock as to open the viewers’ eyes to the

numbness induced by repeated exposure” (2012: 23). This is true of the South African society. The media — both print and electronic — is always awash with images and stories of aggressive acts and volatile situations. The gun culture has seen numerous cases of armed robberies in South Africa. Therefore, beyond exposing a society that has been militarised, the *Dying to be Men* series depicts a society in turmoil and fear-ridden, where the gun is the only thing that gives one a false sense of security. Through evocative and innovative photographs, Chiurai takes a deep and discerning look at his present society — South Africa — and his immediate past home — Zimbabwe — through what Miner calls “startlingly subversive routes” (ibid). The *Dying to be Men* series is thus a commentary on the violence, fear and suppression of the twenty-first century, and I have used Zimbabwe and South Africa as microcosms of these worst chapters in the history of African politics and life.

Violence is one of the legacies left by colonialism in Africa. Colonialism was a violent phenomenon, and the process of decolonisation was equally violent. Hence, Fanon observes that “[i]t is true that we could equally well stress [that] the rise of a new nation, the setting up of a new state” as part of the decolonisation process is characterised by violence (rpt 1990: 27). The birth of a new nation, argues Fanon, “evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it” (ibid, 28). With the birth of the new nation, the native finds himself in a narrow world that is strewn with limitations and prohibitions, and absolute violence seems to be the only emotional outlet. In a case and/or curse of historical recurrence, the story of decolonisation and attainment of independence in Africa is a narrative that is littered with episodic moments of violence. For instance, Zimbabwe witnessed the gory moments of dissidents, Mozambique had its fair share of violence with the Renamo bandits, Angola endured twenty-seven years of Unita rebels, while Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo, had to face the wrath of the Banyamulenge militia. The history of post-independent Rwanda and Burundi is smeared with the bloody images of hate and anger between the Hutu and Tutsi, and today, the mere mention of the name Boko Haram in Nigeria and al-Shabaab in Kenya and Somalia sends shivers across Africa and the world. In all this, violent rage is exemplified by “a great array of bayonets and cannon” that the rebels possess (Fanon 28).

This seems to be the unpleasant historical trajectory that Chiurai recreates through his photographs in the *Revelations* series. This series of dramatic and theatrically created images takes us through and into some of the worst chapters in the history of African politics and life. Chiurai “utilizes [...] the camera lens, to document these moral assaults [...] and] to deliver the [painful] truth” (Miner 2012: 23). Chiurai is conscious of the fact that a single shot cannot give his viewers a whole story that would hold their attention, so he generates a series of pictures that are intimately connected to the historical events he wants to tell. The series betrays his narcissistic rage. Commenting on popular art delivered in series, Mudimbe observes “the narrative sequence it displays, and its populist message” and argues that “works of this kind carry a message, manipulating, arranging, and combining signs so as to make an unambiguous pronouncement” (1994: 165). The clear message in the *Revelations* series is the dehumanising and destructive nature of violence. Hence, Beier (1968: 14) says, “African art has responded to the social and political upheavals that have taken place all over the continent”.

The question is: how has Chiurai’s art aesthetically responded to Africa’s social and political upheavals as stated by Beier? The works from *Revelations* series are illuminating, especially in the manner it emphasises what Freschi (2011) calls the power of place and space and how it relates to the notion of the body.

The first image from the series *Revelations I*, for instance, projects a group of gun-toting rebels in what appears to be a hiding place. The floor is littered with bottles of beer, brandy and whisky — a succinct pointer that the rebels drown themselves in alcohol in order to come to terms with their unpleasant situation. In the background there are four male figures and a woman. One man is brandishing a machete — a familiar weapon that did a lot of damage during the genocide in Rwanda; the other is sitting in a shopping trolley, holding human skulls, while another is carrying a flag, on which ironically, is written “peace”. The female figure, with a grimace on her face, barefooted and with legs smeared with used oil, is carrying an AK-47 rifle. In the middle ground is a male figure looking through binoculars and carrying an AK-47. His body, like that of the female figure, is also smeared with used oil. The

debris in the room — empty plastic containers, cans and a metal drum — is “plain innuendo attributing aesthetic principles to the ruins and rubbish heaps” (Kikodze 2012: 17). Through the debris as a metaphor of disorder and a ‘jungle’ where the rebels retreat to hide, Chiurai makes a direct challenge to the current state of affairs in Africa and declares his resentment of the ‘dirt’ and ‘rot’ that characterise African politics.

The human figures in the photograph are not only murky, but also young, full of energy and their physical and facial expressions portray a far-reaching determination and vision. These are the wasted energies and vision that Chiurai ridicules through his open declaration of resentment for violence. While the human skulls in the first picture symbolise mortality and the imminence of death, they also are signs of personal hardening and the determination of the young rebels to die for their cause. They have encountered death so often that they have become used to it. Indeed, the used oil smeared on the body shows fearlessness and deep-seated rage. *Revelations II* focuses on human figures “without disrupting the desired flow of historical narration” (Rifkin 2000: 9).

While the background still has dark smudges, the earlier mentioned flag, with its “peace” logo is now obscured and relegated to the far right corner in the background. Any hopes of peace have been relegated to the periphery, and the stern faces of the rebels show that it is now business unusual. The three human figures, one woman and two men, are all looking in the same direction, where the male figure is seriously pointing with his right hand. The female rebel, stern, angry and focused, is carrying an AK-47 rifle. The standing male, in a state of military salute, is holding a launch grenade firing gun. The two weapons are symbols of death and destruction. Combined with the “stern profile, gazing right, medallion-style” (Stace 2014: 18) of the rebels, we begin to see the essence of Chiurai’s transparent socio-political documentation of scenes of the shock of African history.

The fact that the interpretation of a photograph is about the here and now is made plausible in *Revelations VI* which depicts five females seemingly abducted by four male rebels. This image is telling in the way it coincidentally evokes the abduction of 280 Chibok girls by Boko Haram in Nigeria, resulting in the worldwide

outcry, #BringBackOurGirls. Admittedly, the wounds of the incident are still fresh, but what I find startlingly striking about this image is that it existed well before the Boko Haram abductions. What we see is an artist who is angry and outraged by the violence and the alienating injustice meted out to vulnerable women in Africa. The fearful faces of women cowering helplessly in front of the fiery faces of men brandishing AK-47 rifles project the vulnerability of women and the brutality of war. Worth noting is that the setting of this image is still the same as the earlier images discussed, but the floor has been cleared of all the debris. Focus therefore, is not on the surroundings but the human figures and how they violently and inhumanely brutalise each other. The human skulls placed in front of the abducted women have a direct message of death for the women if they do not oblige. The fact that the four men are openly brandishing threats of violence and death makes the viewer conclude that there exists a kind of masked discontent in the rebels, which has exacerbated the might of their hatred and anger, turning it into open aggression. Women become victims of this violence.

When in 1963 Wind said, “it is well known how Angry Young Men have tried to shock their public into attention” through art (10) he had no idea that half a century later, his words would resonate to speak directly to Chiurai’s art. When I began my discussion by declaring that Chiurai’s art has a declarative voice, is assured, bold and unapologetic, I meant it in the sense of Andre Gide’s assertion of “the gratuitous act” of art as “a cruel shock which we ought to feel when we meet the patently absurd or the repulsive” (Wind 1963: 10). Caught in exile and alienation from home, Chiurai’s art is full of anger. The motifs of historical recurrence and narcissistic rage enable him to produce nothing more than those agitated sketches of a life replete with violence. The recurrent angry turns in his images resemble the struggles of an artist battling to articulate a discourse of peace and return to order to an unresponsive public.

By looking back to the past and the present, Chiurai creates a pictorial historical narrative that is ecclesiastical in that it is rooted in historical recurrence, which results in a narcissistic dialogue that is embedded in fury. In the *Dying to be Men* series, he concentrates his attention on the suburban, rich and extravagant lifestyle of African politicians who find refuge and security in

carrying guns around. The *Revelations* series projects a disgruntled and disillusioned young generation that resorts to violence to release their pent up anger. There is continuous narcissistic dialogue between the *Dying to be Men* series and the *Revelations* series in a way that projects the past in communion with the present. When the self-centred and self-aggrandising African politicians fail to address the needs of the people, violent reactions as shown in the images of gun-toting rebels erupt. Here, Chiurai allows his imagination to roam fearlessly, entering into familiar but diverse historical experiences. This series of bold and revelatory images is at once as ironic as it is satirical in its portrayal of African politics and life. For Chiurai, art is the emotional outlet through which pent up anger can be released.

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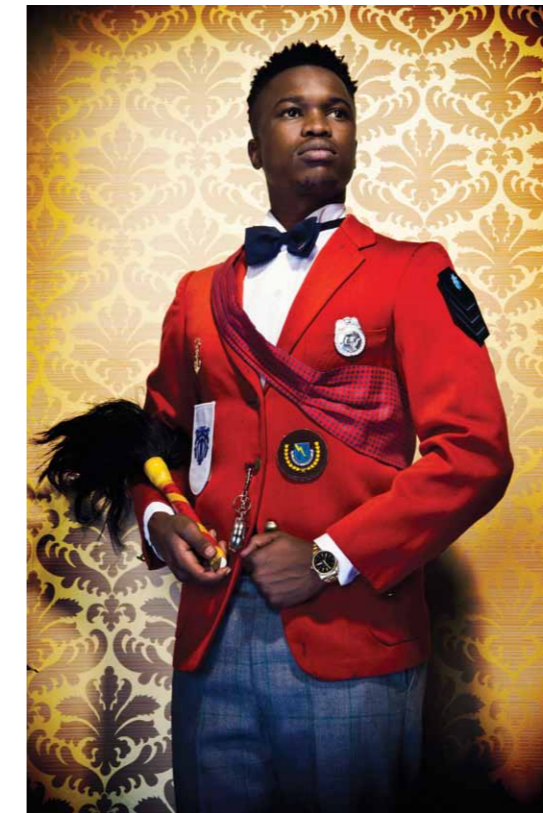
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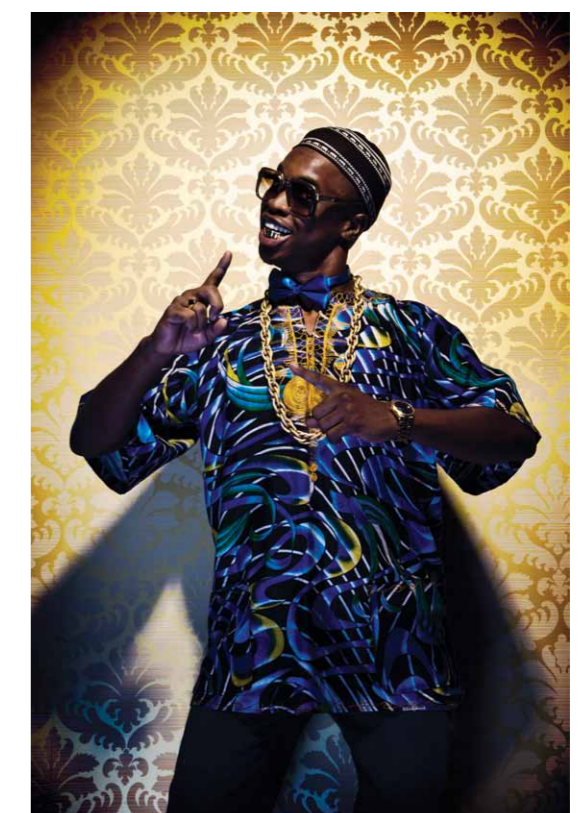
THE BLACK PRESIDENT



THE MINISTER OF FINANCE

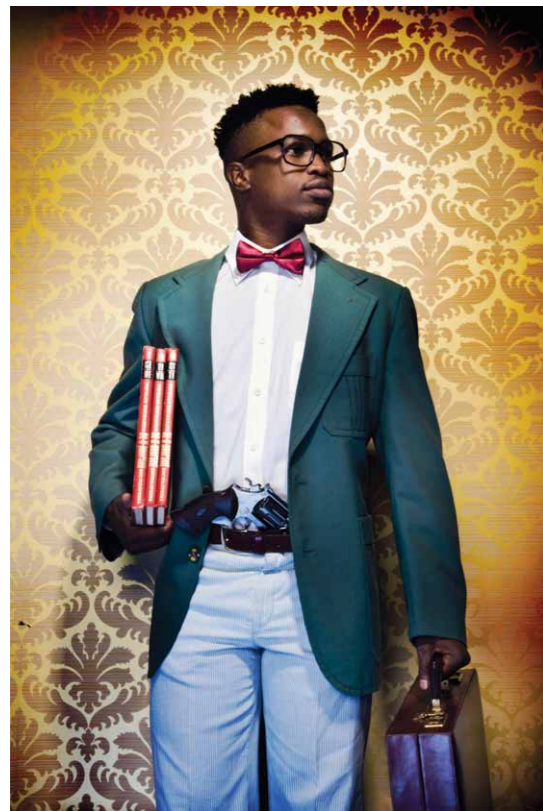


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THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS





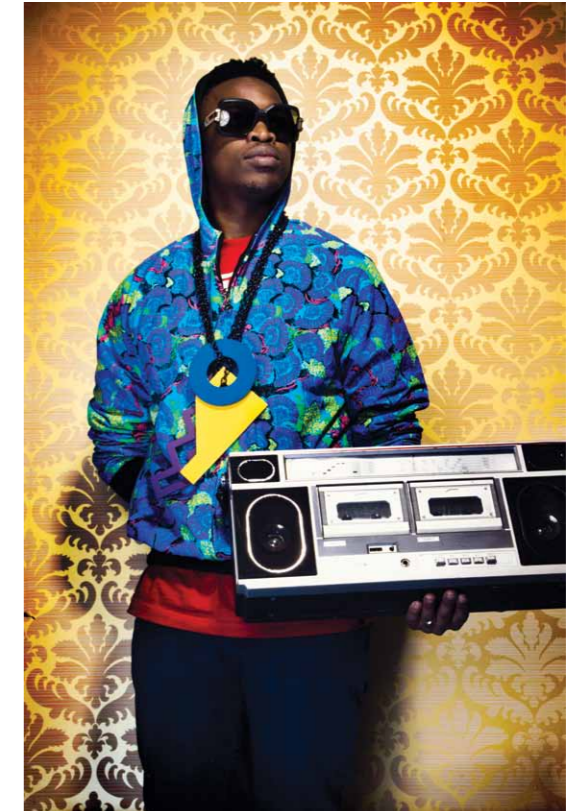
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*THE MINISTER OF HEALTH*



*THE MINISTER OF ENTERPRISE*



*THE MINISTER OF ARTS AND CULTURE*

# NOTES ON THE COST OF THE LAST SUPPER

## *Two African Scenarios*

BY MARY MANDIVAVARIRA

THE VIOLENCE OF REPRESENTATION IS defined at a level of style and perception, and might refer to how an artist uses techniques to violate our understanding of a particular subject and context, or shocks us into a recognition of new, untried ways of thinking about a particular experience. This shock might cause the viewer to relive certain nightmares, or it may shatter certain taboos.

In discussing Kudzanai Chiurai's depiction of the Last Supper in the photograph *Revelations VII* (2011) and the film *Iyeza* (2011), where Jesus is depicted as a black woman, I am made to think of a similar artwork by Owen Maseko (who found himself in the same situation of being oppressed and harassed by the same black regime that forced Chiurai to relocate to South Africa). The style and purpose of the artworks, and the circumstances of their production might differ, but they both evoke the idea of the Last Supper. *Revelations VII* is extracted from the film *Iyeza* and repositioned by Chiurai to speak to feminist issues, or as he put it, "The female Jesus is asking questions about authority and gender" in a context where the film *Iyeza* "is about how we deal with power" in contemporary African politics (Chiurai quoted by Blignaut 2012: 10). On the other hand, Owen Maseko, who remained in Zimbabwe during the period that Chiurai was in self-imposed exile in South Africa, is seized with the unending effects of a genocide committed between 1981 and 1987 on a large section of Zimbabwean society in Matabeleland by Robert Mugabe's government. The genocide ended only after its prominent victims were forced by the perpetrators into a unity agreement that ensured that they would never have a distinct political voice again. Maseko titles one of his works, *Unity Accord (Joshua Nkomo Signs in 1987)* (2010, Installation). Nkomo nearly lost his life at the hands of Robert Mugabe, a fellow fighter for freedom, but now a freedom fighter. Accused of fomenting post-Independence discontent in Matabeleland, he was forced into a unity agreement with Mugabe after he was left with no other choice in the face of the horrifying murders of people who were thought to be his political followers. The violence of representation is seen in the scene of the signing ceremony, which is made to represent or evoke the Last Supper, and the cost of peace to Nkomo's dignity and political influence. In Chiurai's *Revelations VII* the violence of representation is seen in the way Jesus is represented as a possible Judas figure.

In Maseko's piece, the dark moment of humiliating peace-making is represented in black and red. Black paint/colour is used on the human figures that stand

around to observe as well as to intimidate. The figures are not realistic. They are weirdly sculpted, distorted, but with ghostly human faces. The six figures wearing glasses represent the figure in glasses who is sitting down as if holding the bowed large figure. The three figures without glasses, obviously outnumbered by the glasses-wearing figures, are standing close together, compared with the other figures. They represent the shadow of the man slumped over the table, who is bowing to the figure in glasses; probably because he is already weaker than the others, he surrenders himself to them.

The white paint is used as a representation of the big-rimmed white glasses. It hides the identities of the wearers, or indicates something that can be foreseen, that is the collapse and subjugation of the big man at the signing table. The water colour painting has vivid red, black, yellow and elements of white at the bottom of the painting. The red colour might mean healing from war, or depict bloodshed or alertness to violence. Yellow appears behind figures. Yellow behind the figures indicates something of the past, which could mean the defeat of the victims, as yellow is often associated with cowardice. Yellow, often associated with sunset, or the end of a day, could also symbolise the end of a political life and era for some of the figures in the artwork. That the yellow covers the entire signing table is therefore significant as it paints the stage for the end of times for a particular historical figure. The red colour is also reflected on the floor; the light enhances the red, yellow enhances the brightness and also allows the figures to reflect on the floor, making their presence felt in every corner of the room.

The style of the painting is figurative. One cannot see details of the facial features of the figures. The brush strokes applied to the painting are flat and highly controlled, but there are some parts which are not controlled, where it feels like the painting is dripping and thinly applied and the red is still revealed through the black, a tragic mixture of sorrow and violence. The signing of the unity accord is therefore not a moment of peace, celebration and happiness, but a scene of mourning and loss, humiliation and defeat. The Last Supper evoked here by Maseko turns out to be the forced eating of humble pie by one of the most significant founding fathers of Zimbabwean nationalism and liberation, Joshua Nkomo. It represents the end of his meaningful political presence in Zimbabwean history, and the beginning of a long era of ugliness, violence and repression under Robert Mugabe, which Maseko and Chiurai depict in their work.

## REVELATIONS VII (2011)

*Revelations VII* a still derived from the film *Iyeza*, represents complex ideas of violence and conflict whereas Maseko's painting refers to the conflict in a specific political event in postcolonial Zimbabwe. To the untrained eye, or someone without a grasp of the historical events that led to the signing of the unity accord between Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo in 1987, the violence is not self-evident. It would appear that it is just the signing of a peace/political accord to end the physical and structural violence, which ironically led to long-lasting symbolic violence against the people represented by Joshua Nkomo. Maseko adopts the uses of violence of representation in order to make his audience aware of the violence which prevailed in the country and which continues to affect the people of a specific region of the country. His exhibition was banned and seized by Robert Mugabe's government, which accused Maseko of opening old wounds. The perpetrators do not want to be reminded of it as it undermines their political and moral legitimacy as the rulers of Zimbabwe.

In contrast, Chiurai's *Revelations VII* evokes a complex idea of the violence of representation. The artwork shows physical violence, but in its slowing down and in its use of very beautiful colour, it aestheticises violence. Also, the viewers as witnesses to this violence are unable to act, like the 'passive', boyish/girlish-looking Jesus, who is perhaps encircled by known traitors and spies.

Critics have suggested that Chiurai's image of a chaotic, bloody Last Supper could be offensive to a Christian audience. The Last Supper in the Bible is continuously retold, from pulpit to pulpit, as peaceful, meaningful and orderly. It is a symbol of the end of a life and an order and the beginning of things to come. It is a world-shaping event constituted by a small group of dedicated disciples and their visionary leader. Jesus is portrayed as an all-knowing and all-seeing visionary who displays an uncanny understanding of fate. He can look into the hearts of those close to him and tell that one of them will betray him. In the Last Supper, Jesus keeps to the script of the betrayed visionary who will not give up his commitment to follow the plot of his life up to its foretold death. The unnerving way in which Jesus unsettles his disciples by indicating his knowledge of deception, yet his unwillingness to point out the traitor, introduces an undercurrent of violence at the orderly supper table. The moral, spiritual and mental

disorder that Jesus's dark utterances at the supper table caused contradict the orderly manner in which he served the wine and bread to his uncomfortable followers. It directly relates to the Owen Maseko painting, which is peaceful and orderly yet with an undercurrent of violence beneath the "peaceful" signing ceremony.

