The Making of Zimbabwean Stone Sculpture

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No visitor to Harare, not even one whose interest lies in viewing game rather than art, can fail to notice the mutely insistent presence of Zimbabwe’s most vaunted cultural asset — stone sculpture. Even if you don’t go to the National Gallery, where the Permanent Gallery and the Gallery Market spill over with hundreds of pieces; even if you’re not drawn into one of the many commercial stone sculpture galleries by exotic displays of glossy black serpentine; and even if you don’t happen to stumble on a ‘pavement gallery’, more likely than not stone sculpture will come to you, thrust under your nose by an eager young entrepreneur, hawking his wares along one of the city’s main streets.

From Bernard Matemera’s highly acclaimed works, weighing tons and looming tall, to the ‘mass produced’ anonymous curios that tuck easily into the corner of a suitcase, it all goes under the name of ‘Shona’ sculpture. No need for graffiti here. Stone sculpture rules, OK. And as local dealers vie with each other for the custom of international dealers, and the prices of individual pieces climb higher and higher, everyone wants to jump on the stone sculpture bandwagon. Some wonder how big it is, and whether its collapse under the weight of so much stone is imminent. For the most part, however, artists continue to make sculptures at an amazing rate, and buyers to snap them up faster than ever.

Those less concerned with the state of the market than with the state of the art itself, however, view the sculpture’s success and popularity with overseas buyers in a more sceptical light. While international recognition and sale of Zimbabwean stone sculpture is welcomed, many artists and critics increasingly fear that it is being more exploited by than exploiting of ‘the market’. One
symptom of this, as they see it, is the sculpture’s failure to provoke more than indifference amongst most (black) Zimbabweans. As it was put in the editorial of the popular grass roots magazine Moto: ‘it would seem that Zimbabweans do not appreciate this art because they don’t see themselves in it. It does not speak to them and is irrelevant to their lives. If this is true, we would say the challenge to Zimbabwean stone sculptors and other artists is to try to find answers to this rejection by their own people. It would not be sufficient to take refuge in saying that a prophet has no honour in his own country. Without appreciation here at home the Zimbabwe stone sculpture runs the danger of being just another facet of the curio industry meant for tourists, and ultimately influenced by what these foreign visitors want to buy’.\(^1\)

At issue here, as Willis and Fry have argued in relation to contemporary Australian Aboriginal art, are the effects of the relationship between ethnocentrism and power. Like Papunya painting, when placed in the historical, socio-economic context of its designation, valuation and distribution within a Western ‘system of object’ — i.e. a system of commodification — Zimbabwe stone sculpture may also be seen as the product of a process in which the (‘art’) object is ‘categorized, placed and qualified as a genre within a remade contemporary primitivism’\(^2\). As one instance of the relationship between ethnocentrism and power in Australia today, Willis and Fry cite the fact that Aborigines don’t have a simple choice between their culture and ours. ‘We are always dealing with a process of transformation rather than one of translation; the traditional life can never mean what it did prior to invasion, there is no way to return to origins’\(^3\).

Willis and Fry have argued that rather than the art of Papunya serving as a form of resistance to cultural colonialism, the proper name ‘Papunya’ has been appropriated by the market, and signifies a commodity within a Western system of exchange where ‘control still rests ultimately with ‘white’ institutions’\(^4\). To what extent this is true of Aboriginal art in Australia is a question still not adequately answered and perhaps not yet fully addressed by Aboriginal artists themselves. In Zimbabwe, however, within the context of the official re-valuation of traditional culture, it is precisely this process of appropriation that many artists and artworkers are currently questioning. As stone sculpture undergoes its second (and post-independence) wave of acclaim and demand in the international art market, the factors of race, ethnicity and class are now inflected by the cultural policy of a black majority government. After ten years of independence, as it responds to demands (both artistic and economic) of neo-imperialism, we begin to see a more complex relationship emerge between power, institutions and cultural identity.

