

## Press Release

## Moffat Takadiwa

October 12  
November 16, 2024

Opening  
Saturday, October 12, 2024  
from 11am to 20pm

While visiting the town of Gennevilliers<sup>1</sup> during the preparation of his exhibition *Tales of the Big River*, Moffat Takadiwa came to realize that the Seine, which encircles the town, has for centuries been used to transport goods arriving from all over the world. He became convinced that the river's bed bears memories of the raw materials and spices associated with the French colonial era. The vestiges of colonialism and their impact on contemporary societies are recurring themes in the artist's work.

Moffat Takadiwa's studio is situated in Mbare, a working-class suburb on the outskirts of Harare, whose informal economy is partially based on the recycling of electronic goods and the sale of second-hand products imported from Europe. Over the past ten years, he has been collecting computer keyboards, used toothbrushes, empty toothpaste tubes and pen casings, as well as bottle caps, plastic bucket handles, spoons and many other objects. More recently, belt buckles and zippers have appeared in the giant tapestries exhibited as part of Zimbabwe's national pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennale.

These disparate elements are given new life through the art of Moffat Takadiwa, who transforms them into sculptures and tapestries. His practice follows in the footsteps of the African artists, who from the 1980s onwards, chose to create works from almost exclusively recycled materials, in a radical break from the Western academic art which was introduced into Africa at the end of the 19th century.

For Moffat Takadiwa, the turning point came in 2015 with the protest movement "Rhodes Must Fall,"<sup>2</sup> which challenged the predominant Western worldview in the curricula of South African universities. This was the moment when he realized that it was time to find his own path, employing an artistic language that drew on his local socio-cultural surroundings. Using keys from computer keyboards, present in many of his works, Moffat Takadiwa began developing a "de-colonialized" vocabulary.<sup>3</sup> Through his multicolored mosaics, whose constituent elements are strung together with fishing line, the artist relentlessly builds connections between past and present, between the ancestral wisdom of yesterday and the urban societies of today. Each new work is a narrative that invites the viewer to contemplate the interdependence of communities across centuries and beyond geographical borders.

The circle, omnipresent in Moffat Takadiwa's oeuvre, not only refers to a shape found in numerous everyday objects but also evokes the outlines of Great Zimbabwe, a legendary medieval city, today in ruins, but which once sat at the center of an empire that encompassed present-day Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The aesthetic appeal of his works—which borrow motifs and colors from a variety of cultures in his country—underpins a scathing critique of the legacy of a troubled colonial past, while at the same time praising the resistance groups that fought against it.

Moffat Takadiwa's works are akin to algorithms relentlessly producing variants of the same narrative. They methodically chart the journeys of goods that have been returned to Africa. Raw materials extracted from the continent are shipped to Europe or China, where they are used in the manufacturing process. When they finally "return to their homeland," Moffat Takadiwa transforms them into precious

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objects, some of which once again make their way back to the West, destined for museums and collectors.

N'Gonné Fall

1. Moffat Takadiwa's exhibition *Tales of the Big River* was held at the Édouard-Manet gallery in Gennevilliers in 2024.
2. In instigating the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes from the campus of the University of Cape Town (South Africa), the "Rhodes Must Fall" collective initiated a major wave of cultural decolonization, particularly in South Africa's academic institutions and museums, before spreading much further afield. Today, the collective is still campaigning for the removal of the Cecil Rhodes statue from the façade of Oxford University's Oriel College.
3. Shona, the language used today in Zimbabwe is not the original language spoken there. It is a combination of more than five indigenous languages, a European construct born of a colonial strategy of divide and rule, which took advantage of the bringing together of various "tribes" who would subsequently enter into conflict with each other.

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N'Gonné Fall is an exhibition curator and cultural policies consultant. She was the editorial director of the contemporary African art magazine *Revue Noire* from 1994-2001. Between 2007 and 2018, she taught in Egypt, South Africa and Niger. In 2018, she was appointed General Commissioner of the Africa2020 Season, a series of more than 1500 cultural, scientific and pedagogical events held throughout France from December 2020 through September 2021.