If in the Biblical Last Supper it is suggested that there was an inevitable logic that Jesus's life had to end in some way and begin a new phase in another way, it seems that it was also inevitable that the violent events surrounding Joshua Nkomo would pressure him into signing the unity accord, which signalled the end of his political influence and the consolidation of a violent authoritarian regime led by his nemesis, Robert Mugabe.

In contrast with Chiurai's interpretation of The Last Supper, Maseko focuses on bringing out the violence that lay underneath the pressured peaceful event. (The discomfort, persecution and betrayal of Nkomo rather than his triumph). Nkomo is forced by political and military pressure to submit himself to a forced and unprincipled unity accord. Jesus is bowed by a superior fate that, in spite of the presence of the menacing shadow of Judas Iscariot and the possibility of a violent death on the cross, he rises above the chaos. Chiurai's Jesus does rise above the chaos, but by distancing herself from it, and making herself a neutral observer. Jesus' bowing represents piety and meaningful suffering which positively transforms an entire universe. Chiurai's Jesus does not intervene in the events unfolding before her, events which tragically disrupt social cohesion. The bowing figure in Maseko's art represents humiliation rather than piety and meaningful suffering. It represents that moment when a significant historical figure signs away his life and principles in order to buy peace from those who seek to eliminate him, and is reduced in stature in the process. The Biblical Jesus bows to people who gang up to persecute him, but only in the way that makes him use his enemies as his path to a higher kind of spiritual life. Maseko's painting portrays Nkomo playing a long-suffering and generous saint (a Jesus figure?) to people who join forces to betray and destroy his legacy, even after unification. In Chiurai's work, the boyish/girlish Jesus figure seems to be in control of the undisciplined disciples who unleash violence on the weak.

In *Revelations VII* Chiurai portrays physical and symbolic violence. Physical violence is demonstrated by the men holding guns. The symbolic violence in this film is depicted by the ritual ceremony performed by a man, and two women kneeling, one of whom is weeping. This symbolic violence juxtaposes the strength of men and the weakness of women, accentuating the position of women in society, as they appear to be second-class citizens. Their unhappiness also suggests emotional violence or abuse, as the men seem to be controlling them and their emotions. The ritual scene can be contrasted with Maseko's *Unity Accord (Joshua Nkomo Signs in 1987)* as Nkomo appears to be bowing to Mugabe, like the women kneeling, which is also a sign of surrender. Nkomo's weakness is like that of the women who surrender to those who exercise ruthless authority and agree with them without protesting.

***The slow pace of the Iyeza film ensures that the audience follows the story, and makes it less of a video than a "slide show", because of its pace. This is because we often do not look, but think we are looking. It makes the audience think critically about the event. In this case the slow motion suggests that this is not a conventional video, and that the audience is called upon to take a critical look at what they consider "normal". The painterly effects ensure that the audience is reminded of the paintings of Jesus at the Last Supper as a foundational Christian icon.***

Chiurai's work is seen as an icon because of the level of style and perception. The Last Supper in the Bible is still believed to have been peaceful, orderly, symbolic and meaningful whereas this one is chaotic and violent, with ill-disciplined disciples crowding the table, and no wine or bread being shared by the Jesus-figure, who seems to be interested in observing rather than stopping the violent drama before her. The Biblical Last Supper is an event that is also surrounded by violence, the horrifying death of Christ on the cross and the symbolic eating of his body and drinking of his blood. This suffering and symbolic cannibalism is what it costs for a saviour to maintain peace and order in a violent and chaotic nation. Chiurai imagines this saviour to be a black woman. If God was a woman, would she be the saviour that men in power are failing to be? What would she do differently?

In *Iyeza* and *Revelations VII* women seem to be the weaker figures in the face of violence while in Maseko's painting, the weaker vessel is a man. This suggests that men are authoritative and violent towards women as well as to themselves. On the other hand, the contrast brings out the insecurities hidden within the male figures: they are strong and powerful on the outside, but deep inside they have insecurities, which is clearly brought out by Nkomo and his relations with the women in Chiurai's film. The ritual also links to Nkomo's failure to overcome Zanu PF's "patriotic history" and shows how the subsequent generation of artists is affected by this hostile history and politics. For instance, the banning and seizing of Maseko's artwork and Chiurai's self-imposed exile from Zimbabwe serve as an illustration of the "patriotic history" barrier.

However, what is common in the two artworks is the imbalance of power, and violence, although conveyed in different ways. Nevertheless, there are remarkable differences in the works, especially the media used to create them. Maseko makes use of simple paintings; foreground and background figures; his installation of a table and colours such as red and black which resemble blood and mourning in his depiction of violence and power.

In Chiurai's artwork, the woman is depicted seated with hands open. This might mean that the woman is talking to disciples, who are talking to themselves and past each other. Behind the red chair in which the woman is sitting is a circle of light which resembles a halo. The halo resembles the head of a holy person, but of course it is behind the woman's head; it has come off her head like a floating doek. However, the ritual represents those people in society who will hold their traditional beliefs at any cost. Traditionally, a woman's place is thought to be in the kitchen and maternity ward. Women were seen as less than second class citizens. The riot resembles a clash of disorderly beliefs, which could destroy the nation. The image raises a question about how traditional beliefs and the modern culture can be incorporated to create an orderly, multicultural society.

*But could it be that the Jesus figure is the cause of the riot? What we see in the image is not a hybrid of cultures, but an unproductive, uncreative, violent misrepresentation of culture. The failure by the boyish/girlish Jesus figure to lead, unite and raise the warring parties above their hatred and violence can only be the result of choice or outright incompetence, or what Chiurai is seeking to find out: the distinction between selfless sacrifice and selfish sacrifice for purposes of dealing with power (see Blignaut 2012: 10).*

On the other hand, the image itself raises some racial issues. It is meant to depict the equivalent of the Last Supper with Jesus as a black woman, but in the image a light-skinned woman is in the high seat. 'Jesus' is meant to be a black woman, but the blackness of the woman in the seat is not self-evident. The black women, who are positioned on the floor at the foot of the table, are squatting in terror. The light-skinned woman is of mixed race and therefore symbolises a unity of races. Could this be what Chiurai is suggesting? What are the implications of such a suggestion: that the light-skinned woman seems powerless to lead, or act, by not stopping the riot and bloodshed? Could it be that much more is required for peace and co-existence to prevail than the unity of races and cultures?

Maseko is talking about tribe against tribe, and the treacherous politics that forced a unity between those tribes in Zimbabwe; whereas Chiurai is exploring gender and cultural struggles and how power is dealt with in Africa (see Chiurai in Blignaut, 2012). This idea is more universal and makes Chiurai's work more general, whereas Maseko is more particular in his representation of violence. However, the ways in which the violence is represented by both artists raises questions about the cost of the Last Supper within comparable contexts, and what it means for peace and order.

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**UNITY ACCORD (JOSHUA NKOMO SIGNS IN 1987) — Owen Maseko — installation (Sibathontisele exhibition, 2010)**

*Image courtesy of the artist, Owen Maseko*



**REVELATIONS VII** – 2011, Ultrachrome ink on photo fibre paper, 145 x 200 cm. Edition of 10

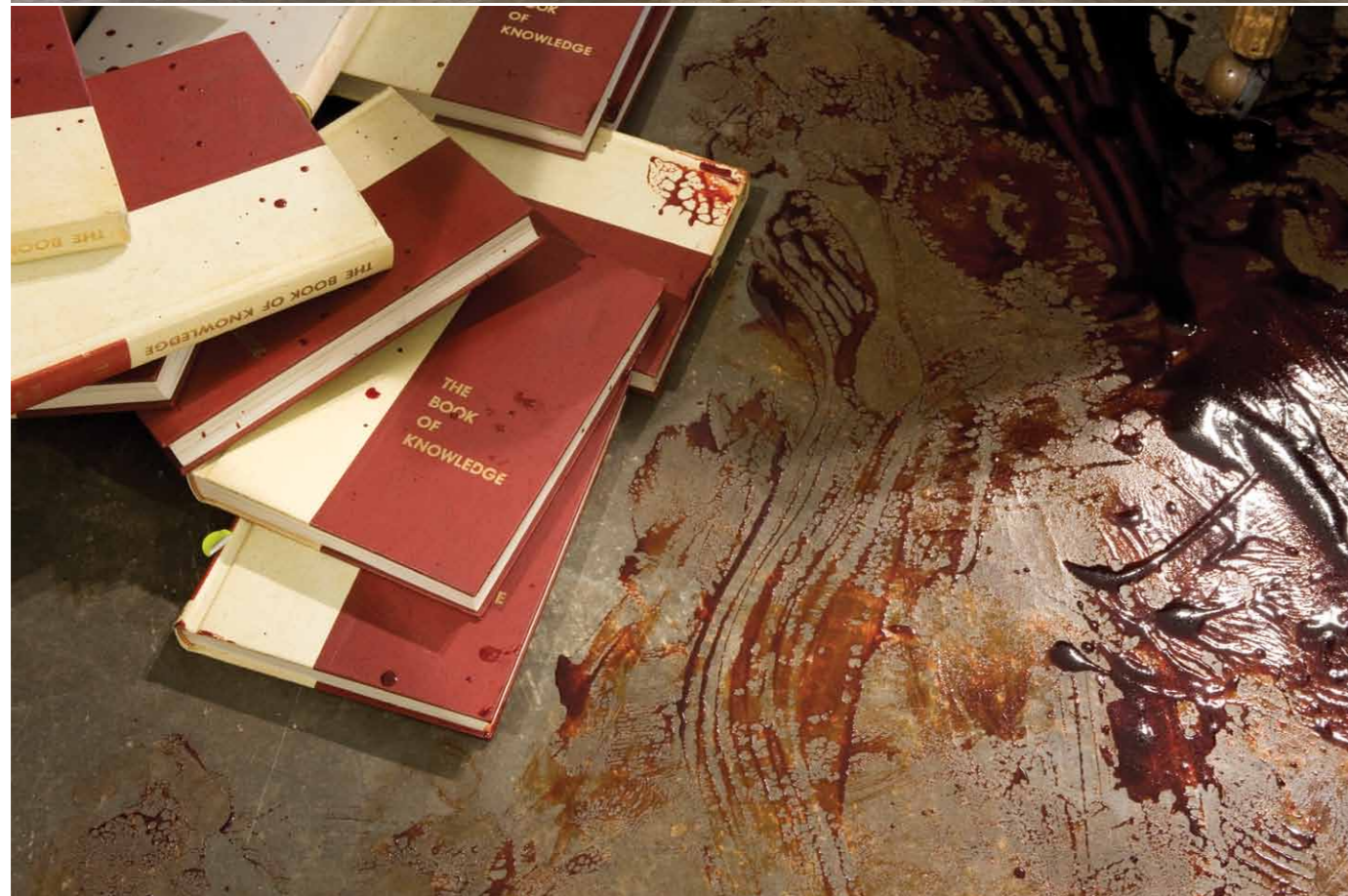
# LOOKING GOOD

*Do it Yourself*

BY EDWIN MHANDU

IN THIS ESSAY I EXPLORE ‘the popular mechanics of the do it yourself’ mantra through the picturacy presented in Kudzanai Chiurai’s exhibition *Communists and Hot Chicken Wings: The Birth of a New Nation* (2010). I use Piero Trupia’s (2004) phenomenological theory on visual arts to argue that central to imagery is the philosophy of essences which foregrounds existence in multifarious ways. I take a cue from Trupia, who believes that the configuration of human spaces in picturacy is characterised by isotopy (recurrence of arguments) and allotropy (negation of arguments). It makes it possible for me to argue that Chiurai aesthetically foregrounds the paradoxes of the postcolonial condition by troping the sartorial and joyful, which I identify as the connecting motifs of the exhibition. The sartorial and joyful motifs in the exhibition capture the ad hoc nature of policy by the black elite and present the African postcolony as a bricolage of inchoate phenomena.

The mural, which is quite colourful, elaborate and well-illustrated, provides fertile ground for a phenomenological approach which places a premium on communicating the essence of things through the artist’s intuition, although the world represented by Chiurai remains present “even before it becomes an object of categorisation” (Trupia, 2004: 365). In the exhibition, “Style becomes a strategy, a means of moving, going somewhere in particular” (Hecht and Simone, 1994: 42), style is more elaborate in dressing and self-grooming, yet it is effective in that it can be both attractive and repulsive to the observer. Jennie Batchelor (2005: 11) argues that, “as a symbol that can variously connote wealth, social status, sexuality and moral probity, dress is, as it always has been and probably will always be, a site on which multiple and often competing anxieties are simultaneously focused”. The mural *No One Likes a Bag of Bones* (2010) is representative of the new nation: quite symbolic if we consider the colour parity of black and white. The woman-as-the-new-nation presents a posture to the incoming black elite that is colourful and seductive in a subversive way. The posture, ironically, suggests the tragic logic of the black elite which, when confronted with such a promising prospect of newness, is to instinctively and routinely pillage, rape, and squander.<sup>1</sup>



**COMMUNISTS AND HOT CHICKEN WINGS EXHIBITION** – 2010, Goodman Gallery Projects, Arts on Main, Johannesburg

The mural is composed of the image of a woman in a kneeling position with her buttocks uplifted, a sagged back and a head somehow styled. A closer look at the woman's face reveals trimmed and well-tended eye lashes. The cringing face denotes an individual who is burdened by a daunting task. A neck chain with a pentagram dangles from her neck. The hair is plaited. It looks quite dishevelled, as if it has been tampered with. Interestingly and quite ironically, the woman is wearing football colours. Her stance is also significantly suggestive as it is within reach of would-be football players. Nonetheless, on the other side overlooking the mural, there is the picture of the president of the new nation who is accompanied by the ominously ambiguous statement 'do it yourself'. The new nation's black elite profess to be communists who would share the meagre resources and opportunities equitably if only everyone liked a bag of bones. What we are made to see from outside are 'chicken bones', as if there is nothing 'meaty' enough on the bones to entice anybody. Since no one else wants the bag of bones, the president will 'do it' himself!

There is something darkly flippant about the birth of this nation that gives the woman the colours of a football and places her in a position where she can be kicked and played with. Gunter Gabaneur (2006: 237) argues that: "Football is like a huge theatrical event" which "involves more than just a ball; it involves the body, both one's own and that of others, as well as emotions and spectators. Playing football is also role-playing." The birth of this nation is absurdly theatrical. There is visual evidence that there is a concerted effort by the black elite to deepen the enjoyment of their well-choreographed perverse games. Sanna Inthorn (2006: 155) foregrounds football as a 'game of nations' where types and patterns of play differ and where the fans go along with the mood and pace set by the team.

What this means is that the elite have already styled this new nation in transgressive and subversive ways for it to retain a veneer of a normalcy that suits their politics. The male and female images in the right bottom corner demonstrate the endemic danger inherent in this birth of a new nation. The lopsided nature of the relationship is further vindicated by the set-up of the office furniture and other items. However, the black elite is overly engrossed in the enjoyment of the moment. Closely connected with the woman are the images of blood-splotted papers and chair, the spoilt carpet,

books and the scattered office equipment. The aesthetic nature of the connection comes with the sartorial aspect of, and joyful engagement with, 'the politics of do it yourself' typified by the president and the minister of defence's pictures overlooking the football woman.

However, "art is a magic free of the lie of being truth... art's duty is therefore to subvert order with chaos" (Ar dono in Trupia, 2004: 367). The underlying aesthetic is that art plays a crucial role in representing and even contesting order and political power when misused or abused. The bottom line is that in their splendour, in their concentration and whimsical sartorial exuberance, the work by Chiurai presents the communists as bringers of the 'ordered' disorder. It is ordered in the sense that there is a conscious effort by the elite to enjoy, plunder and pillage whilst they hide behind the sartorial and well-coded mantras. In *No One Likes a Bag of Bones*, there is a well-dressed monstrous skeleton in male clothes accompanied by an over-trimmed pale female-looking skeleton. The words, 'baby don't leave me, love me tender' and the expletive WHAAM blaze off their heads. Veiled in 'WHAAM' is the statement 'who I am', but coded in a scary way to induce fear in the emaciated 'prey' on the side. The sartorial aspects and the joy that comes with the new nation space are typified in the constructed photographs of fictional ministers and presidents from the series *Dying to be Men* (2009). Thus, the right to rape, plunder and run down the new nation is done with great gusto. Embroidered within the system is the routine carnage to promote the good life strictly for the powerful elite; hence nobody would take a bag of bones seriously.

The vocabulary rampant in the nationalism and communism that Chiurai depicts in the *Popular Mechanics* series, (2010, linocut prints) is that of expletives and slogans such as 'do it yourself!' The hunger to 'be a man', 'the big dick style', means that manhood (and by extension, nationhood) is equated with bravery, which in turn is a euphemism for the plunder and rape of national resources (both human and material). However, the evidence surrounding the idea of dressing well, looking good, agile and learned (with books held in the left hand) is almost comical. What induces the ludic aura is that there is an attempt by the communists to look like a sophisticated bourgeoisie and increase the vulnerability of the powerless. Dressing, as presented in Chiurai's art, has something to do with

keeping up appearances and masking the seamy side of life which is quite visible and irrepressible in the new nation. It reminds me of a phenomenon called 'La Sape' which Hecht and Simone (1994) came across in the devastated Congo. In 'La Sape' there is an over-concentration on self-grooming and wearing expensive suits, as looking good ultimately matters in the way in which a ruined post colony is run. In the case of the Sapeux, "a person may live in a one-room hovel shared with ten or more people, but as long as he or she can beg, borrow or steal a fashionable three-piece suit, they view themselves as fortunate or at least see a means by which life becomes better" (ibid: 46). The system is shown to thrive on insularity while paying lip service to human dignity, human rights and democracy.

In *Popular Mechanics I* a bespectacled minister is portrayed as smartly dressed, agile, head up, with a designer jacket, and his deportment is that of someone who is self-assured, someone who knows a lot. In the exhibition this print was positioned in relation to the mural so that the minister appeared to be looking at the "football woman", presumably to kick, manipulate, molest or rape, among other things. The visual trilogy above foregrounds the idea that the way the new nation space is conceived by the "communist" black elite confirms the power of hegemonic masculinities to normalise and mediate reality and discourse (cf. Connell and Wesserschmidt, 2011). For the elite, dress and style becomes the immediate signifiers of this world and the most vivid symbol of corruption (Batchelor, 2005: 11).

The portraits of the Ministers of Defence and Education in *Popular Mechanics I* and *II* are related to "the popular mechanics of the big dick" and the popular mechanics of dying to be a man. The haphazard nature of the bloodied papers, scattered utensils, and books fallen from the shelf in *Untitled (the President's Office)* (2010) show evidence of a deadly scuffle. The mechanics of the big dick and the hunger to be a man signal that rape and murder take place even in the offices of the learned bureaucrats. There is a derelict industrial machine in the corner denoting the 'pandemic dysfunction'<sup>2</sup> that comes in the wake of such a brutal black elite. The gloss, pomp and ceremony that should go with the sartorial wear off, and are consequently lost.

In the sequel, even in this visual, Chiurai's artistic and analytic strength derives from creating typical images

of a dysfunctional system. Far from being an exhibition of still life images, "everything in it breathes, lives and continuously metamorphosizes" (Thore, 1860: 317-318). To give a semblance of officialdom and normalcy there are several national flags in the office. The picture painted by several lookalike flags is that this could be any nation in Africa. As in many nations, the trend is commonplace when communists get into power but prove to be wielding mere chicken bones. Thus they cobble together slogans predicated on 'doing it their way' which translates into their persistence in wrecking the economy and the lives of ordinary people.

On the carpet are signed papers. The blood on them cannot hide the fact that they belong to Zimbabwe, a nation run by a government that has a tragic human rights record. In the image, the quality of the carpet and the paper is undercut by the gory sights that are produced by the black elite in a postcolonial setting. The elite enjoy spilling blood and it is something that signals the do-it-yourself mantra. Manhood is construed as the ability to arbitrarily kill and rape. Cumulatively, one would argue that the nation of Zimbabwe in its formative stages sank below the level of human civility.

Hefferson (2006: 11) argues that picturacy is the ability to read pictures not as naturally given phenomena. Rather, "pictures are windows through which we read the world" and at times they expose humanity to alternative visions and versions of the world.

The background of the photographic portraits *Untitled I* and *II* (2010) with the figure of the South African ex-president Thabo Mbeki signals the post-Apartheid South African government's complicity with the chaos and disorder in the office. Given Mbeki's foreign policy of 'quiet diplomacy' on Zimbabwe, I would infer that what is presented in this office is perceived as 'normal' for post-colonial Africa. However, Chiurai's work neither rubber stamps nor venerates the bad governance typified here; rather the whole exhibition critiques the ad hoc nature of governance and satirises those who promote such a system.