**HISTORY AND TRADITION**

Like Papunya Tula painting, Zimbabwe stone sculpture (or ‘Shona’ sculpture, as it was then called) began around 30 years ago, in displaced and colonised indigenous communities to which Western materials and art techniques were introduced by Europeans. It is purported to have begun in the 1950s when Frank McEwan, the first Director of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia), gave materials to his gallery attendants, in an attempt to ‘create new artists in the cultural desert of Rhodesia’\(^5\). Actively discouraging these artists from contact with European art, on the one hand, to ‘protect’ them from Western influence, McEwan at the same time encouraged them to realize in
visual terms the beliefs and values of their own cultures. According to Willett, McEwan chose the medium of stone because "such intractable material discourages the mass production which has led to ‘airport art’ (a term McEwan coined) which is identical wherever in Africa — or outside it — one buys it".6

The work that emerged from this experiment became known as the "Shona Sculpture Movement", a form which drew on traditional mythology and cosmology, but was rooted within a Western tradition of art making. Unlike Papunya painting, Celia Winter-Irving points out, "the sculpture is not the product of a continuity of object making among the societies represented by

6 Frank Willett, ibid p 256.
the sculptors, and unlike other expressive forms such as dance and music (to which are linked the mask and the drum), it has no material function, takes no part in ritual or ceremony, and has no link with tribal art." In terms of form, then, Zimbabwe stone sculpture is a contemporary movement (if, as all the evidence so far suggests, the techniques of working with stone are not traditional). At the same time, however, this form is seen to embody a traditional mode of conceiving the mythological universe. Based on the belief that *mushave* — wandering spirits — look for embodiment in animal or human hosts, essence or spirit may also be seen as being immanent in the stone. In the hands of the sculptor, the stone 'becomes' the water spirit, the eagle, the baboon. According to Winter-Irving then: "Although on the one hand the making of art was European inspired, and the notion of the object with no function, either material or spiritual, was largely new, on the other the subject matter is as old as the Shona".

**THE ROLE OF 'TRADITION' IN CULTURAL RECONSTRUCTION**

It is this dual heritage of stone sculpture — its incorporation of the traditional and the modern — to which we can look for an explanation both of its privileged status as 'high art' in the international market, and of the pivotal symbolic function it is currently made to perform in the service of an emerging national cultural identity.

Something of stone sculpture's role in the nationalist project may be seen in the rhetoric surrounding the opening of the 1988 annual Baringa/Nedlaw Zimbabwe Heritage Exhibition, a 4 month long exhibition of the 'best of Zimbabwean art', hosted by the National Gallery and funded by the Baringa and Nedlaw companies. Here (and not surprisingly, given its international prestige), the most space, the greatest emphasis and the highest accolades were devoted to stone sculpture. Meeting the requirement of being both internationally successful and 'traditional', Zimbabwe stone sculpture was seen by Richard Attenborough in his opening address as "reflecting clearly the vibrant and innovative talents of its new nation," and "bringing an understanding of Africa to the rest of the world". These very same qualities also make it possible for the Director Cyril Rogers to claim that "our contemporary visual arts are now truly international!" Through this convenient marriage of the 'universal' and the culturally specific Zimbabwe stone sculpture acquires not only economic and aesthetic value in a world order of art, but also symbolic value at the national level. As the purported sign of something 'essentially' Zimbabwean, it functions as an emblem of national pride.

**WHOSE TRADITION?**

Here, however, the attempt to construct a national visual culture with which all Zimbabweans can identify encounters a major problem. For despite claims that stone sculpture is a rich repository of traditional beliefs and a vital expression of contemporary black culture, the black population of Zimbabwe is largely indifferent to its existence. In 1971 Frank Willett wrote: "The Salisbury School has been operating for over a decade, but its only customers so far have been white. Now that McEwan has retired and no longer lives in Salisbury,
we must wait to see how viable the school will become and whether it can develop a black patronage". 11 Now, nearly three decades later, very little has changed.

