

Press release

May 6th
June 17th, 2023Opening
Saturday, May 6th
from 11am to 8pm

Zero Zero

Moffat Takadiwa

Moffat Takadiwa is known for his organically structured works, made up of objects salvaged from one of Zimbabwe's largest landfills, situated on the outskirts of Harare. Appropriating everyday consumer products and breathing new life into them, the artist denounces the prevailing dynamics of economic and political power. Situated between denunciation and sublimation, his works echo the remnants of colonial domination, the debris of an ultra-globalized world and the ecological challenges of overconsumption.

Through his use of the computer keyboard keys that invade his compositions, Moffat Takadiwa accords language a fundamental role in his work. Resonating with constant movement, his oeuvres pit two cultures against one another: one based on an oral tradition, while the other stems from an ultra-digital landscape, perpetually inundated by a never-ending flow of words. Acting as metaphors of digital culture, these dismantled keys embody the new common language of the internet, one that is devoid of any geographical or cultural identity and whose vocabulary is subject to constant evolution and codification. The disassembled QWERTY keyboards form a malleable alphabet that allows the artist to take aim at the English language, a ubiquitous symbol of globalization as well as a remnant of Zimbabwe's colonial history. Through the repeated re-arrangement of these keys, liberated from their original context, Takadiwa dismantles the language and creates one of his own, free of all political, economic and cultural constraints, in a similar way to those generations born in the post-digital era.

With the same desire to build new narratives, Takadiwa appropriates and subverts objects from the West, in particular from the United States, that have infiltrated local lifestyles. In a similar way to Pop Art, Takadiwa takes mass consumption as a starting point. However, his works are radically different from those of the Pop movement in that they in no way imitate brand aesthetics or the processes involved in industrial production. Instead, the artist integrates these consumer products into tapestries with Zimbabwean motifs, drawing inspiration from traditional African weaving and wickerwork from the Hurungwe region. On close inspection, his works reveal empty Colgate toothpaste tubes, worn-out toothbrush bristles and caps from used Coca-Cola bottles. Viewed from a greater distance, they resemble clusters of precious stones or rich mosaics overflowing with color. Objects of desire are created from used, abandoned and sometimes repulsive items as a mysterious transformation takes place. In a provocative and triumphant act, Moffat Takadiwa seizes upon the consequences of economic and political domination and by anchoring them in a sumptuous, local aesthetic, he succeeds in overturning the prevailing dynamics of power. In defiance of the Western narrative of art, Takadiwa's works lay out a new chapter in the story of modern abstraction. His visual vocabulary, characterized by geometric shapes, repeated patterns and structures in series, could easily be part of a minimal art strategy, but one that subverts it. Like Theaster Gates with his *Civil Tapestries*, Takadiwa charges his materials with meaning, turning the proclaimed neutrality of minimalism on its head by imbuing his works with a political and ecological message.

Like Gates, Takadiwa is an archivist of the contemporary world. This obsession is reflected in his approach to salvaging, the first step in the drawn-out process necessary for the creation of his works. The result of a collective, arduous, almost performative effort, his works are far from a rejection of the physical

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gesture and spurn the depersonalization inherent to the manufacturing processes characteristic of the minimalist movement or of mass production. On the contrary, Takadiwa accords great importance to craft work, which takes on an almost ritual form. In stark contrast to the automated processes used to create the objects he uses, Takadiwa's works emphasize the need to embrace a new temporality; one where time slows down.

As a reflection of the Anthropocene age, his post-industrial fabrics evoke urban or rural landscapes, seen from above and revealing mankind's geological imprint. These damaged landscapes, colonized by objects and transformed into oceans of debris, are strongly reminiscent of the vortex of waste situated in the Pacific, a sixth continent made up entirely of plastic and whose surface area is six times that of France. His works appear to be in a state of overflowing, and thus bear a certain resemblance to the "all-overs" of 1950s abstract impressionism, as well as being intimately linked to the notion of the infinite. Takadiwa's oeuvre reveals the vast immensity of the devastation produced by man, in which the individual finds her or himself swept away or even drowned. Through this depiction of the decadence of economic growth built on programmed obsolescence, Takadiwa's practice recalls the fictional archeology of Daniel Arsham, whose sculptures seek to transform contemporary elements into petrified fossils. Unlike Arsham, whose practice is anchored in a post-apocalyptic world, Takadiwa's works are situated in the reality of today's landscape. Like an archeologist in a world of waste, he excavates, constantly searching for the buried remains of our society in order to reveal its paradoxes.

Takadiwa roots his recycling practice in African tradition, in reference to the second-hand markets present throughout Sub-Saharan Africa and as a metaphor for the manner in which the economy of Harare works. The artist draws much of his inspiration from Mbare, a suburb of Harare characterized by its sprawling markets and one of the largest centers of clandestine recycling and the parallel economy in Zimbabwe. Although crucial to the protection of the environment and to the everyday life of certain sections of the population, the practice of recycling has been on the wane since the end of the 19th century in most western countries. Takadiwa's works invite us to reflect on the hypocrisy of certain western societies where marketing strategies use upcycling to justify conduct that is often far from environmentally friendly. By appropriating debris and reusing it, the artist celebrates the African tradition of recycling and sublimates waste materials, transforming them into a new form of wealth to be exploited and valorized.

Takadiwa's oeuvres constitute a poetic chronicle of contemporary society. At a time when ecology is increasingly under threat and new technologies are transforming the world as we know it, Moffat Takadiwa grasps the situation, embodies it and denounces it, while avoiding any descent into nihilism. Uncompromisingly critical of the world, yet imbued with an almost totemic aura, his works convey a preciousness and presence that demand meditation. By conferring dignity on waste, by intermingling revolt and contemplation, they offer a ray of hope and poetry in the midst of a fragile and threatened society. His works operate as a silent manifesto for a coming revolution.

Jérôme Sans is a curator, artistic director and director of institutions. He co-directed the Palais de Tokyo with Nicolas Bourriaud for the first six years of the art centre, before heading the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in Beijing from 2008 to 2012. He has curated numerous major international exhibitions, including the Taipei Biennale (2000), the Lyon Biennale (2005), etc. He was editor-in-chief of L'Officiel Art and is a regular contributor to Purple. He is currently accompanying the development of a new venue in Mexico City called LagoAlgo.

Jérôme Sans

Translation Chris Atkinson