The male figure in *Untitled I* is youngish and must wield certain levels of power in the political establishment to be able to have his portrait hung next to the image of the president. The jacket is exquisitely colourful and looks expensive, suggesting the illusion of his

multiple identities. Certainly, he is a creation of the communist system. His neck chain and a buttoned shirt collar give the impression that he is fashion conscious. At the level of looks, one would think that here is somebody who is organised. However, when the portrait is read in the context of the environment, the connection becomes clear that he shares the same space and the same world-view as the older elite in post-colonial Africa typified by the Minister series.

Chiurai's exhibition is multi-dimensional. Suggested here is the policy continuity between the Zimbabwean government's black empowerment and indigenisation policies and the South African GEAR policy (Growth, Employment and Redistribution plan) that created a black middle class with the misleading trappings of communists but who are in practice mere consumption addicts. There is nothing in this picture to suggest that the young man is keen on work. Rather the sartorial taste demonstrates a keen interest in consumption and style. Unlike the football woman portrayed in the mural, the woman in *Untitled II* has a stately mien — evinced by her glamorous hair style, pleated purple jacket and a golden garland (not a neck chain) that perfectly matches her earrings. She is not a victim of communist whims like the football woman, rather she is the communist, and the picture is complicit with the environment. Her hair, almost like a crown, signals the comfort and enjoyment of newly acquired wealth. The two pictures make a statement of power, money and the joy necessitated by the birth of a new nation.

The exhibition is a metaphor of the human story in which ordinary Africans grapple with the vicissitudes of the worst forms of dictatorship masquerading as communist governments. The exhibition tells “us something about our existence by showing us the things as gathered existents: a diachronical illustration” (Trupia, 2004: 373) of what African and nation states have become. The aesthetic experience of the exhibition comes as shared experience in the connection of life and logos, art and thinking, the observer and the objects (Freiberga, 2004: 412), creating an invaluable link between the experienced world and Kudzanai Chiurai's art.

#### END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I thank and acknowledge Robert Muponde for suggesting this insight.

<sup>2</sup> I acknowledge and thank Robert Muponde for suggesting this phrase.

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**UNTITLED (THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE)** – 2010, installation, Goodman Gallery Projects, Arts on Main, Johannesburg

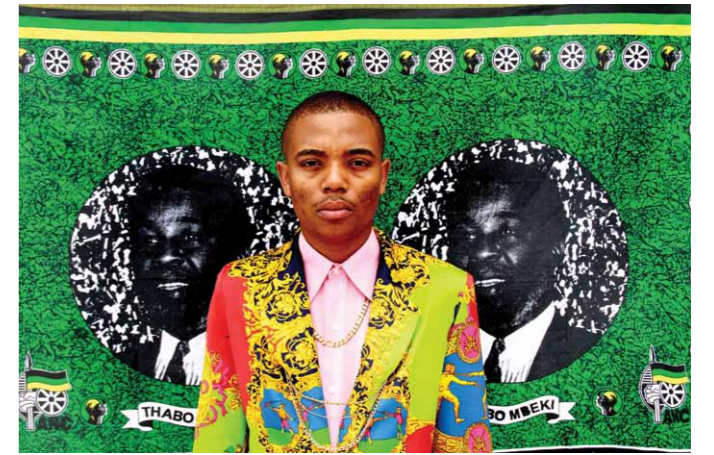


**POPULAR MECHANICS I, II AND III** – 2010, linocut, 215 x 109 cm. Edition of 10





**NO ONE LIKES A BAG OF BONES** – 2010, wall mural, 160 x 200 x 5 cm



**UNTITLED I** – 2010, photograph, 215 x 109 cm. Edition of 10



**UNTITLED II** – 2010, photograph, 215 x 109 cm. Edition of 10



Kudzanai Chiurai in collaboration with Marianne Fassler,  
**UNTITLED (DRESS FROM MOYO)** – 2013, dyed bandage and sheep skin,  
 height 155 cm as installed (dimensions variable)

# STAINS, BEADS AND LOGOS

*The Elegance of Horror in  
Kudzanai Chiurai's Art*

BY JESSICA HEMMINGS

**I**N THIS WRITING I OFFER A CLOSE READING of Kudzanai Chiurai's use of stains, beads and magazine cover mock-ups. My eclectic selection pays particular attention to the materials of Chiurai's practice. But it also attempts to read what could arguably be defined as the antithesis of materiality: the fashion logo and image making of the fashion brand. This awkward variety is perhaps a fair reflection of the artist's multiple foci, guided here somewhat selfishly by my personal interest in the meaning of the textile across its varied guises.

## STAINS

Jenni Sorkin muses on the meaning of stains, observing that “Fresh, stains are the sores of a fabric, raw wounds that map an event. Aged, they are scars of retrospection. They function as both a remainder and a reminder of what has come to pass: both evidence and memory” (Sorkin 2000: 78). Sorkin’s reflections on the stain as a mark both in the present and the past provides a useful starting point for reading Chiurai’s bloodied garment, *Untitled (Dress from Moyo)* (2013, dyed bandage and sheep skin), included in the “Harvest of Thorns” exhibition.

Chiurai’s garment is fashioned entirely from bandages and sits on a carpet of dyed red animal skins; in place of the mannequin’s upper body, red animal skin also appears. The red fur bears an uncanny resemblance to the red carpet recently used by Dutch fashion designers Viktor and Rolf. Known for their conceptual take on the games of fashion, Viktor and Rolf sent Red Carpet Dressing down the catwalk as part of their fall/winter 2014-15 collection. The gown and matching red shoes crafted from red carpet literally envelop the wearer in the symbol of prestige and honour the rolling out of a red carpet is intended to signify. But in Red Carpet Dressing the carpet is not beneath the celebrity’s feet: it is worn on the feet as shoes and swaddles the body as dress. The ritual of the red carpet arrival has engulfed the wearer. Viktor and Rolf seem to suggest fashion is an industry that consumes its audience.

Chiurai’s garment also appears in video work exploring the rituals of death and arguably sits far from these commercial critiques. But when considered in relation to the artist’s appropriation of magazine covers and use of references to fashion trends and branding, it deserves a little further consideration. Where Viktor and Rolf present a crafted perfection out of materials we are meant to stand on, not wrap ourselves within, Chiurai wraps the entire body in bandages, creating a garment that could suggest healing if it were not so badly bloodied and stained below the waist. Are we to read here that violence too is an industry that consumes its audience?

66 The bandages look to be drowning in the task at hand — asked to cover wounds too large and absorb damage too great — as though the wearer has waded through blood. But the figure is seated and upright, not yet defeated by the damage she carries. Her neck is decorated with a necklace of stained, rolled bandages. “Cloth holds the sometimes unbearable gift of memory.” (Sorkin: 77) Is this another unbearable gift; violence that does not deserve to be forgotten? Perhaps the late Zimbabwean author Yvonne Vera can help us here. When interviewed by Eva Hunter (1998), Vera explains her novella about the spirit medium Mbuya Nehanda. “Now when I started to write Nehanda, I wanted to write beyond the photograph, you know, that frozen image, beyond the date, beyond the ‘fact’ of her dying. If anything, in my book she doesn’t die, she departs.” (77) Chiurai’s sculpture offers a partial figure dressed in a garment of wounds, but nonetheless upright. A version, like Vera’s writing of Nehanda, of survival.

Louise Bourgeois turned to bandages as a sculptural material late in her career, creating some of her most acclaimed and moving works from fabric. After her defiant use of scale and the “serious” materials of sculpture, Bourgeois’ bandaged faces possess a humility far more evocative than earlier works. Frances Morris (2003) refers to Bourgeois’ series of fabric heads as “the most arresting of recent works... a series of extraordinary upright and front-facing fabric heads.” (30) Both artists share the strategy of recording damage, be it physical or emotional, without suggesting that the subject is defeated.

*Untitled (Dress from Moyo), 2013* — p64  
*Untitled (From Harvest of Thorns), 2013* — p69

## BEADS

Chiurai also uses crimson strings of beads much like a bandage, grafting a tree trunk body to a pair of Kudu horns, a type of antelope. The horns have lost their original setting and instead sit at an angle suggesting another larger animal, now with a tree trunk body. The new hybrid rests on a sea of blue animal skin. The body shape presents a far less ominous form than Nicholas Hlobo’s *Ingubo Yesizwe* (2008, leather, rubber, mixed media sculpture) which dragged a wounded body of leather and rubber stitched with ribbon across the floor of London’s Tate Modern. Hlobo’s sculpture is pieced together with leather and rubber. The new whole suggests a combination not at ease, perhaps heightened by the visible ribbon sutures holding the whole together while spewing from an empty hole in lieu of a head. Chiurai’s grafting together of new parts presents something more intact. His hybrid offers an elegance not particularly evident elsewhere in his work — work that hardly shirks the responsibility of the gruesome or troubled.

67 The American artist Liza Lou, who lived in South Africa between 2005 and 2012, reflects on the meaning of beads from her perspective as an outsider. In *Durban Diaries*, Lou writes, “Working with beads is a connection to an ancient struggle, a struggle I did not know. Since being in Africa, I have met women who can weave faster than other people can walk. Weaving is a way of getting somewhere. It puts food on the table, has agency in the marketplace. If you can weave something with beads, you’ve got skill. Maybe you can survive.” (19) The volume of beads Chiurai uses in *Untitled (from Harvest of Thorns)*, (2013, wood, bronze and glass beads) deserves our attention. After the blood red colour, and after the bandage-like wrapping of the beads, we must acknowledge the sheer quantity of material used. This volume speaks to both the labour of the painstaking production and the wealth their ownership could symbolise.

## MAGAZINES

Chiurai's mock-up covers of magazines — *Esquire*, *Drum*, *Vogue* and *Africa Today* — move attention from the material stuff of stained bandages and beads to the commercial logo. For instance, in the painting *Vogue: the black issue* (2008, oil on canvas) Chiurai's version of the *Vogue* cover page is graced with a portrait of Winnie Mandela. The original *Vogue* issue, released in July 2008 by *Vogue Italia*, is celebrated for running out of print twice, with later reprints even carrying the tagline “Most Wanted Issue Ever”. The issue featured black models and ran articles that focused on prominent black women.

References continue to collide in Chiurai's several versions of the cover of the metrosexual man's magazine *Esquire*. *Black Diamond* (2008, oil on canvas) refers to inflation figures; another *Esquire* cover, *Esquire* (2008, mixed media), sets a male figure against a wallpaper background of repeating pattern of crowns. Chiurai's version of the crown suggests the copy. It is not identical to the logo of famed watchmaker *Rolex*, but the pattern nonetheless smacks of aspiration — or perhaps more realistically, the trade in counterfeit goods whose objective is to copy, but not too accurately.

Chiurai does literally refer to the brand *Rolex* in the 2010 work *Rolex* (mixed media on paper) that carries the brand's title, a hand drawn crown with the accompanying text “when you are working tomorrow wear a Rolex”. But here the overriding message is not the appropriation of the brand symbol — in fact Chiurai's drawing of the logo renders it childish and flimsy. Instead the crudely drawn female figure, legs agape, looks to be a take on Tracey Emin's *Something's Wrong* (2002) an appliquéd blanket with similar female figure which also appears in the earlier mono-print *Terribly Wrong* (1997). But where Emin's woman spills from between her splayed legs, Chiurai's figure receives bullets directed into her body. In pink text “machine gun fuck” accompanies Chiurai's spray of bullets. The logo and its aspirational connotations could not be demoted further.

In *Esquire* the *Esquire* cover title and model is stencilled and spray painted to suggest the aesthetics of graffiti art and tagging rather than the slick commercialism of the newsstand. Rather than staring directly out to meet the consumer's gaze, this figure peers downward, hands shoved in pockets and hunched forward, seemingly unaware of the viewer's attention. Dressed in the style of late 70s and early 80s ska music, the figure wears a pork pie hat popular to the era and the suggestion of branded sport clothing such as *Puma* and *Adidas*. But perhaps most crucially something obscures the model's mouth. Is he sick, vomit flecking his shirt? Or gagged — silenced by some blockage in his mouth and throat? Or an accidental blot of ink — a publishing flaw — that by an ill fate of chance obscures the real message carried by the cover story?

Chiurai's clashes and juxtapositions leave me winded. References are picked up and put down; attention devoted to the material and the immaterial. My reading has been that of a magpie, picking and pecking at shiny things that sparkled to my eye. But I would hazard that the artist works much the same way. Horror is far from avoided, but at times it arrives with elegance.

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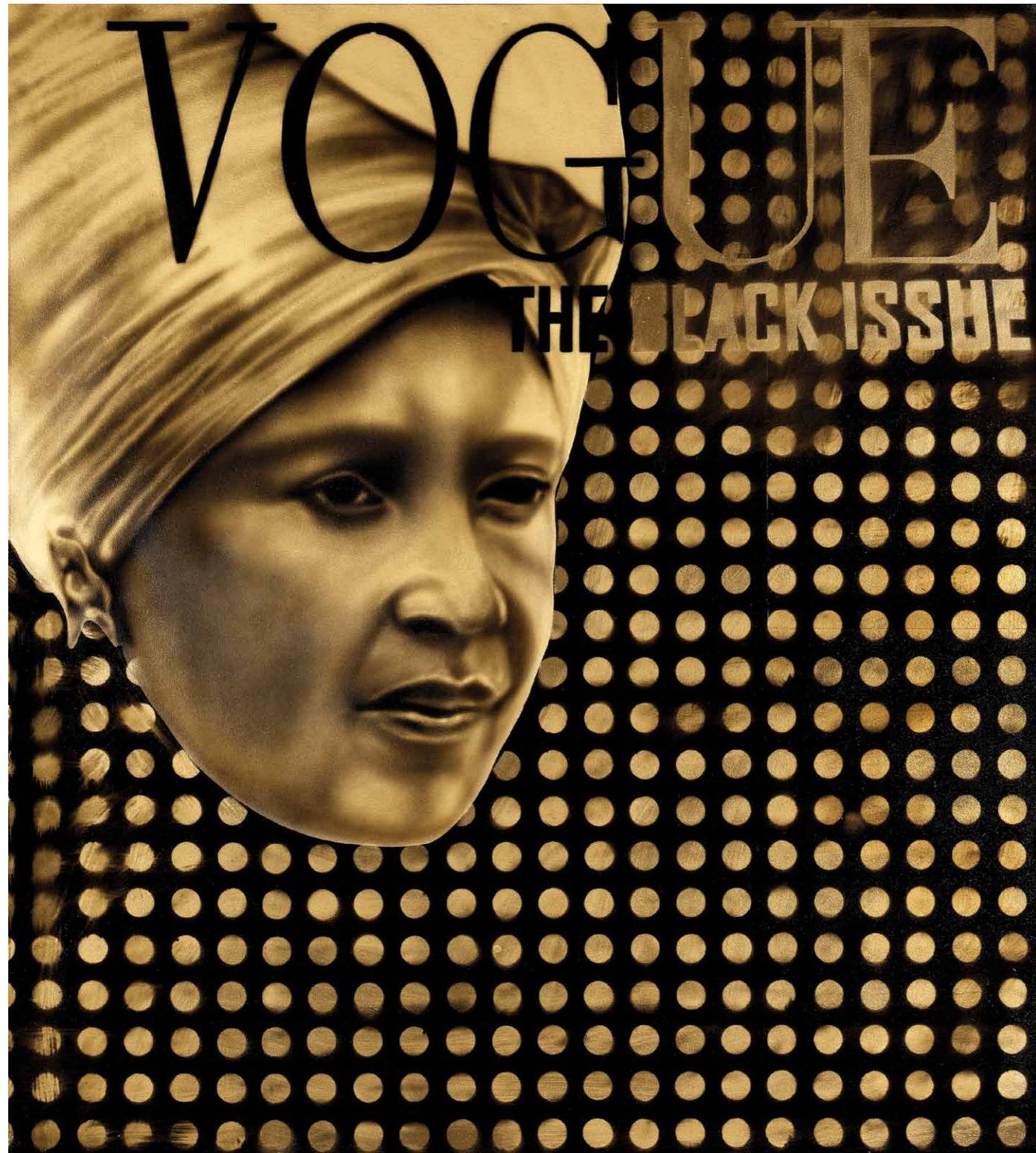
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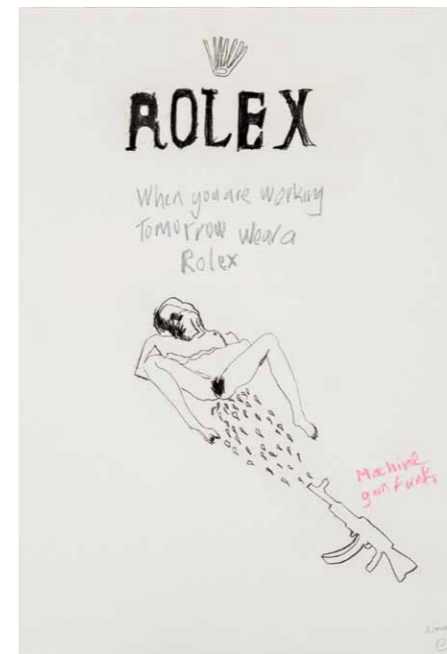
*Vogue: the black issue*, 2008 — p70  
*Black Diamond*, 2008 — p71  
*Esquire*, 2008 — p71  
*Rolex*, 2010 — p71



**UNTITLED (FROM HARVEST OF THORNS)** – 2013, wood, bronze and glass beads, 230 x 210 x 72 cm



**VOGUE: THE BLACK ISSUE** – 2008, mixed media on canvas, 200 x 100 cm



**ROLEX** –  
2010, mixed media on paper  
mounted to board, 84.5 x 59 cm



**ESQUIRE** –  
2008, mixed media, 180 x 122 cm.  
Incomplete when photographed.



**BLACK DIAMOND** –  
2008, oil on board, 180 x 120 cm

# VISUAL SONICSCAPES

## *Creation, Ritual, Death and the End of Times in Chiurai's Art*

BY INNOCENTIA MHLAMBI

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KUDZANAI CHIURAI'S PHOTOGRAPHIC series *Revelations* (2011) and *Creation* (2012) and the video *Creation (from Conflict Resolution)* (2012) exhibited by The Goodman Gallery in 2011<sup>1</sup> and 2014 respectively offer an instance where fine art, performance, the spoken voice, song and music merge. In the representations and performativity of African subjects in the artworks, Chiurai draws on the power of visuals, voice and sound to create notions about origins, the transience of life, violence, consumerism, destruction and detritus which at times are punctuated by an inclusion of African ritual processes. In the *Revelations* series the African subjects are represented in still tableaux. However, the montages in the video *Creation (from Conflict Resolution)* employ chameleon-like movements that produce the effect of an animated still. The acts of creating life, mourning for lost life, supplication on behalf of life gone awry and the destruction of life are all hyper-real and kaleidoscopic. Even the acts of excessive consumerism and detritus in the African continent in the *Revelations* series are all given psychedelic-textured hues of deep red, different shades of blue, brown and black. Despite the flamboyant colours, the paintings and the videos register a disconcerting reading of the position and place of Africa vis-à-vis the old and new empires; Europe, America and the new kid on the block, China.

In the *Creation* series<sup>2</sup>, the 'actions' of the subjects in these tableaux-like presentations are further layered with thick, complex sonic images drawn from African instrumentals, popular Christian hymns as well as popular contemporary Afro-jazz vocals. The *Revelations* series presents Africa gone wrong, entrapped in a cycle of violence, consumerism, decay, waste and destruction. Young men and women toting guns amid shocking aftermaths of consumerism and detritus are presented against backgrounds of the symbols of global capitalism. Linking the metaphors in the *Creation* series and the *Revelations* series are unequivocally thickly embellished biblical images, drawing on narratives of mythical imagination and events described in the old and new testaments. The canvas on which these metaphors are scripted is alive with hallucinatory images drawn from African settings, both in their prehistoric and contemporary senses.

Firstly, this discussion will interpret the *Creation* series and emphasis will be put on its imagery of biblical events, that is, the genesis, the (post) crucifixion and the Last Supper. In relation to the *Creation* series, I argue that the porousness with which the biblical metaphors have been conceived in the artworks offer possibilities of how they can be seen as talking to African experience.

Secondly the discussion will explore the depiction of Africa in the *Revelations* series. A focus in the *Revelations* series will be on how the art draws from the biblical epistle, the Book of Revelation, to depict Africa as a wasteland through metaphors of cankerous toxic waste infiltrating every sphere of life. Furthermore, with regard to the *Revelations* series, I discuss how the artworks are critical of global capitalism, the uncertainty it causes in Africa and more significantly, how Africa has become a global dumping site for all toxic non-recyclable waste created by the First and Second Economies out of Africa's mineral and labour resources.