Two very important factors which inhibit a more widespread appreciation of the sculpture are the absence of art education (all levels of education are beset by a dire lack of qualified art teachers and basic materials), and the fact that "there is no common iconography within Shona beliefs, which makes it difficult for even black Zimbabweans to understand what the sculpture is about". 12 In addition to these factors, sculptor Bernard Takawira suggests other reasons for stone sculpture's low profile, reasons which take into account its more overtly political and ideological mediation. First is the absence of a tradition of leisure and 'aesthetic contemplation' in Zimbabwean society. Second, he says:

We must remember that the Shona is a very practical man — there is a Shona proverb: If a lady is too beautiful watch out, she may be a thief or a witch. The moral here is that beauty for beauty’s sake has no place. Third, when we started to make stone sculptures there was UDI and sanctions, and the sculpture was not on the list of sanctioned goods. The Nationalist were very disappointed with this and wanted us to stop. They said 'look at the way they make faces, they are pretending that this is what Africans are like and they are selling us like that!' So it was attacked from that angle — it was their way of disrupting the Smith regime — and this produced a lot of resistance to the sculpture here. 13

What is foregrounded here is the always latent, if not manifest, struggle for control over meaning and value. And it raises important questions for the practice of stone sculpture in Zimbabwe: what kind of 'Africa' does stone sculpture represent to "the rest of the world"; how is its imagery mediated by dealers, curators, critics and the like? Whose vision does it represent, and whose interest does it serve?

**MAKING HISTORY: THE DENIAL OF DIFFERENCE**

While there are, of course, no simple answers to these questions, consistent trends in the 'making' of the 'tradition' are revealing. Originally presented under the title 'Shona', stone sculpture received its first exposure not to a local audience, but to the European artworld in Paris in 1971 — presented as 'authentic tribal art' and clothed by McEwan 'in the rather flowery language of 'myth, magic and African spiritually' ', 14 Virtually no interest was taken in the sculpture inside the country but outside a large market quickly developed. Following its initial success in Europe, stone sculpture continued to be marketed under the rubric of 'authentic tribal art', yet at the same time, through its appropriation for a Western art history, it was placed in a line of succession from Picasso through the Cubists to Henry Moore. "Virtually all the writing around the sculpture", says Winter-Irving, "has been embedded in a Western aesthetic and has tended to make Western art-historical judgements of the object". 15

This process is not uncommon in post-colonial renaissances of indigenous art. The Ishogbo art of Nigeria, for example, which emerged during the Nigerian Civil War when shortages of materials led to experimentation with two dimensional forms and produced a synthesis of traditional themes and Western techniques, was initially promoted by European artists and academics. As a modern, syncretic form, it at first held little appeal for Nigerian audiences,
but as it began to incorporate urban imagery and experience into its traditional pantheon of spirit-world themes, its local popularity grew rapidly.\textsuperscript{16}

In the case of Zimbabwean stone sculpture, however, it cannot yet be said that the appropriation of Western forms, techniques and ideas has resulted in a form of art that is either broadly accessible or popular within Zimbabwe itself. Currently the audience is still predominantly white — the white residents, expatriates, tourists, and constant stream of overseas collectors and dealers who export regular shipments to rapidly expanding markets in Europe, America and Australia. To the majority of black Zimbabweans, apart from those in the emerging middle class who have responded to the government’s call to invest in their ‘heritage’, stone sculpture remains an arcane and alien commodity.

If, as is claimed, Zimbabwe stone sculpture is re-making, reinterpreting traditional culture through contemporary forms which have their origin in the West, it needs to be asked for whom and by whom it is being remade — who controls the context of production and reception?

Since, in the absence of a National Art School and the virtual absence of art education in secondary schools, the National Gallery is the most influential institution outside the fully commercial sector, we might ask for whom it is fostering “the innovative talents of the nation.” According to Cyril Rogers, the Gallery’s Director, “If we are going to make an impact on the art world it’s got to be through our own artists whose work we can display to the rest of the world.”\textsuperscript{17} Rogers also speaks of the need to expose Zimbabwean artists to developments elsewhere, but at no point does he say that he sees a role for the gallery in addressing audiences inside the country. His emphasis lies exclusively on the task of constructing a national visual style which will be “recognizably Zimbabwean” to the rest of the world. There is apparently no role here for art as a form of cultural production which has the capacity not only to represent, but to explore, question, transform, or even simply engage with, the social order within which it is produced.

When I asked him if he thought the demands of a predominantly Western market for ‘traditional’ sculpture may inhibit the emergence of new forms and ideas — which is precisely the criticism levelled at the stone sculpture industry by younger and more experimental sculptors — Roger’s answer was symptomatic of the contradictory ethnocentric and ahistorical frame within which the sculpture continues to be read.

That’s a fair question, but the answer, I think, is simple. It’s not inhibiting the development of something that is so essentially Zimbabwean. I was out in the bush yesterday with a whole lot of artists and it was astonishing, really, how true they remain to their cultural base. They want to use the new techniques, but you look around you and it’s still the same kind of African manifestation. They’re not producing Venus de Milos or anything like that, they’re still producing African art, and I believe this will continue... They come out of the bush, sometimes with masterpieces. Look at that piece over there, that could be a Henry Moore, and dammit, that came from a little village up on the Mozambique border and he’d never heard of Henry Moore.\textsuperscript{18}

Roger’s implicit valorization of ‘traditional’ content as innate and static on the one hand, and his appeal to a Western art historical context as the appropriate index of aesthetic value, on the other, not only collapses differences between sculptors, but clearly subsumes them under an ethnocentric Western notion of ‘African’ cultural identity. This contradiction is echoed even in Marion Arnold’s published thesis on Zimbabwe Stone Sculpture, the first scholarly


\textsuperscript{17} Cyril Rogers, Interview, Harare, November 1988.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
investigation into the relationship between the sculpture and its cultural context. She claims that in terms of content not only does Shona sculpture have very strong associations with traditional mythologies and beliefs, but that "there is a direct relationship between the sculpted form and the content of the stone sculpture". At the same time, however, she also says that these culturally specific qualities "evoke a timelessness and a universality. Stylization and simplification imbue the work with a depersonalized quality and the sculptures tend to embody the general and permanent rather than the particular and transient". Arnold is perhaps invoking a distinction between the collective nature and function of art in a tribal context and the individual orientation of the production and reception of 'art' in a Western context. However, while her thesis constitutes an important attempt to understand stone sculpture in relation to its cultural roots, her attribution of meaning — both in its 'universal' and particularist aspects — is problematic.

Jonathon Zilburg, an anthropologist who spent six months with the multi-ethnic Tengenenge Sculpture Community (150kms north east of Harare), warns against the tendency to flatten, homogenize and unify what are significantly different sculptural practices. He stresses that the ongoing practice of calling the sculpture 'Shona' (despite recent attempts to promote the term Zimbabwe), and the assumption that Shona cosmology is encoded at primary and secondary levels of meaning, fail to recognize the diverse cultural experiences and symbolism in Zimbabwean stone sculpture. As he points out, in the debut of stone sculpture in Paris in 1971 the majority of artists represented were from