Both the *Creation* and the *Revelations* series considered together are subversively critical of Western, Chinese and African kleptocracies whose collusion in the capitalist agenda has imprisoned Africans (in this case African youths) in a quagmire of a capitalist black hole and transformed them into defenders of kleptocracies. Both are also critical of the legacies and dire consequences the former economies and the new kid on the block, China, will have on the political, social and economic landscapes of the African continent. These artworks have become sites where marginalised African experience finds articulation which intersect and question the grand capitalist and Christian narratives. The contexts established by the stills and videos act as a nexus which allow for interpretations of African historical narratives — both primordial and postcolonial — to be central in their interactions with the global capitalist flows and their legacies in Africa. Linking the antediluvian and the contemporary in the pieces is the idea of personal affects such as life, mortality, bereavement, pain and violence, and socio-economic ones such as global capitalism, consumerism, pollution and destruction.

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## GO DUBA THANGKA: CREATION; A MESS THAT IT WAS, IT IS AND WILL BE...

The Creation myth draws from familiar metaphors of the Christian genesis story but quickly defamiliarises it by including events that allude to generational battles between deity-like beings responsible for creation. According to this myth, in prehistoric times the vast expanse of space had nothing except an entity called Nothingness. This space, emptied of life of any other form, existed in this manner since time immemorial. Another entity, Stream of Time, which also had no beginning or end, in existence since ancient times, sought out nothingness. Stream of Time desired Nothingness and from their encounter, Thankganyego was born. S/He grew up to know her/his loneliness for s/he was alone, like an orphan thrown into the open veld. Thankganyego found comfort in her/his own footsteps as there was no one or anything s/he could relate to. S/He reaffirmed her/his consciousness as a living being by reminding herself/himself, “I am what I am” every time s/he was moving in and about the darkness that engulfed her/him, trying to escape from the inescapable darkness that was not to be feared. Her/His acts of escaping from darkness were tantamount to escaping Nothingness, a part of herself/himself. S/He was lost, just as darkness was lost. Eventually Thankganyego realised that s/he had to survive, s/he said, “I must grow, or else take my own life when darkness comes to swallow me. In the same way I have to grow until I am as big as Nothingness.”

There was nothing that Thankganyego could sustain herself/himself with, thus s/he lived off herself/himself. S/he grew until Nothingness found her/him unacceptable and wanted to kill her/him. Nothingness, who held powers of Darkness, but also the Mother of Light, attempted to blind Thankganyego with darkness. Thankganyego strengthened herself/himself by shining even more. Then Nothingness hurled her/

him with a vortex of cold, the Mother of Mist. But Thankganyego grew bigger and became even more energetic. Thankganyego grew until s/he was as big and as powerful as Nothingness. To avenge herself/himself, s/he shook around Nothingness and covered her with blinding light and eventually consumed her. “I am what I am”, Thankganyego thereafter proclaimed.

Now the Stream of Time, who has been withdrawn all along, did not expect what Thankganyego did and became furious. Stream of Time sent Cold Wind to fight Thankganyego. A bloody war ensued, Thankganyego, now armed with a fiery spear filled with clay which had words of creation on it tried to eliminate Cold Wind by filling the atmosphere with loud noises. The fire tried but failed to melt and swallow Cold Wind, and only managed to turn it into ashes. Equally the remains of the fire were also turned into ashes. This fierce war which started a long time ago continues today and will continue beyond the end of times. The narrator, Nothingness, says she knows all of this and claims, “It is only I, your mother, who knows your father”.

The myth is set against rhythmic, cyclic haunting sounds from African traditional instruments echoing against a background of a forest scene. Alternative sprays of light and darkness circling in the background as well as in the mise-en-scene recreate Greek and biblical mythology-inspired epic battles, though in this case between Thankganyego and her/his amorphous deity-like parents. The juxtaposition of light and darkness in the myth is an invocation of colonial discourses of Africa associated with darkness/nothingness and Europe with light, but also cold. The entities represented by these binaries are further emboldened by metaphors which create vivid images of the geo-positionings of these continents as well as establishing both continents as the creators of a ‘mess’, Thankganyego being a chaos and a bungle equated to the African postcolony, the grotesque offspring of Africa and Europe.

## JESUS’S LOT IS AN AFRICAN WOMAN’S TOO!

In the photographic series *Moyo (I – III)* (2013) and the video *Moyo* (2013) Chiurai draws on Michelangelo’s masterpiece, the *Pietà* (1475-1564) for inspiration in representing women’s issues in Africa. The *Pietà* refers to the pose of Mary, Jesus Christ’s mother, post-Crucifixion. Chiurai’s take on the issue is different as for him the human affect is significant, especially in view of the analogy he maps out between Jesus Christ and African women. In the original sculpture, the establishment of Mary’s sacrifice as a spiritually influenced realisation of a woman who has embraced her son’s duty to humanity on earth is emphasised. Michelangelo represents Jesus Christ’s mother as “younger, calmer, and less sorrowful”.<sup>3</sup> The calm composition of Mary’s face covers up the anguish and dismay at the barbaric manner, which she witnessed, in which her only son was murdered and which Christians ritually celebrate. Also smothered in the original sculpture are signs of torture that Jesus Christ suffered; the wound on the right hand side of his torso, the nail wounds on his feet and hands and the thorn wounds on his face and the actual dramatic and lengthy ordeal of his persecution, trial, torture, crucifixion and death.

The effect of this concealment ‘humanises’ Jesus’ death as though it resulted from natural causes. The special Carrara marble from which the original was carved, the size of the sculpture, measuring 5.7 and 6.4 feet<sup>4</sup>, and the fact that its production was commissioned by a Vatican Cardinal, Jean de Bilhères, removes the spectacle of the grotesque violence, cruelty and injustice as well as the agonising death he had to endure because of the outlandish nature of Roman and Jewish laws. The monumentalisation of the violence that accompanied Jesus Christ’s death in this sculpture sediments desensitized, normative discourses that fail to interrogate the inhumanity and the injustices that should prick the conscience of humanity.

Representations of this type of the *Pietà* exist. A few foreground the physical and psychological effects of his torture and death. But generally, these constructions do not differ remarkably from the original sculpture and proceed from the toned-down savagery and barbarism undergirding the execution of Jesus Christ. Equally, in all other presentations the patriarchal master narrative

*The collusion between Africa and Europe refused the African postcolony the space to shape its own identity and destiny, thus the tensions, feuds and deadly intent to wipe each other out of existence. The existential question uttered by Thankganyego, “I am what I am”, not only brings to mind Peter Tosh’s popular Black Consciousness-inspired reggae song, “I am that I am” but also the Christian God’s identity as spelled out in the Book of Genesis.*

Both Thankganyego’s notions about identity and the observation that he has to grow and survive alludes to the postcolonial Africa’s search for its identity and fate as it develops away from “dark”, “empty” Africa and “cold”, “meddling” Europe. Its harsh experiences at the hands of former powers that created it can only make it strong and make its existence undeniable. There seems to be a suggestion that postcolonial Africa can only be emboldened and spurred to further growth with each strike from its original creators. The non-defeatist attitude Thankganyego assumed is symbolic of a stance that postcolonial Africa should take in registering its preparedness to fight for its destiny and identity all the way to beyond the end of times.

of a 'man' dying and saving all humanity from sin is foregrounded with the sacrificial female in the background in a resigned, defeatist and sorrowful position. Even more bizarre in the original representation is an image of a youthful Mary carrying on her lap an aged son who has outgrown her. The image of the woman is playing to patriarchal notions of women embodying an un-ageing, eternally youthful physique.

The replacements effected in the Moyo series bring a different dimension to received readings of the trials and tribulations of Jesus Christ and his mother at the hands of the Roman and Jewish patriarchy and law. In the photographs *Moyo I* and *III* and in the film *Moyo*, a youthful African woman replaces Mary, and another figure of a dead young African woman is a substitute for Jesus Christ. The angst and lament in works from the *Moyo* series regarding the acts leading to the death of the young woman are unmistakable.

In addition to registering grief at the untimely death of this woman, the bereaved woman dips a cloth into the wound of the dead one and ritually cleanses the upper exposed parts of the corpse. Her actions are accompanied by a plaintive Wesleyan hymn, Wadatshula Ngenxa Yami (Song 67 from Incwadi Yenkonzo Nezingoma zamaMethodisi AseNingizimu Afrika, 1954: 54). The song also proceeds from the original composition, just as the sculpture also draws from the original, but changes. The lyrics of the songs from the second verse are changed to reflect on the complicity of humanity in acts of violence, debasement, pain, redemption and forgiveness, in this case, in relation to African women:



**PIETA'** — Michelangelo Buonarroti, 1475-1564  
Vatican, St. Peter's Basilica. © 2016. Photo Scala, Florence

### ***...Amaphutha ethu sonke***

*The mistakes of all of us*

### ***Awela kuwe***

*Fall unto you*

### ***Nezandla zethu sonke***

*Even all our hands*

### ***Zabalelwa kuwe***

*Are counted on you*

### ***Siyaxolelwa, siyaphiliswa***

*We are forgiven, we are saved*

### ***Ngezinhlungu kuwe***

*With your pain*

### ***Sigeza lezo zono***

*We wash away those sins*

### ***Ngegazi lakho***

*With your blood*

Even though the song refers to general religiosity, the representations in the videos carefully attach it to the African context and locate the acts of brutality against women and hopes of redemption within an African context. The popular isiZulu Christian hymn, the African traditional cleansing ritual and the suggested brutal death visited on the woman provoke interpretations which relate the video portrayals to the South African context. In South Africa, shocking images of gross violence visited on girl children and women circulating in the public domain have become normative. By appropriating a familiar, Christian and naturalised representation of the (post) Crucifixion, for the South African context, where overwhelmingly the citizens are Christian, the *Moyo* series seems to disrupt the normative Christian practice and discourses around Easter celebrations. The *Moyo* video's amplification of the intense observance of Christian rituals around Lent by South African Christian communities enables Chiurai to switch attention to issues of violence against women in South Africa. Furthermore, by having these African women replace the original images of the Pietà sculpture, he makes the comparison of the treatment Jesus Christ received at the hands of his persecutors with African women unexpected, but also shockingly similar and familiar.

## **RITUALISING THE LAST SUPPER: GLOBAL CAPITALISM, AFRICAN TRADITIONALISM AND THE BETRAYAL OF AFRICA**

A similar technique has been deployed in the representations of *Iyeza* (2011, video) where images of the biblical Last Supper permeate the video. *Iyeza* was developed from an earlier photographic print, *Revelations VII*, and superimposes this Christian event on the African context. Connecting the biblical event and *Iyeza's* communicative intent is the theme of betrayal, sacrifice, feasting and prophecy. *Iyeza's* visualities are embedded on a cacophony of polyrhythmic sounds of a popular song, *Ithongo Liyavuma* (The ancestor agrees) by Thandiswa Mazwai. The song appeals to the ancestors to provide one possessed by an ancestral spirit with medicine to cure *inkathazo* (a possession by a spirit of the ancestor). The polyrhythmic music bed provides a base for polyphonic representations in the video which depicts seemingly unconnected subjects partaking in a feast in the background. In the foreground there are also representations which lend themselves to senses of disjointedness; a man is engaged in a sacrificial ritual, there is a shooting by another, as well as sorrowful women crouching as though they are consulting an African *isangoma* (diviner).

As the video unfolds, the seemingly disjointed narratives assume a connected logicity. The middle of the table is occupied by what could represent an indifferent superpower seated with hands outstretched in a regal, high winged chair, having adopted Jesus Christ's Last Supper pose. S/he is flanked by a gleeful soldier, fully armed with an AK 47 on the right, and three feasting men on the left. Initially, the calm feasting masked the longstanding confrontation between them which is brought to light when one gigantic man adorned with a United States flag and other popular paraphernalia draws out an AK 47, intending to shoot one of the men seated with him. Initially, the gleeful soldier, who has an open suitcase and brown liquor bottles in front, is unmoved, just as the character in the majestic chair is unmoved. Both seem to have their gazes fixed on events occurring before them in front of the table. But as soon as the AK has been aimed, the third man, in trendy 1970s Jamaican popular dress, rises to help disarm the huge



man. Both the intended victim of the huge man and the Jamaican-dressed fellow attempt to wrestle the AK 47 from the man, but failing to do so, strangle him with it. Even at this moment the character in the royal chair is oblivious to the happenings occurring immediately next to her/his left. However, the soldier who is on the other side of the imperially-seated fellow gleefully looks on, holding up an AK 47 and a glass, toasting to the scuffle of the three men that he is witnessing.

Even though the imperial character's gaze falls on the events occurring in front of the table, it appears that s/he is not fully cognisant. Equally, the ritualist performing a sacrifice where the imperialist's gaze falls is oblivious of the shooting that occurs behind him at the front of the table. It is the gaze of the gleeful soldier which moved from initially fixing on the paramilitary youth, shooting an unarmed youth with an AK 47, to the scuffle of the three men, which registers connection between the events in the background and in the foreground. Similarly the distress and laments of the women crouching on the right of the table connect the events on set in terms of their position in the composition of the camera and what they react to: the shooting of one youth by another. Furthermore, the strangulation and the shooting fall symmetrically on an obtuse angle and connect the ritualist with the warring men and the shooting. The ritualist's act, of spit-spraying the set with some liquid sipped from a transparent liquor bottle after performing a ritual, underlines the theme of 'sacrifice' and 'rituals of violence' associated with each individual in the mise-en-scene.

It would seem Chiurai drew inspiration for this work from a US black choreographer/dancer, Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* (1960), who through his dance performance tells the story of African-American faith and persistence in their struggle against slavery, racism and freedom through a suite of dances set to spirituals and blues music. Whereas Ailey drew on a positive, heroic anti-slavery and the Civil Right Movement discourses, as part of the celebration of black history and African-Americans success in inscribing their historical presence in white America, Chiurai's *Revelations/Iyeza* has the opposite effect. Chiurai's ideas of the concept are more about the shocking admissions of failures in Africa as a postcolony. The imperially-seated, indifferent fellow is symbolic, representing the continued imperial ambiance of European superpowers, the effect of which are betrayal, anarchy, violence, suffering, premature

death, military juntaism, kleptocracies and global capitalists' intrusiveness, all of which are aspects that have come to define the political and cultural economies and landscapes of postcolonial Africa. It is against the effects of this apathetic invasiveness by European interests into the political and private lives of postcolonial Africans that Chiurai seems to register his concerns.

*The uncaring attitude of the imperial power can also be observed in the ritualist, a symbolic representation of African traditionalism. Implied is that African traditionalism now seems to be about observances that have lost their relevance as they no longer respond to experiences that affect people who revere it. The imagery in the video provokes this sense and is contrary to the polyrhythmic music bed on which the representations are arranged. Whereas the song sanctions and affirms the role of ancestors, and therefore African traditionalism in postcolonial Africa, the depictions of the ritualist undermine that view. The indifference of both African traditionalism and the imperial superpowers lead to conclusions that these entities have betrayed Africans.*

## AFRICA COLLAPSED: CONSUMERISM AND DETRITUS IN THE REVELATION SERIES

It is in the *Revelations* series that Chiurai introduced themes of violence, anarchy, globalisation, consumerism, political disorder, economic devastation and detritus. The inclusion of *Revelations VII* in relation to the *Creation* and *Moyo* series in the 2014 exhibition *Harvest of Thorns* served to add and bring to the fore post-apocalyptic readings which are currently animating the African continent.

*Revelations I* set the tone for the thematic explorations of the whole series. In the twelve scenes presented in *Revelations* series, the theme of doom and gloom runs throughout the art pieces. In *Revelations I*, the greyish, flower-dotted wallpaper in the background is bedecked with a huge Chinese fan on the left and a flag on the right, bearing the green, yellow and white colours symbolic of pan-African political sovereignty. The juxtapositioning of these sovereignty symbols brings into sharp focus the relationship existing between Africa and China. The centre of the piece is constituted by seemingly rebellious young men and a woman. Some of these young people are toting heavy military fire power and another is brandishing a machete. These half-clothed young men with maniacal expressions and menacing, glistening black bodies are dressed in oil-soaked rags. The woman is in short pants which expose her huge seductive black thighs. She dons a ginger-coloured wig, the latest fashion rave with some African women. The young people give the suggestion of having once embraced the 'good life' promised by an earlier superpower, the US, as a dirty t-shirt worn by one of the young men seems to indicate. Furthermore, consumerism, suggested by a shopping trolley, in which another young man in an army helmet sits bearing a human skull, attests to the notion that the young people depicted in the still have embraced certain aspects of the consumerist, global capitalist-influenced lifestyles. The kind of consumerism occupying the foreground of the still is unsettling, picking up on the spine-chilling, fiendish facial expressions of the young people. This type of consumerism is toxic and non-recyclable. The plastic oil drums, discarded plastic products, old rubber tyres, a crate with a Coca Cola symbol, and alcohol bottles littering the foreground of the still are punctuated by a discarded classical danger sign.

The representation of doom and gloom established in *Revelations I* is continued up to *Revelations VI*. With each subsequent revelation, Chiurai seems to highlight certain aspects; for example, the American global consumerist symbols, MacDonald's, and the Chinese fan are foregrounded and the American symbolism is made subservient to the Chinese cultural symbol. These global symbols are juxtaposed with earlier representations of warring youths, discarded rubber and plastic products and an oil drum. In yet another still, the same composition in the print reveals an image of Michael Jackson and the flag of an African state with PEACE lettering emblazoned on it. Yet the foreground is cluttered with youths armed to the teeth, non-recyclable waste, cloths and ironically, green trees. In another still, the violence predicted in preceding stills eventually occurs. A family with mainly women in it, relaxing under an umbrella, is attacked by a group of young men. In this still, human skulls — representations of death — take centre stage in the foreground and in the background the flag with PEACE inscriptions and the Chinese fan dominate the overhang. It would seem this still marks the climax of the *Revelations* series, as thereafter the scenery in the following stills is markedly different.

The turnaround is introduced by *Revelations VII*, discussed as *Iyeza*, above. After the dramatic portrayals of death, ritual, betrayal and sacrifice, senses of normalcy are introduced. *Revelations VIII* reveals feasting young men and women. The youths are properly clad and well behaved. Metaphors of violence, death and global capitalism are all gone and in their place are those of picnic paraphernalia, stylish outdoor attire and a mood of relaxation and enjoyment. However, images alluding to consumption continue to permeate the still. *Revelations IX* introduces a mixed race couple walking on a red velvet carpet accompanied by a man holding an umbrella for them. The bespectacled man in a safari suit walks with a finely dressed white woman wearing all white, whose hands are sheathed in white matching gloves. This bespectacled man also dominates the next still, *Revelations X*. He seems hard-pressed as he stands against a flag with Barack Obama's face behind him, the African PEACE flag next to him as he addresses

seated men in front of him. The smiling face of the US President, Barack Obama, is flanked by two images of Africa on both sides and its countenance contrasts with that of the standing man in the safari suit. The fact that the latter is hard-pressed probably with questions from the floor is revealed by his bulging eyes and his sweating countenance, which he wipes. *Revelations XI* is the penultimate work in the series and the last of the landscape tableaux's from which the majority of the series is comprised. In *Revelations XI* the man dressed in a safari suit is now in an army general's hat with a gold chain around his neck. He is inappropriately dressed for this type of lounging area and is sitting with another man with an equal demeanour. In the background red draped curtains hang stylishly behind a painting. The decor is finished off with a vase with an arrangement of roses on a table in front of the portrait. Both half-clothed men are speaking into a microphone placed on a small table between them.

The *Revelations* series pick metaphors from the biblical Book of Revelation to document the destruction of Africa and its (post) apocalypse, post-war conditions. The series also moves on from the (post) apocalypse to introduce senses of renewal and normalcy within consumerist spaces. However, the ending which connects Africa to America under black leadership and the plotting men at the end of the series leaves one with a sense of an unresolvable conundrum.

In the main, the communicative intent of the stills is suggestive of the legacy the new Africa-China relations will leave as an aftermath on the African continent. The US constitutes and is representative of earlier relationships Africa had with global capitalism. The legacies of earlier economic relationships were of complete social entropy, wars, destruction and the exploitation of mineral resources, consumerism and decay on the continent of Africa.

The new Africa-China ties, as suggested by the stills, will only add to the woes from which Africa is already suffering. China, with its traditions of economic models that produces excessively with no regard for the wellbeing of the environment, the ecosystem and humanity, will, it seems, add to the social disintegration and destruction already plaguing the African continent. It is against these realities that Chiurai seems to suggest that perhaps Africa's future and destiny is better placed in America under a black president (as the print *Revelations X* depicts) than is the case currently, despite America's pervasive, superpower intentions. Or is he suggesting that since Africa lost to the first wave of imperialism, it will lose once more to China's wave of imperialism. Is he saying it is better to stick with the enemy you already know? Does China's plastic-based economy differ from earlier mining economies whose effects led to the unprecedented despoliation of the African continent? In terms of the human affect, do warped youths socialised in misguided ideology and false patriotism stand to be better off with China's imperial takeover? Linked to the global focus in the prints are Africa's own anomies which have emerged since independence. The state of collapse in many African states reflects the lack of moral and political compass that could have provided economic stability and development. Chiurai seems to question the social, political and economic malaise prevalent in Africa and its effects on youthful nihilism. By highlighting the imperial interests of the new economic powerhouse, China, vis-à-vis postcolonial anomies, he forces self-reflection, cautioning that the effects of this relationship will recycle the non-recyclable toxic waste already choking the continent.