Nicholas Munyaradzi *The Spirit of Chamuska* 1988-89

Photo: Dawoud Bey (courtesy The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York).
Tengenenge, and the majority of these were not Shona but migrant labourers turned artists from Angola, Mozambique, Malawi, and Zambia. Of their sculptures (inspired by the masks of the Mbundu Makishu or Yoa Nyau, in which images are taken from a performance context and transposed into commodities for a European market) he says: “to consider these sculptures as embodying significant and meaningful cosmological value is more often than not a vacuous mystification. Meaning is rarely so simply reduced and transferred across such entirely different mediums and contexts”. While the logic of the ‘Shona’ categorization, he claims, allowed buyers and promoters to read into the sculpture “the spiritual resonance of a ‘deeply mystical’ experience”, a more accurate reading requires a greater sensitivity to context and a respect for “diverse and open-ended identities, to say nothing of the paradoxical, ambiguous and contradictory aspects of social identities”. These mythifying generalities not only collapse precisely those differences which locate the particular historical identities of artists and their work, but that they also fail to see the tradition itself as an “innovative strategy for commodity production”. Through a tendency either to disavow these elements of innovation, or simply to recuperate them for a Western context, this remade genre of the contemporary primitive is reinforced not only by continued overseas demand for pieces titled “Water Spirit” or “Buffalo changing into Man”, but also by the continued policy of protecting sculptors from Western influence. There is a strong belief in some quarters that if you simply provide the tools, as McEwan did three decades ago, the ‘African essence’ will emerge from man and stone. As sculptor Bernard Takawira puts it: “If you’re a stone sculptor you’re expected to be uneducated, you just about have to have a tail to be authentic”. 

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ZIMBABWE STONE SCULPTURE

For Takawira, as for Murray McCartney (Editor of Insight, the Gallery’s magazine), and for Tapfuma Gutsa (sculptor and former Education Officer at the National Gallery), the consistency of stone sculpture and its apparent conformity to its supposed cultural roots is not so much “astonishing as cause for concern”. In McCartney’s view, “the engine for development in stone sculpture is money,” and the problem is “not just the selling of the work, but buying being the main objective of people attending openings. It’s an exhibition opening culture, rather than a gallery going culture. Little is being produced that’s very challenging, primarily because it is produced for a market of overseas buyers, which means more of the same”. 

According to Gutsa the dealers have been useful in sustaining sculpture, but are not prepared to take risks with new forms.

When I make work that can be given the label ‘Shona’ sculpture I can sell everything I make and I can make it very fast, but my recent exhibition at Gallery Delta — new work that was constructed with some sense of logic and personal integrity — did not do so well. When an audience is used to something, it won’t move away at any cost, and because ‘Shona’ sculpture is seen by most buyers as an investment, the new experimental work has a shadow on it because no-one’s singing about it. One produces it at one’s peril. You’ve chosen starvation. The National Gallery has, I think, fallen into the trap. And this is not surprising, because McEwan operated here, and one of the strengths used to be the workshop.
where this art was produced. For them to denounce this art form as now redundant would be like cutting the hand that feeds the Gallery, so they have a dilemma.\textsuperscript{27}

As a result of this, he says, many of the best works at the Baringa/Nedlaw Exhibition are overlooked, which is a real problem for younger sculptors working in a contemporary African idiom, since the Gallery is virtually their only source of exposure and support.

But there are further costs of entering into competition with the Commercial Galleries. Caught up in its own momentum, not only can the National Gallery not afford to stop promoting ‘traditional’ stone sculpture if it is to continue setting up shows for sale (and survive financially), but by doing so it contributes to the production of an inflated market in which it becomes increasingly difficult for the gallery to fulfil its role as conservator, of precisely the heritage it has helped reclaim and construct.

Ironically, it was a comment by the Merchant Bank of Central Africa’s Chairman, Glyn Richards, as he handed over the bank’s annual contribution to the Gallery’s Acquisitions Fund, which best illustrates the Gallery’s contradictory position. He quipped:

You will see around you only some of the artifacts we have helped the Gallery to add to its Permanent Collection. I hope the rest can be accounted for: because when one has a marketeer like Prof. Cyril Rogers whose laudable ambition is to become ‘Exporter of the Year’ spreading Zimbabwean art far and wide, then it becomes all the more important to preserve and protect the lodestar in its natural environment.\textsuperscript{28}

Given that the Merchant Bank’s Z$7,500 will now buy only half a Takawira sculpture, McCartney asks: “do we really want to keep the best in the country or do we really want to sell it? Certainly the artists want to sell it”.\textsuperscript{29} And as Rogers likes to remind those who question the Gallery’s commercial ventures, its prime responsibility is to the needs of the country’s artists, needs which Rogers sees primarily in economic terms.

The economic argument is a familiar and compelling one in the history of stone sculpture in Zimbabwe. Tom Blomefield’s experiment at Tengegenge in the 1960’s, for example, was motivated by the collapse of mining and tobacco farming during UDI and sanctions. Like McEwan, he encouraged his farm and mine workers to try their hands at sculpting. These days, with Zimbabwe’s extremely high rate of unemployment and chronic shortage of foreign exchange, the stone sculpture movement can only be viewed very favourably by the government, as a major export industry.

Although some have commended the Zimbabwean government for the ideological freedom it has allowed the nation’s artists, there are clearly stronger economic (and ultimately political) incentives for keeping stone sculpture within the realm of the spiritual, mythological and traditional, than there are for encouraging artists to engage with the material, contemporary and ideological. As Steve Williams, Director of the Mzilikazi Art and Craft Centre in Bulawayo observes:

“Political art isn’t encouraged, just as criticism in general isn’t encouraged. You just have to look at theatre. Workshop Negative by Amakhosi, which criticised the broad aspects of corruption, was prevented from leaving the country and effectively stifled. There are two sets of values, it seems. Certainly in the past the government could talk of socialism and the Ministers used the rhetoric, but when it comes to people on the ground discussing these things amongst themselves, it’s seen as something subversive. Artists have generally been scared. You also have to
question whether this is such a politicised country. Politics is very high on the agenda, but do the majority of people really understand the issues, and the concept of socialism? I don’t think it’s ever been explained to them.30

DEPARTURES: RESHAPING THE PAST

If, up until recently, the focus has been primarily on the commodity value of stone sculpture, now more and more younger sculptors are also seeing their work in terms of its symbolic use value. And they are doing so with a growing critical awareness of the increasing prevalence of Western imagery, and of the neo-imperialist interests it serves. Tapfuma Gutsa:

A lot of the older sculptors never had a chance to develop a political consciousness (because of the patronage for one thing), but there is a conscious step forward in which people are beginning to find and assert themselves. With the younger generation of sculptors there are conflicting ideas. Some are totally radical and see their art as a way of influencing what happens around them. Others have chosen an international way of thinking, a ‘universal’ way of thinking, where the concept of art for art’s sake comes in. They’re producing a body of work which to a certain extent is very relevant, but based on European movements. I’ve studied art in depth but I’ve also studied other things and have come to realize that the main thing is the way the world is worked out with a few people sitting on top of a lot of people. Like women, the black man realizes that politically he has a part to play — and that he can’t just sit back, it won’t just happen.31

Gutsa’s performance piece Doom, a large sculpted wooden bird which was ritually burnt, leaving a charred body, could be read in ‘universal’ terms as a ‘post-object’ statement on the commodification of art. In terms more relevant and specific to Zimbabwe, however, it can also be read as an act of resistance to the market’s appropriation of stone sculpture. As the visual, textural and formal antithesis of the sleek, finished appearance of stone sculpture, the charred bird is not the kind of object that would complement a high fashion Western interior. It is not only, as Gutsa says, “against the whole history of art”, it is also a reference to the non-commodity nature of traditional forms of Zimbabwean cultural expression. Just as the mask loses its power after the dance is over, so the bird loses its commodity value when the ritual burning is complete. Gutsa, however, feels that some of his other work, which might not be as legible to the international panel of judges which awarded it the Baringa/Nedlaw prize in 1987, have more important things to say to Zimbabweans.