#### END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In 2011 KUDZANAI CHIURAI's exhibition *Nation State* was exhibited over two venues; at an independent space in Newtown and at the Goodman Gallery project space at Arts on Main.

<sup>2</sup> Creation series refers to the photographic works *Creation I – III* and the video work *Creation (from Conflict Resolution)*

<sup>3</sup> <https://beckehris.wordpress.com/visual-arts/best-work>, accessed 15 April 2015

<sup>4</sup> Ibid



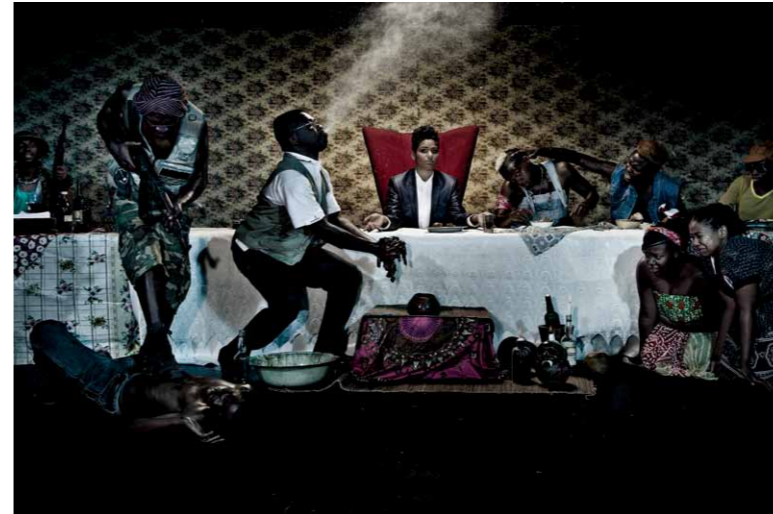
**CREATION (FROM CONFLICT RESOLUTION)**, 2012 Length: 5'16. Edition of 5



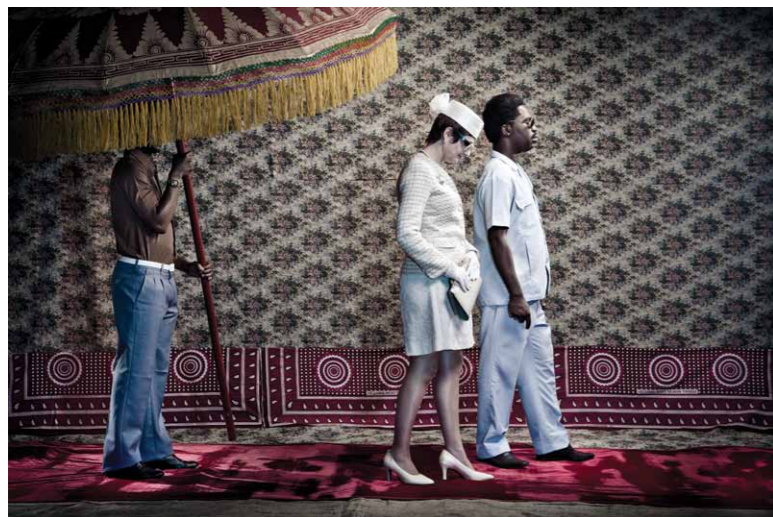
**MOYO I**, 2013, Ultrachrome ink on photo fibre paper, 112 x 163 cm



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**REVELATIONS I—XI** – 2011, Ultrachrome ink on photo fibre paper, 145 x 200 cm. Edition of 10  
[left to right]

# THE SOIL IS ALIVE

*The Female Nomad and Chiurai's  
Eco-Gothic Landscapes*

BY EMMA LAURENCE

In this essay I explore how the ‘female nomad’<sup>1</sup> is linked to the land which, I argue, is positioned as a post-colonial gothic site — at once a place of haunting and redemption characterised by the “repressed return” of the debris of colonial history<sup>2</sup>.

In a series of untitled charcoal drawings for *Conflict Resolution* (2012), Chiurai depicts female bodies in anguished poses against dark and intricate landscapes. These landscapes are often rendered not from tracing the natural formation of land but from compositions of skeletal remains, disembodied limbs and wire fencing — the remnants of the oppressive colonial control of body and land. Chiurai’s landscapes offer both an excavation of and a cathartic confrontation with the continual ‘repressed return’ of past into the present. Viewed as related portrayals of the post-colonial experience the drawings map the progression of the ‘female nomad’ through sites of haunting and offer ways in which the female subject, having confronted specters of the past, can transcend the confines of history and the shackles of ‘being’ through a cycle of ‘becoming.’

Perhaps one of the most forceful ways in which the colonial past continues to haunt the post-colonial experience is in the industrialisation of labor. As a result of colonial systems of oppression, in many post-colonial states there is still a separation of wealth and class. Although technically emancipated from regimes of the past, in post-colonial states like Zimbabwe and South Africa the labor force is nevertheless predominantly comprised of the same groups of people who were oppressed under colonialism. It is the mechanisation of the black body — and the role of the black female in producing labor which is furiously excavated and, although anguishing, ultimately surpassed by Chiurai’s ‘female nomads.’

In *Untitled (Miner)* (2011), a female figure crouches over a miner’s helmet — positioned between her bare legs. Her hands are clasped over her head — which is turned inwards as if protecting herself from the viewer’s gaze. Chiurai has taken great care in depicting the anatomy of the human form — the drawing shows how skin stretches over the knuckles of her hands, which twist together grasping her head. A sense of momentum and sudden movement is caught in the cloth which is tied around her head and which has fallen forwards. The contours of the body — caught in momentum — are mimicked in the fibrous organic landscape behind the figure. The detail and intricacy of the body and land are

juxtaposed with the static shapes of the miner's helmet and the skirt which covers the figure's torso. The dissonance between the organic and the inorganic instigates a sense of transformation — of the body transcending the confines of the industry, capitalism, and colonialism signified in the miner's helmet. The miner — described in the title of the work — is absent in the drawing itself and is only brought into being through the generic and unyielding helmet. This helmet, placed between the figure's legs, alludes to childbirth — and it is here that Chiurai demonstrates the urgent need to transcend the confines of the systematic violence utilised in the control of land and labour. The mourning and tormented figure laments the loss of individualism — if she has given birth, as her position suggests, she has not birthed a child but rather a body to be mechanised by the industry of mining. She laments both the history of forced labor and the seemingly inescapable plight it has brought into the present.

Chiurai has turned the process of drawing itself into an act of transmutation. While the landscape in *Untitled (Miner)* is organic and relatively free of the anguish experienced by the figure in *Sacrifice* (2011), the landscape heaves with painful symbols of a violent past. Rendered with charcoal so thick, the residue almost obscures the figures and forms making up the landscape. The images, which do emerge from the unforgiving background, have been formed through a process of erasing and lifting the dense charcoal layers. There is violence in these marks — and indeed this process of drawing requires significant stamina from the artist who must at once force the charcoal away from the paper and finesse the residue into a form.

The profile of the Zimbabwe bird is brought forth from the charcoal surface and is utilised here as a symbol of the traumatic duality of post-colonial identity. The bird at once calls to mind the majesty of the Zimbabwe ruins, looting of these sites by 19th century explorers and Cecil John Rhodes' strange fascination with the soap stone carvings of the Zimbabwean bird.

The jaw of a human skull lurks at the bottom of the drawing — the rest of the skull hidden in the dense black that surrounds it. This omen of death and fear haunts the formidable landscape, a reminder of the violent and brutal past. Whereas the worker's body is absent in *Untitled (Miner)* — superseded by a uniform helmet — in *Sacrifice* it is brought into being as a horrifying gothic symbol of the past. As the drawings are part of a series, the skull and the helmet in the respective drawings call upon each other, existing as binary opposites. The relationship between the helmet and the skull is evoked through the compositional elements of the two drawings so that the shape of the helmet in *Untitled (Miner)*, which is fashioned through leaving blank parts of the paper, mirrors the shape of the skull in *Sacrifice*, formed through lifting charcoal away from the paper. The stark

contrast between dark and light, unfinished and overworked surfaces and aggressive and loose mark making links the absent body of the miner in *Untitled (Miner)* with the violated and deteriorating body in *Sacrifice*.

Reading the works as a narrative progression, the relatively quiet surface of the land in *Untitled (Miner)* is torn open by the figure's torment, revealing the monstrous forms which lurk beneath the surface in *Sacrifice*.

The female figure in *Sacrifice* no longer buckles forward, rather it is spread across the paper, mimicking the position of Christ in Renaissance and Baroque crucifixion paintings. The body curves upwards so that the stomach and genitals appear to protrude from the drawings. This time it is the figure which has been left untouched and formed through omitting its shape from the overworked and dark background. Only those parts of the body associated with birth — the genitals, breasts and navel have been drawn into the figure. Another body straddles the female's head between its legs, pulling it so far back that her face is obscured. The female body strains against the pull of the hands freeing itself from the weight and violence of the past. It is through this perverse birthing rite, through merging with the land and with the past that the female figure is able to transcend the trauma, which the landscape has absorbed. In confronting the oppressive control of both land and body as sites of forced labor and production, the female figure is able to surpass the confines of patriarchal and colonial constructions of female identity.

In *Ritual* (2011), and *Untitled (Crying Woman from Conflict Resolution)* (2012), the female figures are depicted as free from the static positions of anguish in *Sacrifice* and *Untitled (Miner)*. There is a sense of movement not only in the bodily positions of the figures but also in the clear mark making and tonality in the figuration of the bodies. In *Ritual* the female figure, emancipated from the grasp of the haunted monstrous landscape, walks over mounds of skulls from which the land itself is comprised. While these skulls are certainly disconcerting, they are not the monstrous specters of the repressed past which haunt *Sacrifice*. Having been exorcised in *Sacrifice* the landscape now is a site of memorial, which the female figure is able to cross over. Chiurai plays with scale in the drawing so that the female figure appears larger than life. Far bigger than the landscape she appears to be about to walk through the drawing itself. The sense of movement evoked in the stance of the figure as well as the careful mark making employed in depicting the female body transforms the trapped bodies of the previous works into sites of female agency.

In *Ritual* Chiurai's female nomad — having negotiated the graveyard in *Ritual* turns her face — freed from the grasping hands in *Sacrifice* — towards the sky. A white bird, often seen as messengers between the humans and supreme beings,

floats towards the figure from the sky. In the bottom of the drawing, a male form reaches forward towards the female. The figure's hands are placed over a white bowl ready to be cleansed and freed from the shackles of oppression and labour.

Both the female form and the land have, through a cathartic confrontation with violence, been freed from the past and the mythical and spiritual relationship between the female and the land have been restored.

*Untitled (Open Jaw and Goat from Conflict Resolution)* (2012), is the only drawing from the series which depicts male bodies away from the female form. Perhaps, having been freed from the cycle of labour production, the male and female forms are no longer bound by an umbilical cord of suffering and oppression. A hybrid male form, half-man half-lion, holds his hand above the head of another figure who kneels in front of him. A goat is tethered behind the powerful hybrid — a symbol of sacrifice and ritual. The mutation of the male form into a lion or a lion into a male form, is perhaps a reference to the Shona mhondoro: lion spirits who possess human mediums, male or female, and had the power to make rain.

So the transformation of the male form into a lion in Chiurai's drawing is at once an attestation of the African male freed from the cycle of labor production, and is also a destabilisation of static gender roles where males are associated with power and provision and females associated with fertility and mothering. Freed from the shackles of the past, the female nomad continues to adapt and change. In continually flowing through and confronting the literal borders of land allocation and the symbolic borders of constructed gender and racial identities, Chiurai's female bodies and the implied feminine spirits disrupt the confines of the past on the present in a continuous process of 'Becoming.'

#### END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For Braidotti, the figure of the 'female nomad' explores not who we are, but rather what, at last, we want to become. Braidotti stresses the significance of "representing mutations, changes and transformation so that the process of 'becoming' overcomes the dominance of 'Being'" (BRAIDOTTI, ROSI. 2002. *Metamorphosis: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*. Polity Press: Cambridge. pp.2)

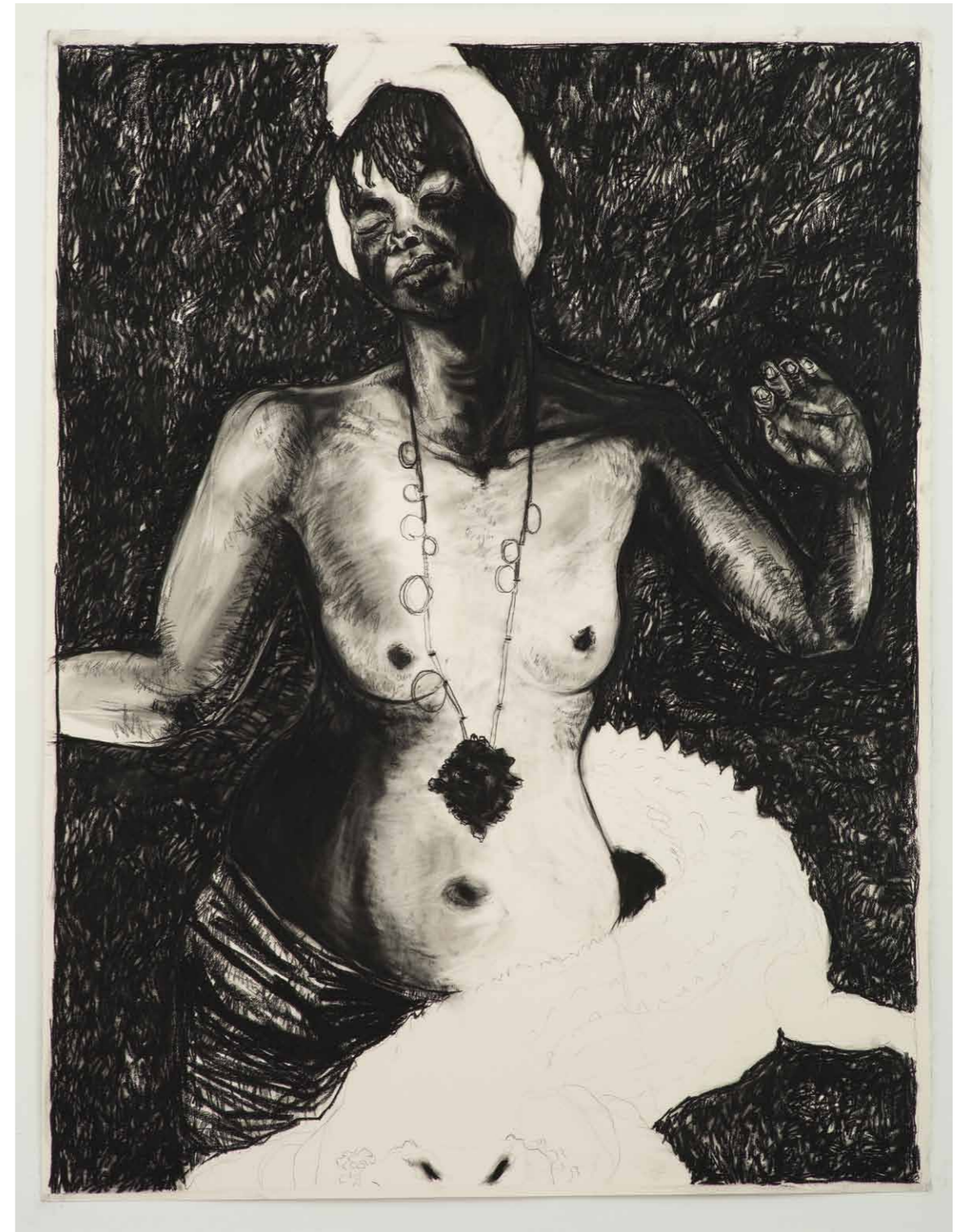
<sup>2</sup> The post-colonial gothic is defined as a genre which depicts the post-colonial experience as one which is constantly haunted by the colonial past. (HUGHES, WILLIAM AND ANDREW SMITH, 2003. Introduction: Defining the relationships between Gothic and the postcolonial. *Gothic Studies*, vol.5. No. 2: 1-6.)



**SAFARI CLUB** – 2013, charcoal and pastel on paper, 163 x 125 cm



**UNTITLED (OPEN JAW AND GOAT FROM CONFLICT RESOLUTION)** – 2012, charcoal on paper, 140 x 100 cm



**UNTITLED (DANCING WOMAN FROM CONFLICT RESOLUTION)** – 2012, charcoal on paper, 140 x 100 cm



**UNTITLED (CRYING WOMAN FROM CONFLICT RESOLUTION)** – 2012, charcoal on paper, 140 x 100 cm



**UNTITLED (SKULL FROM CONFLICT RESOLUTION)** – 2012, charcoal on paper, 140 x 100 cm





**RITUAL** – 2011, charcoal on paper, 220 x 80 cm



**SACRIFICE** – 2011, charcoal on paper, 220 x 80cm

# BLACK POWER NEXT DOOR

*Hip Hop and Chiurai's Work*

BY NOLAN OSWALD DENNIS

I AM LOOKING AT *Boy Next Door* (2009) a painting by Kudzanai Chiurai. In the foreground is a black-skinned boy, neatly dressed in a dark red blazer, white shirt, sensible trousers. His posture, projecting unresolved tensions, is caught between menacing swagger and schoolboy fragility. Behind him stretch rows of Metrorail trains, the sprawling mass stretching into the endless landscape. The image is eerily familiar, a montage of local banalities and aspirational ambiguity. The trainyard is an iconic marker of black labour and migration in de-industrialising southern Africa today. But the presence of this boy repositions this landscape, pushing it towards a hip hop vernacular. The figure of the *Boy Next Door* transfigures this collapsing urban infrastructure into a site for new black power.

Hip hop culture emerged in the post-industrial Bronx of the 1970s as a source of identity and social resistance for young black and Latino Americans. The crumbling infrastructure of post-industrial America formed the backdrop against which African-American, Latino and Caribbean culture was cut up, scratched, mixed and sampled to create a rich cultural expression termed hip hop. An equivalent set of global conditions emerged in the post-Reagan, Washington consensus, structural adjustment era of the late 80s and 90s to which hip hop was the natural worldwide expression.

The mechanics of hip hop is embodied in the cut, a complex procedure implying a severing of connections. The cut (re)opens the wound. From the cut you get the break, the sample, the possibility to loop the remaining material, to paste and mix new ideas into the discontinuous body. The break, the cut and remix are the lifeblood of hip hop as a cross referencing tradition.

In his photograph, *The Minister of Arts and Culture* (2009) Chiurai plays on the archetypal male image of golden era hip hop. Looking off-camera the *Minister* stands erect and self-assured. In his hand is a boombox, an oversized radio, and he is wearing oversized sunglasses, oversized jewellery, and has oversized ambition — this is Radio Raheem as a government minister. This nostalgic image draws on the optimism and self-consciously political ambitions of late 1980s and early 1990s hip hop, in a polychromatic resistance to the stark reality of black life in the US. That Chiurai employs this colourful character in the fantasy role of *The Minister of Arts and Culture* returns me to the enigmatic figure in *Boy Next Door*,

The boy stands with his head cocked to one side, the expression on his dark face shifting between disdain and apprehension. His head is ringed by a white and pink halo which hides his neck. In its place three black stars mark the beginning/end of an encircling text — “Didn’t see that shit coming. Did you, really?”. This peculiar aura illuminates his head while severing it from the rest of his body.

*His hand is raised in a typical rapper’s pose, hands up. In place of a hand this gesture exposes a yellow Lego prosthesis. Instead of recalling a toy hand, this non-human appendage becomes a menacing mechanical digit displacing the schoolboy image and translocating the figure into the industrial complex of black body — black labour. This image pulls from another tradition in hip hop: the angry black man.*



Portrait of O’Shea Jackson (b.1969), better known as the rapper **ICE CUBE**, at his home in Inglewood, 1990. United States. Photo Gallo Images / Getty Images / Janette Beckman

If *The Minister of Arts and Culture* utilises a fantasy of success to reimagine black power in Africa, Boy Next Door connects black power to urban labour, unemployment and disposable populations. It posits another type of power, the black body as an infrastructure of resistance, an offensive power parsed through the austere authority of Niggas Wit Attitude (NWA). The figure of *Boy Next Door* recalls the cover of *Ice Cube's* debut album: *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted* (1990). In place of the sprawl of Metrorail trains, Ice Cube stands in front of a sprawl of black men filling the city's endless streets and alleyways. This is gangster rap coming south.