Previously I’d tried something with an arch made of boulders and balanced on a series of wooden poles, and I think in terms of cultural weight it had more to say than Doom. I was trying to say that as a people we have forgotten who we are, that this requires a rewriting of the old books — a new order. For me that sculpture symbolizes it. It had ten elements and had I completed it as I wanted to I would have dug a pool underneath it so that the arch would be reflected in the water, hence completing the circle. In Africa today there’s a lot of superstition, spurious mysticism. In the sculpture, superstition is represented by the reflected, and then the actual stones represent the reality we must analyse. But I got discouraged because no-one understood and I think this is one of the blocks, in as much as the older generation artists are natural artists. For them it’s not an intellectual thing, it’s not a thing they have a strong argument for or against in themselves. They make these works which are very beautiful, whereas some of us of the so-called younger generation, we see what a major role we can actually play in the making of our country and this doesn’t go down too well in most quarters.32
What is at stake here is not simply the power to reclaim cultural traditions which have been repressed and denigrated by the colonizers, and which are now being reconstituted by the West as their specular ‘other’, but rather the power to transform the opposition between the traditional and the modern,
and to remake visual language in the image of contemporary Zimbabwe. For graphic artist Chaz Maviyane-Davies,

Nostalgic return to our past forms would be tantamount to avoiding a situation which demands action against what is dominant and dominating us today. We must stay in the contemporary battlefield and fight for our liberation with all the means at our disposal. Cultural imperialism employs the most sophisticated technology, but its methodology also incorporates our own forms. It is up to us, and us alone, to make use of all knowledge in our contemporary development. Only then can we begin to revitalize our means of cultural expression, injected with new content; only then will the process begin of regaining power over the language of words and images ....we should not look for admirers, but for people to communicate with; we should offer dialogue, not spectacle.33

While the National and commercial galleries continue to offer spectacle in the name of national pride, some sculptors are beginning to find new and responsive audiences. Vote Thebe, working in Bulawayo where stone sculpture has not become as entrenched as in the north, is one such sculptor. "I just grew tired of all these highly polished, traditional (one might say traditional of the sixties) sculptures. I'd seen them, grew up with them, and I made them, but they were not part of my personal experience. Now, when I make a sculpture or a painting I try to relate it to the people I see around me. I still use stone, but in its raw state, and I put it together with other things, as in A Gift from the Inlaws.34 This piece was based on something he saw somewhere on a road in rural Zimbabwe:

There was this truck, with men sitting in the back, and when they stood I saw a goat's head coming up as well, out of a bag. I asked one of the men and he said "its a gift", and I realized it was a gift from his inlaws in the communal (rural) lands and it was being smuggled into town against the health regulations, which at the moment are trying to control the spread of foot and mouth disease. The men had put it in the bag and sat next to it in such a way that whenever they reached a road block the goat couldn't be seen. What I like most was the fact that the goat was in the bag. I made the sculpture then went out and bought a hayseed bag and put the sculpture in it. But when I looked at the bag it didn't mean anything, so I wrote on it NATIONAL FOODS OF ZIMBABWE and a Box Number. When I did that the sculpture started to speak to me: wherever you go in Zimbabwe you're bound to meet a goat, the goat is a national food.35

Judging from the interest generated by this piece, it spoke also to many of the black Zimbabweans who visited the Gallery during the Baringa/Nedlaw Exhibition. Familiar yet enigmatic, this work offered the pleasure of immediate recognition while simultaneously provoking questions. With the playful reference of its title to the 'law' — to tensions between Customary Law, which governs traditional kinship relations, and the Western legal system of a developing industrial (and capitalist) state — this sculpture speaks more clearly than most to the conflict between tradition and modernity. Stone sculpture has a long way to go in developing a rapport with Zimbabweans — aided hopefully by an injection of funds to the education system — but there is no doubt that the dialogue has begun. Despite all attempts by official culture to keep 'tradition' in its 'proper place', someone has finally let the goat out of the bag.

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