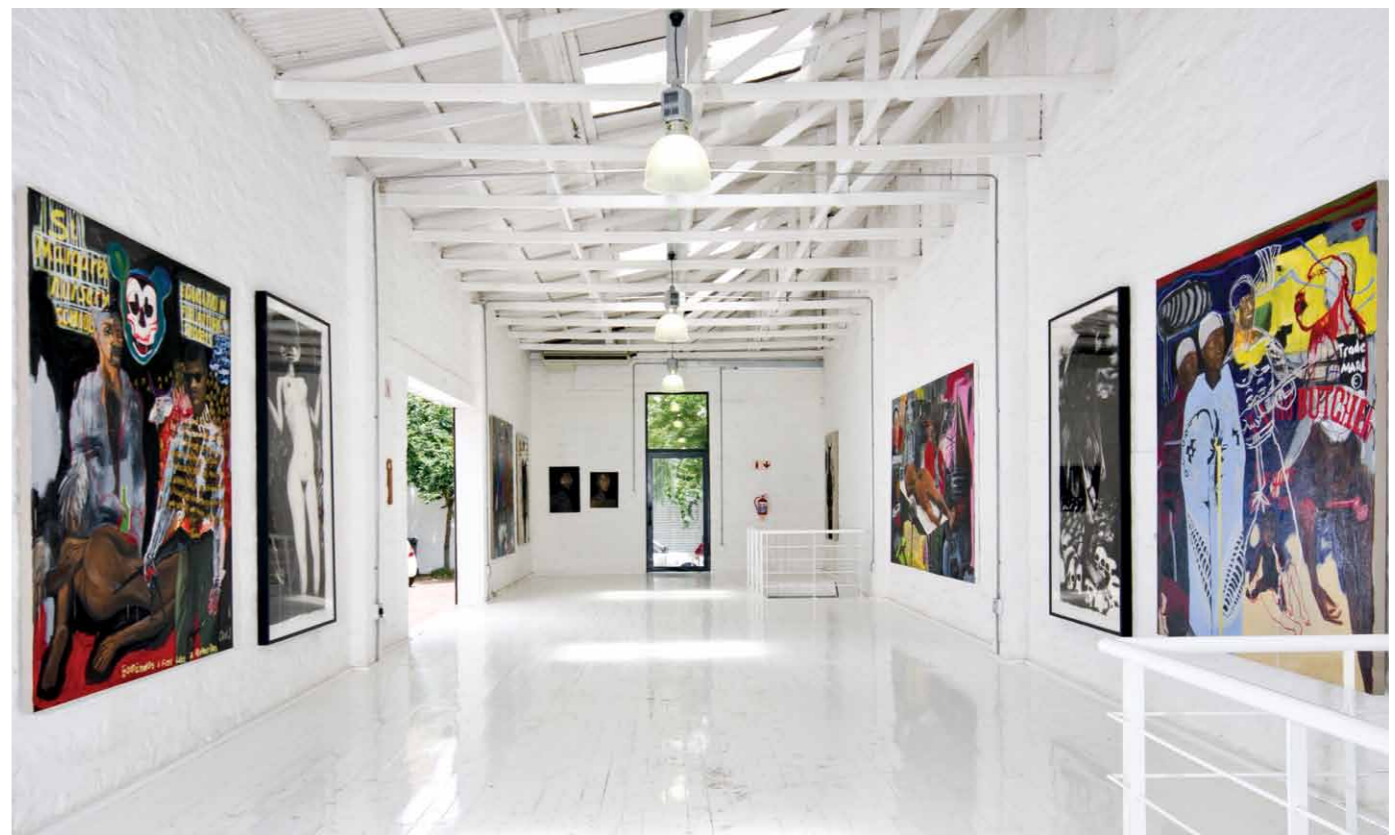
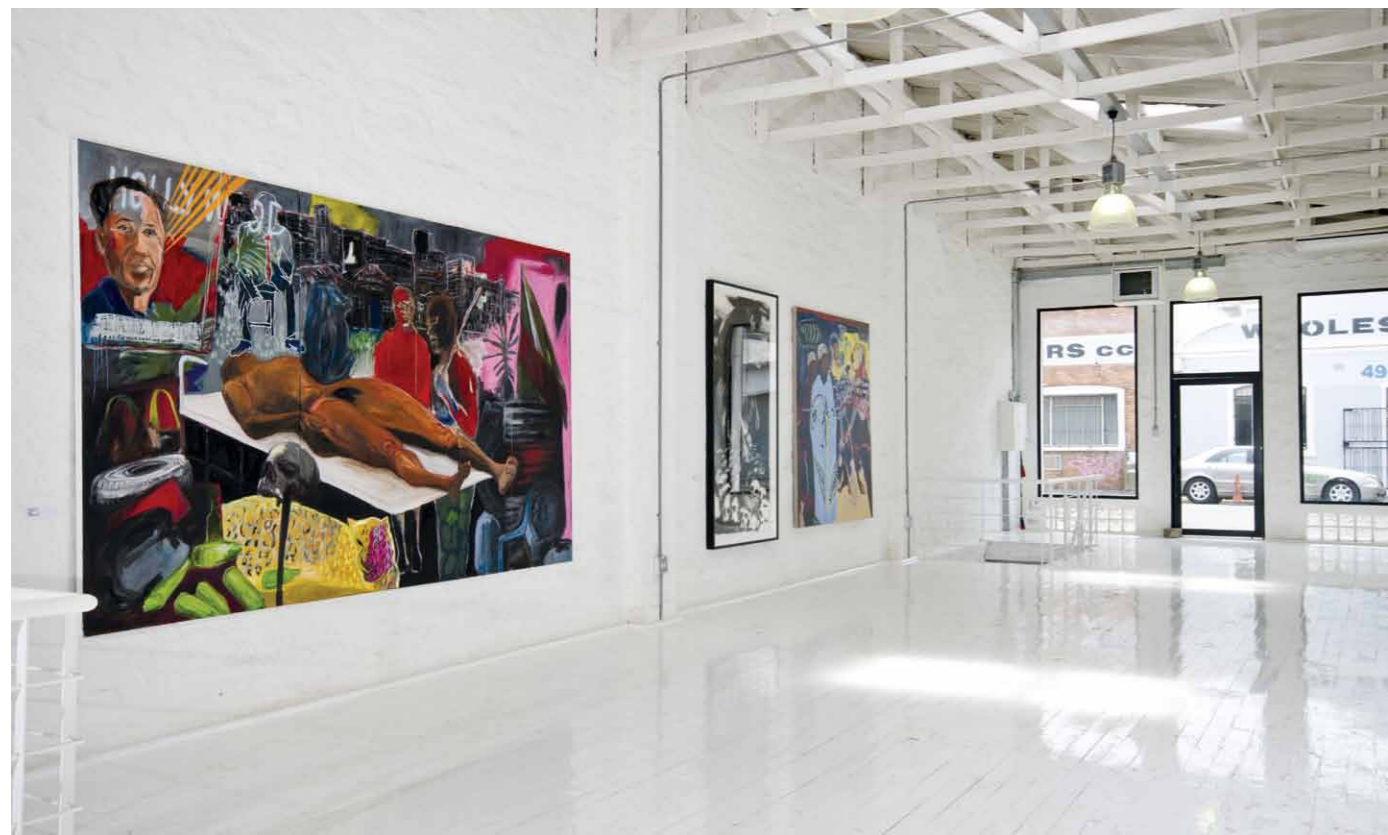
These figures, and their representative traditions within hip hop, are not opposed; instead they work in tandem, cross-pollinating and remixing the image of black resistance. Like the hip hop producer absorbing anything of use-value into the construction of meaning, in this struggle everything is fair game.

In the *Boy Next Door* the scene is framed, magazine style, by two title blocks. The top title block has been erased, obscured by white lines, and in its place a pair of purple sunglasses float beneath a black ribbon inscribed with the words "the extraordinary death of the boy next door". The sunglasses are oversized, occupying the width of the canvas. The convention of the magazine cover has been combined with the ancient symbol of hip hop's subversive excess, indoor sunglasses. The double obscuration of the title block, once with white paint and again with technology for hiding eyes, does more than recall the oversized sunglasses of *The Minister of Art and Culture*. It demands a cross-referential attitude in the reading of either painting.

A grey band at the bottom of *Boy Next Door* contains the logo of the popular South African newspaper, the Sowetan, cut short by the body of the 'boy next door'. The narrative connection between Soweto and Johannesburg is made and unmade. The train as the vessel carrying the notional black-body-as-lifefood feeding the city is interrupted by this particular black body. The boy next door with his robotic limb and severed head is finally overwritten by the enigmatic headline, "well oprah said he was a cooky monster".



**BOY NEXT DOOR** – 2009, oil and spray paint on canvas, 180 x 120 cm



STATE OF THE NATION EXHIBITION — 2011, Newtown, Johannesburg



**UNTITLED II (FROM CONFLICT RESOLUTION)** – 2012, bronze and found objects, approx 200 x 120 x 100 cm

# DRAMA AND THE AESTHETICS OF DYSTOPIA IN CHIURAI'S ART

BY PRAISE ZENENGA

**C**HIURAI'S AMAZING RANGE OF ARTISTIC creations aptly captures the agonizing dystopian cycle that many African countries have experienced, starting with the early euphoria of celebrating political independence with its attendant hopes and inflated expectations, to the dramatic decline into extreme disillusionment, despair, severe oppression and gruelling anxieties characterising the present dispensation and beyond. The inevitability of drama in representing and narrating this dystopian story in a wide diversity of formats on a broad array of media sources is this essay's primary concern. Chiurai's dystopia, set not so much in the future but in the now, depicts the present reality of most African societies suffering from dictatorships, cataclysmic wars, failed peace pacts, xenophobia, gender and political violence, as well as many other forms of dehumanisation.

Due to its broad and multifaceted connotations, the term drama<sup>1</sup> is used in this essay in its most mundane dictionary sense, which connotes the idea of acting out, executing or carrying out an action with specific reference to the theatrical or performative elements in Chiurai's work. Most notably, the distinct predominance of such elements as conflicts, contrasts, emotions and action in the whole collection underlines the inherent dramatic essence at the core of his works. Particular focus is not only on the expressive, spectacular, breathtaking, sensational, impactful or tragic elements that make his artwork so dramatic, but also on how his art works enact dystopia.

Since Chiurai's wide range of artwork is marked by an inescapable dramatic flair, the essay also examines the way this immensely talented artist deploys aesthetic techniques such as contrast, tension and suspense to create a dramatic atmosphere in his paintings, photography, installations, videos and animations. The dystopian vision embodied and enacted in his various artistic offerings present audiences with an opportunity to experience, and encounter contemporary reality and its projections into an imagined grim future. Chiurai's collection extrapolates the reality of contemporary Africa and enables the audience to imagine a bleak future of empty utopias. As such, the range of emotions that Chiurai's works evoke among diverse audiences cannot be ignored.

His immense capacity to stimulate emotional sequences akin to those experienced in the world of theatre underlines the dramatic nature of his artworks, which is not just evident in the expressiveness of colour, sound, images, texts, figures, but also in the actual action depicted through the various media. Action abounds in Chiurai's works. Examined in their totality, Chiurai's various bodies of work and exhibitions accomplish the same progression as classical drama, adhering to the Aristotelean rule of a beginning, a middle and an end.<sup>2</sup> Over and above its intense emotional appeal, Chiurai's art is primarily perceived visually. As visual texts, Chiurai's paintings, drawings, photographs, and installations possess the suggestive power of words not only in the ways in which they convey essential information, move the plot forward, establish characters and their motivations, but also in the manner in which they depict action.

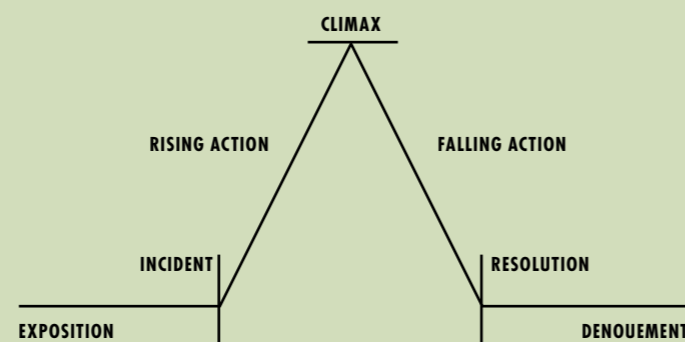
Events and phases of the dramatic action depicted in Chiurai's collection reflect sequential patterns that strongly resemble classical drama models. Over and above its dramatic attributes, Chiurai's art falls into the realm of narrative art.

Whether examining a whole series, specific installations, and entire body of work or exhibition or individual standalone pieces of Chiurai's art work, often there is a clearly recognisable dramatic structure which either contains specific elements or conforms to the classical structure which the nineteenth century German novelist Gustav Freytag<sup>3</sup> represented in the form of a pyramid.

Freytag's main objective was to help map the emotional progression in theatrical, literary and other artistic texts. Freytag's technique of the drama involves the following stages: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution and denouement. Though not explicitly an orthodox adherent of Freytag's model, Chiurai's artwork generates varying levels of emotional responses that depict distinct elements of the classical dramatic structure in numerous configurations, as intimated earlier. In Freytag's model, the initial exposition's function is to set the scene and furnish observers with background information. In Chiurai's works, particularly the videos and installations, observers can decipher specific signals and incidents that trigger conflicts, which Freytag refers to as the inciting incident. Chiurai's masterful use of such dramatic elements as suspension, contrast and tension as the observer's aesthetic experience builds up towards the most exciting moment illustrates what Freytag describes as the rising action.

The peak in Freytag's pyramid represents the climax where an observer's aesthetic experience attains the greatest maximization of emotions. There can be one or multiple tipping points with a capacity to invoke the most intense feelings depending on an individual observer's reaction to Chiurai's art. The need for observers to bring together all the loose pieces of the puzzle in the aftermath of the climax sets into motion a process which Freytag identifies as falling action. Its function is to give the observer some insight into the consequences of the tipping point in anticipation of the conclusion.

### FREYTAG'S PYRAMID OF NARRATIVE STRUCTURE



### TELLING A STORY

Much of Chiurai's art tells a story and many conflicts are resolved through the inherent narrative in his art. The fact that Chiurai gives titles and subtitles synonymous with some phases of the Freytagian pyramid, like *The Birth of a Nation*, *Creation*, *Conflict Resolution*, *Revelations*, *Resolution* and *After you Win the Title* to some of his artistic works indicates that the artist is conscious of the dramatic emotions he intends to evoke, and also underlines his affinity and adherence to Freytag's model. In Freytag's emotional mapping, the resolution represents that phase where the main problem is solved while the dénouement signals closure. Most importantly, these last two phases ensure that the story is fully understood, in so far as they provide additional information to explain and fill in any remaining details secrets, questions or mysteries not revealed before.<sup>4</sup> Within the classical context, the endings help the audience delineate if the drama is a comedy (a story with a happy ending), a tragedy (story with a sad and depressing ending) or a tragicomedy (story with happy and sad endings) put simply. The action in Chiurai's works depicts dark, bleak and tragic endings.

Though Chiurai's artwork may not necessarily follow a strict chronological order or contain all the elements of Freytag's pyramid, the observer's aesthetic experiences parallel and bear strong resemblances to the primary constituent elements found in classical emotional mapping models of the dramatic arts. The fact that Chiurai creates a body of work entitled *Conflict Resolution* (2012) not only underlines the centrality of opposition, contrast, contest, struggle, strife, war, fighting and dissent as common themes and motifs running through his artwork, but also bears strong testimony to his affinity with Freytag's interpretation. Similarly, since Chiurai entitles one of his photographic series *Revelations* (2011) — synonymous with exposition — an observer cannot avoid reading, interpreting and viewing this series as occupying that Freytagian phase which functions to disclose and divulge critical background information within the artist's entire artistic narrative continuum. Most of Chiurai's individual artistic pieces, series and bodies of works can be read either as self-contained miniature dramas or episodic scenes and acts constituting full-length dramatic works, due to their pervasive or intrinsic agony and intense action.

Chiurai's oeuvre can be summed up as dramatic, not just because it communicates key constituent elements of drama like conflict, tension, contrast and emotion in numerous ways, but exhibitions like *Communists and Hot Chicken Wings: Birth of a Nation New*, (2010) *Harvest of Thorns* (2013), and *State of the Nation* (2011) convey a deep sense of the tragedy bedevilling the post-colonial African state. The post-independence dispensation in most African countries is fraught with corruption, violence, poverty, torture, warfare, depravity, treachery, injustice and greed for money, power and pleasure that provide Chiurai with raw materials for the construction of a strong dystopian thematic thread and other aggregations of tragic elements and cathartic aesthetics in the classical (Aristotelean) sense.

Works such as *Revelations I* (2011, photograph) and the lithographic poster *Vote at Own Risk* (2009), *Shopping for Democracy* (2009), and the aptly entitled *We Always Have Reason to Fear* (2009) graphically depict violence using symbols of violence intended to arouse pity and intense fear among viewers. For example, if in the Aristotelian sense art imitates life,<sup>5</sup> then the real life and the material conditions in post-colonial Africa also imitate art in return. Though not an exact copycat, the actual conditions obtaining in post-colonial Africa in general mirror the dystopian society depicted in Chiurai's works underlining the imitative essence of his art. In a way, Chiurai extracts his themes from human actions and the human condition characterising the post independence dispensation in Africa. Ironic titles like *Africans: Manufacturing Poverty* and *We Always Have Reason to Fear* serve as examples. The cold, dark and deathly themes coupled with the gory and ghastly scenes and spectacles dominant in Chiurai's collection evoke feelings of terror and pity in ways that stimulate some kind of purification, renewal or what Aristotle calls purgation of emotions, through art which emanates from the strong empathy that observers develop with characters and situations depicted in the art. Most significantly, Chiurai's language of artistic communication is imbued with pleasurable accessories in the Aristotelian sense.

*Untitled II (from Conflict Resolution)*, 2012 — p104  
*Revelations I—XI*, 2011 — p82-83  
*Communists and Hot Chicken Wings*, 2010 — p56  
*Untitled (from Harvest of Thorns)*, 2013 — p69  
*State of the Nation*, 2011 — p102-103  
*We Always Have Reason to Fear*, 2009 — p22

## TRAGI-COMEDY

The full collection of Chiurai's dramatic artwork incorporates both tragic and comic elements. He desires to express and share with the viewers the tragedy of disappointment and of complete disillusionment with political independence typical of many contemporary African societies. The comedic and satirical approach enables Chiurai to amplify the absurd and shine the spotlight on human vice or folly. Through such satirical devices as humour, irony, exaggeration and derision, Chiurai repeatedly focuses his critical gaze on corruption, misrule, economic plunder, abuse of power, official greed, human rights abuses, violence, exploitation and lawlessness. Though adhering to the universal characteristics of satire, Chiurai apparently inherits from the traditional African artist the role of social correction. Comedy and satire thrive through humour and in Chiurai's art they both continue to play their traditional and universal role of ridiculing humanity's foibles in order to change or reform society.<sup>6</sup> To this extent, his satire is revolutionary. Although works like *After You Win the Title* (2010, oil on canvas) and *The Best Movers* (2008, oil and spray paint on canvas) can be considered humorous, Chiurai's art cannot be classified as light-hearted due to its predominantly heavy-handed satire and grim seriousness intended to transform not just individual and institutional behaviour, but also that of entire societies. In essence, satire is fundamentally pessimistic and Chiurai's grim view of the future constitutes a pessimistic and dystopian vision projected from a rapidly deteriorating economic situation and increasing political instability characterising much of post-independence Africa today. From the observer's perspective, the appeal of satire then and the pleasure derived from it is essentially an aesthetic based on the redemptive, educative, corrective and curative powers of satire.<sup>7</sup> Both Chiurai and his audience derive pleasure from satire's inherent capacity to find humour in the suffering and tragedy of the world around one, or in the misfortunes of others. Though works like *Revelations III* (2011, photograph) and *Revelations VIII* (2011, photograph) have erotic and humorous elements, audiences cannot lose sight of the underlying tragic essence. This evokes the old emblematic adage in the dramatic arts: 'with one eye we cry and with the other eye we smile.' Chiurai's work is revolutionary in so far as depicting a dystopian world will likely compel audiences to imagine an alternative utopia —

what could be — a just world order where the rule of law, peace and harmony thrive, and human rights are observed and respected. To depict a dystopian vision is to imply to an audience that such a thing has not or cannot come to pass.

Chiurai's oeuvre is replete with metaphors of death, desolation, destruction and violence. Works like *Untitled I (from Conflict Resolution)* (2012, bronze and found objects) and *Untitled II (from Conflict Resolution)* (2012, bronze and found objects) depicting a dead body criss-crossed with machete blades, carry tragic and serious meaning in their metaphor for death. They raise the dramatically ironic question of whether violence, killing and mutilation are the best ways to resolve conflict. The works give the impression of continued and excessive violence on bodies that are already metaphorically dead. At the metaphorical level, Chiurai depicts how the post-colonial state in Africa created a condition that is as bad as the actual physical biological death. Ordinary citizens experience a condition tantamount to death as depicted in the *Communists and Hot Chicken Wings: The Birth of a New Nation* and *Harvest of Thorns* exhibitions. The imagery, metaphors and character traits depict death and death-related social issues and emotions that are recognisable. Death is strongly associated with tragedy and throughout Chiurai's collection, different forms of death constitute the central theme and reinforce the artist's dystopian vision. In the *Revelations* series, for example, death occurs at many levels, ranging from the literal, ghastly realistic portrayals to the abstract and metaphorical representations of death, dying and dearth.

To enhance the dramatic element intrinsic in his collection, Chiurai also presents contrasting themes and large antitheses such as life and death, time and ending, light and darkness, decay and morality, harmony and disharmony, flesh, spirit and bones. The videos *Iyeza* (2011) and *Creation* (2012) serve as examples. In addition, he also deploys antithetical forms and structures, colours, tones, moods and impressions to heighten the dramatic flair. For example, in the video *Creation* and the drawings *Untitled (Open Jaw and Goat from Conflict Resolution)* and *Untitled (Dancing Woman from Conflict Resolution)*, each produced in 2012, oppositional black, white and grey colours depict a deathly and dreary atmosphere signifying death as a lurking leitmotif in most of Chiurai's art works.

While the artist's multimedia approach permits integration, synchronisation and juxtapositioning of various expressive modes, it also gives him more latitude to amplify thematic, emotional, structural and formal conflicts and tensions in ways that bring to the fore the dramatic essence of his artistic series, installations and individual pieces. One of the stark contrasts in Chiurai's collection is the juxtapositioning of violent, murderous and grisly scenes with innocence, as seen in the piece *Motherless Child* (2011, oil on canvas). Elements like conflict, tension, contrast and emotions constitute the basic foundation of drama and are clearly perceivable in Chiurai's artistic collection. For example, graphic depictions of death and violence, which contrast sharply the images of sex, booze, music, fashion and cash also add to the dramatic attributes.

*Creation (from Conflict Resolution), 2012* — p81  
*Untitled (Open Jaw and Goat from Conflict Resolution), 2012* — p90  
*Untitled (Dancing Woman from Conflict Resolution), 2012* — p91  
*Motherless Child, 2011* — p119  
*No One Likes a Bag of Bones, 2010* — p62  
*In the Distance, 2011* — p120

## CONTRASTING AND CONFLICTING DRAMATIC AESTHETICS

One of the most dramatic components of Chiurai's art is the extreme contrast between his beautiful art and the ugly humanity it depicts. In Chiurai's works we can cite many examples of ugly or unpleasant or outright horrible events depicted in the most beautiful and aesthetically pleasing artistic forms. The dramatic contrast created through Chiurai's beautiful rendition of the ugly conditions debunks the idea of equating pleasure with beauty. While these conflicting elements help to grip and maintain the viewer's attention, in works like *Revelations I* and *Motherless Child*, they also create the much needed emotional balance from the point of view of the perceiver.

Nowhere in Chiurai's collection does contrast enhance the dramatic impact as strongly as it does in the *State of the Nation* exhibition. The shocking, dramatic, intense, jaw-dropping images of shooting squads, figures walking on skeletons, and point-blank executions in *Revelations VI* (2011) and *Revelations VII* (2011) photographs, child-soldiers, man-beasts, predators, nudity, bones and blood stand in sharp contrast with photo portraits of clean executive figures on the opposite walls. The beastly, vulgar and murderous scenes and actions are contrasted with superimposed inserts of gentle childhood innocence in the form of a baby and Mickey Mouse images, stuffed animals, and the St Margaret's Nursery School inscription. The way in which the overwhelming aggression, wild violence and extreme vulgarity threatens to erode, eclipse and obliterate innocence and purity adds to the dramatic impact of the exhibition.

Sharply contrasted with the spectacular images of death/dying and doom and destruction are the more dramatic images of sex and pleasure. The larger than life wall murals like *No One Likes a Bag of Bones* (2010) and paintings like *Motherless Child*, *In the Distance* and the photograph *Revelations I* enhance the dramatic spectacle. They also present multiple scenes depicting dramatic action occurring at the same time. Contrasting and juxtapositioning of sex and death, pain and pleasure, innocence and wickedness in these wall murals and oil paintings function as important dramatic devices and generate different emotions among audiences. Pieces like *Untitled (Open Jaw and Goat from Conflict Resolution)* juxtaposition violence and innocence to



create an intensely dramatic contrast highlighting the wild and the tame, the brutal and the weak. Similarly, the skeletal figure holding what looks like a green liquor bottle, in *Motherless Child* is juxtaposed with a machine-gun toting child soldier with an ammunition belt draped across his shoulders. Both represent the ghastly and the pleasurable, the innocent (gentle) and the vile (brutal) respectively. They exemplify the effectiveness of contrast as a dramatic device.

While the beauty of the artistic forms conflicts with the horrible humanity it depicts in exhibitions like *Communists and Hot Chicken Wings: The Birth of a New Nation*, *Harvest of Thorns*, and *State of the Nation*, they nevertheless supplement each other and belong to an underlying aesthetic whole. In essence, these extreme dramatic contrasts function to move audiences emotionally. Within the aesthetic whole, the dramatic contrast and opposition not only heighten the feeling of conflict, but are also ultimately unified and contribute towards the bringing about of the desired emotional result or end-product. Just as extreme contrasts function to generate shock among audiences in most artistic works, the antithetical formal and thematic aesthetics in Chiurai's installations and collections are no exception. Thus dramatic contrasts of the beautiful and the horrible, the bright and the dark help bring Chiurai's multimedia art to life.

The artist takes full advantage of the potential for multimedia artistic modes to effectively present and represent the story of Africa on its dramatic journey through this vicious post-colonial endless cycle of hope and hopelessness. In an apparent case of art inspiring art, Chiurai presents the dystopic future predicted and projected in African novels with such dramatic titles as *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Things Fall Apart*, *Harvest of Thorns*, *House of Hunger* and *Nervous Conditions* from which a number of his works and exhibitions derive their titles and captions. Just like his literary counterparts, whose works he engages with intertextually and intervisually at various levels throughout his collection, Chiurai highlights the dangers of the personality cult of the post-independence African leadership as a key constituent element of totalitarian regimes in a way that underlines his dystopian vision. In particular, Chiurai depicts African leaders, elections, independence and freedom as contrived illusions,

encouraged and misused by people and special interest groups to gain power and continue domineering others. The ubiquity of recognisable African leaders both real (Jacob Zuma, Robert Mugabe, Thabo Mbeki, Winnie Mandela, and Barack Obama) and fictitious cabinet ministers in the satirical photographic series *Dying to Be Men* (2009) not only places Chiurai's works within the broader Pan-African artistic aesthetic, but functions more like agit-prop theatre, designed to convey urgent messages without hiding meanings behind abstract images. For example, in the series *Dying to Be Men* Chiurai creates caricatures of cabinet ministers of defence, finance, health and education in a manner that not only adds a dramatic dimension, but also a deep performative essence to his work. While several of these government officials are depicted as pimps, others are portrayed as clinging to traditional ritual practices and magic, no matter how educated they appear.

Chiurai does not blame the prevailing dystopic conditions on African political leaders alone, but also highlights the hidden role of multinational corporations in the continued exploitation and oppression of Africa, its people and resources. For example, throughout Chiurai's oeuvre, the predominance of advertising inscriptions, products, and symbols for such multinational corporations as Coca Cola, McDonald's, Gillette, Dickies and many others, are used not only to satirise the consumerist capitalist culture, but also the commodification of everything including human bodies, souls, culture, spirit, flesh, sex and education. Chiurai exposes the fallacy of freedom in post-independence Africa in ways that underline the postmodern belief that the notions of freedom and independence are not as absolute or real as they sound. His gripping multimedia art installations not only dramatise dystopia, but also provide audiences with an opportunity to contemplating the stark repression, hopelessness, disillusionment, economic retardation, social decline, loss, grief and implied death. To an extent, Chiurai's conscious choice of a realist aesthetic enables him to use his art as a vehicle for social and political criticism and agitation. While clearly not favouring idealisation in his art, the underlying message implied in Chiurai's stunning collection is undoubtedly cautious and revolutionary: if left unchecked, the brutal, dehumanising and deadly traits afflicting Africa today would sink the continent into an undesirable and hopeless state in future.

## CHIURAI'S DRAMATIC AESTHETIC

Besides the dramatic action, the highly visible spectacles together with the music and contrasting colours or lighting also add a dramatic aesthetic to Chiurai's works. In other words, Chiurai's works are dramatic, in every sense of the word, whether referring to action, performance, or the incorporation of many other traditionally theatrical elements like spectacle, ritual, conflict, tension, suspense, violence, tragedy, shock and the salvation or the ruin of human beings. Conflict — a vital component of drama — is also inherently at the core of Chiurai's artistic collection.

To a great extent, the different components of Chiurai's artwork resemble scenes in a drama. Each separate component of the collection can be viewed as a building block in the grand dramatic narrative of dystopia. The dramatic dystopian theme and persistently bleak vision, together with the dark atmosphere, provide a unifying aesthetic to the artistic collection. Whether treated separately or collectively, his works are all organically related. Since the multi-media artistic modes naturally defy a cohesive structure, Chiurai's aesthetic choices nonetheless reflect a strong unity of ideas, atmosphere, and themes germane to the development and projection of his dystopian vision. Though sometimes not so apparent, the numerous dramatic elements give structure and cohesion to the whole collection. Put into perspective, the underlying dramatic aesthetic, the overarching dystopian themes, the all-pervasive gloomy tone as well as the grim vision of the future, synthesise the collection, imbuing it with a unique essence and holism.

## SHOCK AND AWE: IMPERATIVES OF THE DRAMATIC SPECTACLE

Chiurai's bodies of works and his exhibitions in particular, emphasise and bring to the fore the dramatic quality of history. Key elements of drama, spectacle and shock in exhibitions like *Communists and Hot Chicken Wings: The Birth of a New Nation*, *Harvest of Thorns*, and *State of the Nation* are expertly merged to evoke emotional responses from audiences. Spectacle, shock and emotion constitute an intrinsic part of the dramatic aesthetic in Chiurai's works, especially in the entire *Revelations* series. Apparently, concrete African historical experiences provide Chiurai with fertile ground for dramatising and expressing Afro-pessimism and dystopia in the multi-media and performative modes that constitute exhibitions like *State of the Nation* and *Communists and Hot Chicken Wings: The Birth of a New Nation*. The aesthetic appeal of Chiurai's works lies not only in its wide range of representational, modernist, realistic and abstract styles and creative trends, as well as the artistic deployment of dramatic elements, but also in the gripping manner in which he depicts the riveting history unfolding in contemporary Africa.

Examining Chiurai's works from a historical perspective yields dramatic insights into the political, economic and social structures and processes that have shaped the present, and point towards their implications for the future. In his depictions of the state of the present dispensation and visionary projections of a future dystopian African society, Chiurai not only depicts historical events as isolated, but sees them as constituting a continuum in which the past informs and influences the present and shapes the future in a dialectical manner. The fact that his collection straddles time's continuum, recording both history and the present condition while offering visualisations of the future, Chiurai provides viewers with an artistic legacy that stands the test of time. Besides synthesizing the past, present and future, Chiurai also deploys known figures, images, symbols, intertextual allusions and key themes or events drawn from across Africa and crystallises them into a dystopian vision that straddles time and space. It is not just the choice of dramatic subject matter with direct and lasting emotional

impact, but also a matching boundless dramatic vision cutting across time and space that makes Chiurai's artistic collection an enduring cultural phenomenon. Chiurai's spectacular dramatic workmanship which includes but is not limited to the manipulation of audience emotions, depiction of extreme dramatic and emotional moments and the choice of dramatic subject matter, appeals to the audience's empathetic, intellectual and spiritual senses in a manner similar to the classical theatrical experience.

For Chiurai, such an integration of different media and representative expressive modes provides mutual reinforcement and supports the dystopian and pessimistic visions that have become a hallmark of his work. Africa's history, with its cycles of violence, betrayal, repression, resistance and liberation struggles characterising the colonial period, produces shock effects that fuel the intense dramatic elements in Chiurai's exhibitions. Similarly, the grand optimism, spectacular fanfare and euphoria of independence and subsequent gravitation towards authoritarianism, power abuse and the attendant fear, disillusionment and pessimism that have taken root in the post-independence era are also real-life dramatic events that Chiurai translates into multimedia dramatic art. Whether empty or occupied by real characters, Chiurai's exhibitions and installations very much resemble the theatre stage or any other formally designated acting space. Examined collectively, just like the dramatic arts, Chiurai's artworks strive to portray life and characters, and to tell stories that involve conflicts and emotions through action depicted by means of multiple forms of media.

## PERFORMATIVE AESTHETICS IN CHIURAI'S PHOTOGRAPHY

Although photography and modern technical graphics or lithographic prints are often conceived as twin threats to painting, Chiurai shows how these variegated art forms can converse with and complement each other to provide full narratives and dramatic insights into the multifaceted dystopian narrative of post-independence Africa. Chiurai's collections adequately demonstrate that while artistic forms like photography, painting, sculpture, drawings and video can be standalone arts genres unto themselves, they can also enter into conversation with each other. This integration of different media and semiotic systems on a basis of mutual reinforcement and support creates a symbiosis of narratives that complement each other in role and meaning. Similarly, mixing both realist and surrealist styles not only imbues Chiurai's collection with a modernist aesthetic, but also adds to the dramatic impact. The contrasting and alternating stylistic features help Chiurai take viewers on an emotional journey, traversing through a myriad of human experiences under failed states in post-independence Africa. To this extent, Chiurai emerges as one of the most innovative, progressive, avant-garde and daring multi-media artist of our times. He is constantly pushing boundaries of known art aesthetics and social conventions with cutting edge, integrative approaches and underlying performative aesthetic to multimedia art. In pieces like *Revelations VI* and *Revelations VIII*, Chiurai jolts audiences out of their complacency with a blend of realist and surrealist taste for the desolate, violent, vulgar, cold, grotesque, bizarre and unsettling images depicting dramatic and shocking scenes of ruthless cold murders, magical practices and rituals, obscenity, corruption, greed, exploitation and human rights abuses. The loss of hope and a sense of portending doom that Chiurai so aptly captured throughout his collection and installations are a sure sign that Africa is descending into a dystopian society.

As a contemporary African multi-media artist, Chiurai draws from African rituals, myths and magic not just to give his work dramatic flair, but also to illustrate how they are still integral to present-day political and socio-cultural practices. The depiction of numerous traditional ritual fetishes and paraphernalia like fly whisks, feathers, skulls and charms in the *Dying to be Men* series and *Revelations I*, and the shocking performance of a blood-drinking ritual in the video Iyeza, point to ritual as a possible source for Chiurai's dramatic aesthetic. Among the most obvious signs of Africa's gravitation towards a dystopian society "is the looming presence of the past and the existence of forces that threaten to overpower human characters" (38).<sup>8</sup> Most significantly, Chiurai's apparent inter-semiotic, intervisual and intertextual engagement with the metaphysical world of both traditional and contemporary African mythology, ritual, magic and sorcery, replete with such identifiable symbols as fly-whisks, human blood, clay pots, and hyenas add to the dramatic impact of his multi-media work and provides a unifying aesthetic to his entire collection.

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## THE DRAMATIC AESTHETIC IN THE PAINTINGS

Chiurai's desire to conscientise the world about the objective socio-political and economic situation in post-independence Africa leaves the artist with no room for subtleties. The viewer is struck by the artist's realistic approach to the human figure, painted directly from life and dramatically spotlighted against a predominantly dark, dim, dingy, and desolate backdrop, especially in the *Harvest of Thorns* exhibition. Interpreted from a dystopian aesthetic perspective, Chiurai's use of contrasting and harmonious colours evoke conflict and imbue his works with a dramatic essence that has come to be the hallmark of his overall collection. For example, dramatic paintings like *Revelations I* and *Revelations VI* are characterised by dark, dreary, violent, shocking, deathly scenes set against a background of bloodshed, confusion and shifting morals.

The dark background in the drawings *Untitled (Open Jaw and Goat from Conflict Resolution)* and *Untitled (Dancing Woman from Conflict Resolution)* highlight what would constitute agon in classical Greek tragedy, which refers to the struggle or fight of humans against other humans or against nature. Similarly, in pieces paintings like *Motherless Child* and *How Could You?* (2008, oil and acrylic on canvas) Chiurai uses antagonistic colours and polar opposite colour effects to create, enhance and sustain a dramatic and emotional appeal throughout his works. The predominant use of antagonistic colours heightens the dramatic effect particularly in the photographs and videos from the *Creation* (2012) and *Moyo* (2013) series reflect the artist's thematic preoccupation with exposing how the dark and inhumane side of Africa's corrupt political leadership and the exploitative global capital enterprises conspire to create a repressive atmosphere of menace, violence, pessimism, futility, crime and corruption, entrapment and doom. His emphasis on the brutal, gloomy, shadowy and dark sides of the human experience that threaten to eclipse any ray of hope in the most dramatic fashion points to the horrific dystopian vision that Chiurai paints to present ominous warnings of Africa's futures.

*Throughout Chiurai's bodies of works the beast and predator motifs depict society's dramatic gravitation towards a cannibalistic and carnivorous existence.*

The beauty and significance of detail in Chiurai's paintings, videos and exhibitions create contrasts and help reveal the inherent historic and social contradictions that constitute the bedrock of drama. The predominant artistic strategies, contradiction, juxtaposition and contention pervasive throughout Chiurai's collection also comprise distinct elements of the dramatic aesthetic. The ingenious strategy of using competing art forms to complement each other enhances the dramatic effect of Chiurai's artistic collection. This multiplicity of forms, media, styles and techniques is intended to adequately handle the thematic and emotional freight of Chiurai's artistic collection, series and installations. The myriad of art forms in Chiurai's work not only conveys an array of artful and candid messages, but also provides viewers with broad perspectives and dramatic insights into the multifaceted narratives of Africa's dystopic futures.

## THE DRAMATIC AESTHETIC IN STATE OF THE NATION

In the *State of the Nation* exhibition Chiurai portrays a series of shocking, dramatic, visually graphic and emotionally charged images of extreme violence. The predominance of naked people (sometimes on the surgical table) and machine gun, rifle, knife and machete wielding militias, as well as child soldiers, point to a state of constant violence or warfare and constitute the key ingredients of a dark dystopia. *The State of the Nation* exhibition features several artistic forms ranging from dramatic paintings and photographs to spectacular bronze sculptures and installations. Though these various artistic modes appear conflictual or incompatible, they complement each other aesthetically and thematically. Through morally and aesthetically shocking graphic depictions of violence that climax with dramatic executions, Chiurai continues to extrapolate on the incessant theme of the multifarious nature of death. In addition to actual physical death depicted in this exhibition, Chiurai also reminds his audience that the painful and soulless nature of existence that is now part and parcel of Africa's post-independence dispensation is tantamount to dying before one actually dies. Most spectacular in the State of The Nation exhibition is the bronze sculpture constituting the centre stage installation, as well as numerous other paintings depicting half-man, half-beast images. Through these images Chiurai draws attention not just to human degeneration, but also to the inert beast of prey who lurks within the human and declares war on mankind. On the other hand, as a metaphor reflecting the human condition, the half-man, half-beast image highlights the extent to which human beings have been reduced to a soulless, emotionless, thoughtless and animal-like existence, amounting to a death of some sort.

## THE DRAMATIC EFFECTS OF IMAGERY, SYMBOLISM AND MUSIC

The consistent use of the printed text with corresponding visual imagery reinforces and pinpoints important iterative themes, while also exerting dramatic effects throughout Chiurai's artistic oeuvre. In particular, the effect of these mental images and associations on the audience's emotions underlines the dramatic impact of the predominantly expressive and evocative images in Chiurai's art. Several important clusters of images in Chiurai's multimedia art not only heighten the dramatic elements, but also reinforce the dystopian theme and vision. These clusters of images such as predators, blood, bones, skeletons, blades, guns and bullets appear as leitmotifs in a flow that connects and organises them into an aesthetic whole.

Chiurai consistently uses imagery associated with death, doom, darkness and destruction collectively to foreshadow a grim vision of the future and to reinforce the main themes of dystopia. Overall, Chiurai succeeds in painting a picture in the viewer's mind of an African dystopian post-independence existence where ordinary people's lives are fraught with dangerous confrontations with predatory animals, politicians and thugs. Such scenarios generate a grand historical tragic drama and also portend doom for the human race. In the viewer's mind, inscriptions and images of taverns, bars and booze together with nude and semi-nude male and female figures create leitmotifs that forge a seamless connection with the different acts and scenes of pleasure, the corruption, sin and debauchery, the ubiquitous grotesque images of predators, marauders, vultures and beasts of prey and perpetual themes of violence, destruction, pain, death and dying.

Most stunning in the *State of the Nation* exhibition is the expressionless corpselike figures with deathly faces on the three-dimensional bronze sculpture installation occupying the centre stage. The two expressionless male figures mounted on a podium melded together and resting on a beast-like lower body (standing on all fours) continue the half-man, half-beast theme. On another wall, the words Naked Butchery are superimposed with images of a hyena carrying what looks like a human bone in the painting *Procession* (2011, oil on canvas). Other works where the predators and ravenous beasts threaten human life include *Untitled (Dancing Woman from Conflict Resolution)* the painting *Untitled (from Conflict Resolution)* (2012) which portrays three female lions menacingly guarding a dead woman's body, as well as the painting *Corinthians* (2012), which shows a leopard lying next to a surgical table with a prostrate, naked torso. These works not only generate suspense, but also elicit intense fear and shock among audiences. The grim and gruesome spectacles of beasts and predators feasting or preparing to feast on prey are the prime source of a heightened dramatic aesthetic that permeates Chiurai's multimedia artistic works. Throughout Chiurai's bodies of works the beast and predator motifs depict society's dramatic gravitation towards a cannibalistic and carnivorous existence.

The artist's use of various colours, animals, objects and the way specific gestures and movements are deployed to symbolise violence, pain, evil, danger, death and lifelessness heighten the dramatic effect of his collection. Whether the beasts of prey are real life hyenas, lions, crocodiles and snakes or the sharks in government and business, in Chiurai's artworks, the level of devastation they cause to human life and the human spirit is immense. Chiurai's oeuvre is awash with recurring symbols of devastation and desolation which reinforce the artist's dystopian vision and theme. In addition to the numerous symbols, Chiurai deploys numerous dramatic elements that include but are not limited to sound, lighting, movement, setting, rhythm, contrast and conflict to create a spectrum of moods ranging from dark, gloomy, mournful, depressed, pessimistic, to hostile, harsh, violent, predatory and brutal. These devices drive home the intended message and themes.

Music fulfils a significant dramatic function in Chiurai's videos *Iyeza* and *Moyo*. In *Iyeza*, the music, singing and chanting not only serve to enhance moods, but also function to tell the story and dramatise the conflicts, in addition to creating tension, suspense and the desired levels of emotional appeal and impact among audiences.

Allied to music and sound is rhythm, which also adds a dramatic dimension in Chiurai's videos. In such videos as *Iyeza*, Chiurai adopts an unusual timing and pace for the dramatic action. The tempo of the animations is dead slow, to the extent that the images resemble still photos, aptly dramatising and capturing the pain and agony. While capturing the very slow progress of change, this dead slow rhythm not only reflects the hopeless emotional state as well as the painfully slow decline and degeneration, but also the gradual social death characterising contemporary Africa. Working in harmony with lighting and colour, music in Chiurai's collection helps depict feelings such as pity, pain, anger, despair, fear, or frustration and the impending doom to underline the dystopian theme and map the dramatic emotions simultaneously.

#### END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines drama as both prosaic and poetic compositions or real life conditions, situations, or series of events involving, interesting or intense conflict of force that affect people's emotions. see <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/drama> Accessed: 9 Oct 2016. Chiurai's multimedia art offers visual narratives replete with all the defining elements of drama ranging from emotions, conflict, contrast, action, spectacle and plot to characters.

<sup>2</sup> While defining tragedy as a form of drama whose plot is centred on human suffering, for the purpose of evoking feelings of pity and fear in the audience ... Aristotle listed plot as one of the six elements of tragedy. He argued that the first essential to creating a good tragedy is that it should maintain unity of plot. He further elaborated that 'The Plot must be a Whole. A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end'. See Internet Sacred Text Archive. VII. <http://www.sacredtexts.com/cla/ari/poe/poe08.htm> Accessed: 9 Oct. 2016

<sup>3</sup> Gustav Freytag was a nineteenth century German novelist who saw common patterns in the plots of stories and novels and developed a diagram to analyse them. He diagrammed a story's plot using a pyramid-like structure. See <http://www.ohio.edu/people/hartleyg/ref/fiction/freytag.html> Accessed: 9 Oct. 2016, which helps map the emotional progression in theatrical, literary and other artistic texts.

<sup>4</sup> See also <http://www.ohio.edu/people/hartleyg/ref/fiction/freytag.html> Accessed: 9 Oct. 2016

<sup>5</sup> See AVELINA, C. 2000. *Hermann Hesse: The Search for Oneself*. In eds. KRONEGGER, M. and TYMIENIECKA, A. *The Aesthetics of Enchantment in the Fine Arts*. Belmont Mass. Springer Science and Business Media Dordrecht. pp.283-304.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Harris defines satire as a 'literary genre that uses irony, wit, and sometimes sarcasm to expose humanity's vices and foibles, giving impetus to change or reform through ridicule.' See ROBERT HARRIS, *The Purpose and Method of Satire*, <http://www.virtualsalt.com/satire.htm>. Accessed: 9 Oct. 2016

<sup>7</sup> See WELLS-GREEN, HAROLD. June 2005. *Contrivance, Artifice, and Art: Satire and Parody in the Novels of Patrick White James*, a thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Communication. University of Canberra. pp.12 and 25

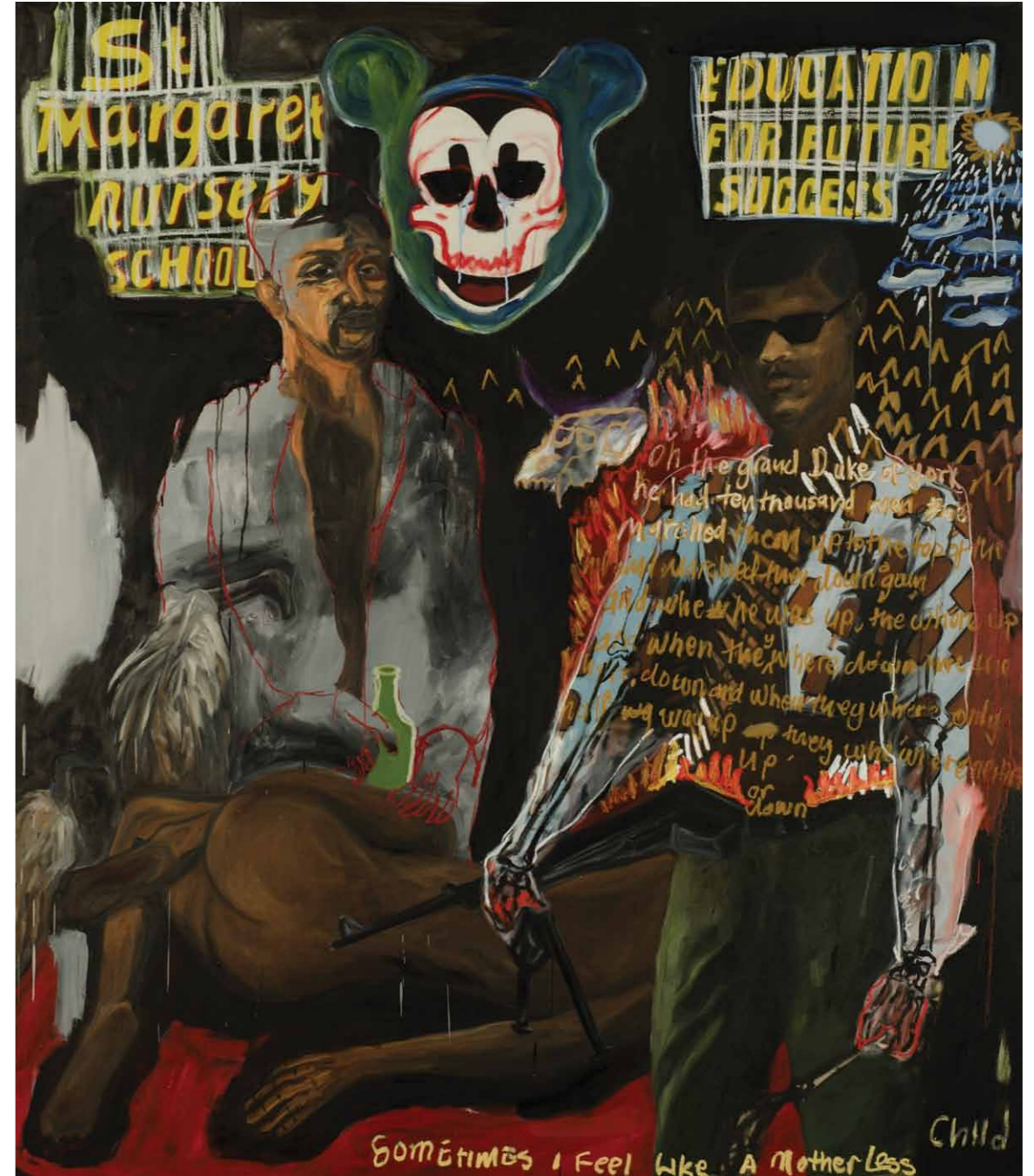
<sup>8</sup> SENF, CAROL A. 210. *Gothic Authors: Critical Revisions: Bram Stoker* (1). University of Wales Press. pp.38



**UNTITLED (FROM CONFLICT RESOLUTION)** – 2012, oil on canvas, 180 x 220 cm



UNTITLED – 2012, oil on canvas, 180 x 120 cm



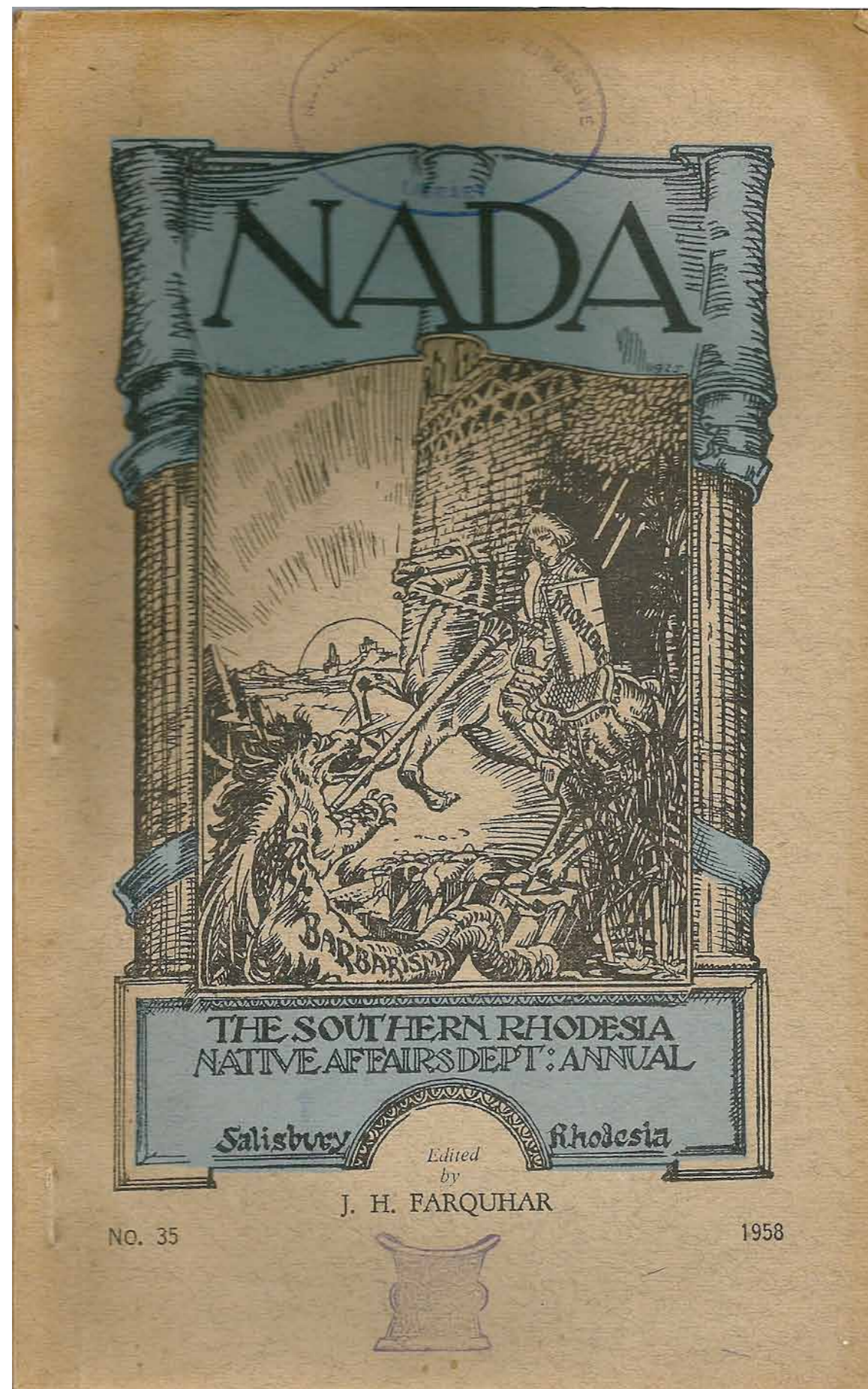
MOTHERLESS CHILD – 2011, oil on canvas, 220 x 190 cm



**IN THE DISTANCE** – 2011, oil on canvas, 170 x 200 cm



**UNTITLED (FIGURES IN LANDSCAPE)** – 2015, oil on canvas, 200 x 220 cm



# WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

BY KUDZANAI CHIURAI

VINYLS LIE SCATTERED AT MY FEET,  
others tossed onto small piles across the floor.

It's been a lazy afternoon sitting in the living room, listening to records. The choice of company had been deliberate, traditional beer bought from the corner store. You couldn't really call it that, it was more of a general dealer on the side of the road. Most of the vinyls were bought during carefree and careless bachelor days, when my weekly pay check was consumed by beer and records, but the collection grew as a result of marriage, and the years that have passed. Additions resulted from weddings, birthdays, any celebration an excuse to go flipping through piles of dusty, worn covers, till my fingers caressed and lingered on a coveted treasure.

The lazy chair had weathered over the years, the spring once healthy and upright now crouched, comfortable, like an old man.

A shadow stretches into the room. The closeness of the wall separating my house from the next always ensured I was starved of light when listening to records.

The vinyls turn, long contemplative drags on a cigarette, interchanged with sips of beer. Occasionally catching some of the crackling lyrics, repeating them, breathing them out, while the rest stumble in my throat as the beer ferments and intoxicates them.

*What else can we do?*

I respond, to the music. We celebrated at independence, we rejoiced when every man had a vote, but that was a long time ago. Now we see as men without the springs of youth and energy. The shadows from our past make us unrecognisable; we occupy our homes as phantoms, masked by confusion.

*What else can we do?*

The seed of independence has produced a harvest we barely recognise. It's stored outside on a *dara*, surrounded by walls that prevent us from consuming it, as it rots from the rain and crumbles in the sun, turning to dust, falling back to the earth from where it came.

*What else can we do?*

I am not alone, as the clouds gather in my thoughts, swirling into a storm, engulfing the sounds and words around me. I try to distract myself by glancing at the paintings hanging on the wall, barely visible in the shadow, hinted at only by the glint of their gilded frames. A canvas of rolling hills, a rich and fertile landscape, uninterrupted views, no factory or buildings or roads in sight, inhabited only by distant, blurred figures the painter thought to include. Next to them, Christ hangs from a cross, his sacrifice for our sins. These were the stories we learnt at the missionary schools. They stare back at me, as if to mark a period in my life, as a reminder of the saviour who was so significant when I was growing up. He already saved me before, when I queued with the other boys to receive with eyes wide open, the oil and water that would absolve us of our sins, the sins of our parents, and their parents before them. How will he save me now?

*What else can we do?*

It's a paralysing question to ask while sitting in the room, as the shadows make themselves at home, the music and paintings resting in their depth. As a storm brews, the thought of them fills my thoughts.

*While the harvest rots outside.*



BEATRIZ VITA – 2015, oil on canvas, 200 x 220 cm



CHIEF MAPFUMO – 2015, oil on canvas, 200 x 220 cm





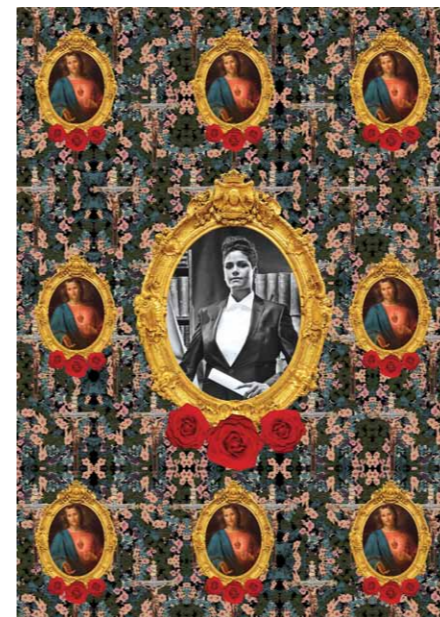
UNTITLED I (OFFICE FOR THE ENREGISTRATION OF SLAVES) – 2016, oil on canvas, 220 x 200 cm



UNTITLED II (OFFICE FOR THE ENREGISTRATION OF SLAVES) – 2016, oil on canvas, 220 x 200 cm



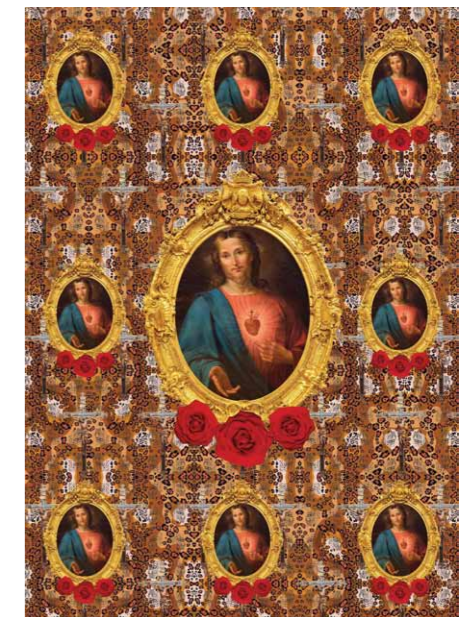
**EMPORIUM** – 2016, shop front installation comprising of wood trim mannequin; digitally printed cotton cassock; linen; wallpaper; 4 x framed digital prints; laser cut, steel plated, gold shopping trolley; window frames with vinyl trim, dimensions variable (Armory Art Fair installation 200 x 300 cm)



**ASCENSION I** – 2016, pigment inks on premium satin photo paper, image: 120.9 x 86.1 cm, paper: 125 x 90.2 cm. Edition of 10



**ASCENSION VI** – 2016, pigment inks on premium satin photo paper, image: 120.9 x 86.1 cm, paper: 125 x 90.2 cm. Edition of 10



**UNIDENTIFIED WHITE MAN II** – 2016, pigment inks on premium satin photo paper, image: 90 x 65.3 cm. Edition of 10



**LEVIATHAN I, II, III** – 2016, 3 Redwood fishing boats, French polish, fabric, 3 chests containing various cargo, installation (dimensions variable)



**LEVIATHAN II** – 2016, Redwood fishing boat, French polish, fabric, chest containing various cargo, installation (dimensions variable)



**GENESIS [JE N'ISI ISI] I** – 2016, pigment inks on premium satin photo paper, 142.4 x 142.4 cm. Edition of 10



**GENESIS [JE N'ISI ISI] II** – 2016, pigment inks on premium satin photo paper, 142.4 x 142.4 cm. Edition of 10



**GENESIS [JE N'ISI ISI] III** – 2016, pigment inks on premium satin photo paper, 142.4 x 142.4 cm. Edition of 10



**GENESIS [JE N'ISI ISI] IV** – 2016, pigment inks on premium satin photo paper, 142.4 x 142.4 cm. Edition of 10

[overleaf]

**GENESIS [JE N'ISI ISI] V–VIII** – 2016, pigment inks on premium satin photo paper, 145 x 200 cm. Edition of 10







Shopping  
For Jesus







**GENESIS [JE N'ISI ISII] IX** – 2016, pigment inks on premium satin photo paper, 250 x 140cm. Edition of 10



**GENESIS [JE N'ISI ISII] X** – 2016, pigment inks on premium satin photo paper, 250 x 140cm. Edition of 10



**GENESIS [JE N'ISI ISI] XI** – pigment inks on premium satin photo paper, 250 x 140cm. Edition of 10



**GENESIS [JE N'ISI ISI] XII** – 2016, pigment inks on premium satin photo paper, 55.63 x 46.13 cm. Edition of 40



Shopping  
For Jesus

GOODMAN GALLERY