



**WALLEN MAPONDERA**  
Tsananguro | Clarifications

27 . 05 . 17  
01 . 07 . 17

**smac**

CAPE TOWN  
The Palms  
145 Sir Lowry Rd  
Woodstock, 7925  
T +27 (0)21 461 1029

info@smacgallery.com  
www.smacgallery.com

@smac\_gallery

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#wallenmapondera

#tsananguro

#clarifications

#smaccpt

Wallen Mapondera's *Tsananguro/Clarifications* is a coalescence of art and matter. Unlike the demands of Hamlet's Gertrude who asks Polonius that she wishes 'more matter' and 'less art' Mapondera's practice is the happy merger of both. It offers an almost forlorn ebullience of narrative, allegory, protest, political engagement, media and form. His two, seemingly distinct, practices of painting and sculptural collage provide insights into both form and socio-political expression.

What perhaps makes Mapondera one of the most interesting artists to come out of the burgeoning group of Zimbabwean art practitioners (that include the likes of Dan Halter, Gerald Machona, Kudzanai Chiurai, Portia Zvavahera, Richard Mudariki and Misheck Masamvu) is his varied influences and practices. The most obvious influence, to those who are familiar with the painting coming out of Zimbabwe, would be Misheck Masamvu and his Village Unhu art studio based in Harare where Mapondera currently resides. Certainly, some of his figuration and application of paint in works such as *Orders*, with its languid 'naïve' line and its evisceration of areas of the canvass, are influenced by this school of painting. However, Mapondera's work is distinctive from this group not only because of the themes he explores and his palate, but also because his practice involves a much larger range of media and influences.

As Mapondera has said, his sculptural collages were partly prompted by the work of the Australian born Nigerian artist Nnena Okore. But their obsessive craft also reminds one of more organic and visceral versions of his fellow Zimbabwean Dan Halter, whose own practice derives its form from Zimbabwean traditional craft. The use of form and colour, however, in works such as *Beautiful Scarification, Or Is It?* and *Kumba Kwababa Vangu (My Father's House)* evoke the colours and grid like patterns of abstract painters such as Paul Klee and Ernest Mancoba. The key, however, to understanding the link between Mapondera's two seemingly disparate practices is that the torn and slashed edges of the cardboard prefigure the disturbing eviscerated themes of his figurative paintings. What is more as one can see in paintings such as *Circus Boys, Love or Something Like That, Change Room I & II* and *Just a Dream* that the grid patterns and boxes of his cardboard works are the lattice on which the animal and human figures are suspended.

Of course the grid has been the foundation of all painting since the introduction of the theory of perspective during the Renaissance. But as the painter Peter Doig once pointed out, paintings have never been fixed or still within this structure. Much like Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* and the work of the Cubists both Mapondera's practices convey movement. And certainly one cannot consider his current body of work without considering the role Picasso, Cubism and Dada have

played in it and the overarching conceit that paintings represent not only space but (current) time.

Within this idea of the conveyance of current time is of course Mapondera's exploration of Africa's relationship with its animals both real and spiritual. Much like J.M. Coetzee in *Disgrace* he has foregrounded the cruelty that they are afforded. But also like Coetzee there is a degree of non-realist allegorizing at play. As Mapondera says of his work: '[it] portrays anthropomorphic imagery as a metaphor for power relations in Zimbabwean society in the context of an increasingly unstable socio-political environment.' The expression of these troubles can be seen in the allegories and mythologizing contained in works such as *Bed of Prophecy* and *Tsvera I*.

Mapondera's work is the similar merger of art and protest that one encounters in artists like Feni, Siopis, Kentridge and Alexander. His exploration of narrative and allegorical engagement belies the current trends of the one-dimensional expression of identity politics that so pervades South African contemporary art. It is this 'aboutness' in his works, this engagement with the socio-political life that seems to stem from lived experience, that in *Tsananguro/Clarifications* captures the *gestalt* of the current socio-political atmosphere of southern Africa. That atmosphere where animal, human and political forms are torn, twisted and at times hacked out of shape. *Tsananguro/Clarifications* is the depiction in current time of the daily tragedies that are the quotidian experience of the clear majority of the peoples of our region.

By Matthew Blackman

**Wallen Mapondera** was born in 1985 in Harare, Zimbabwe. He received formal art training from the National Gallery School of Visual Arts and Design from 2005 to June 2007. In July 2007, he was selected for the National Gallery of Zimbabwe Artist-in-Residence Programme, hosted at the National Gallery School of Visual Arts and Design Studios in Mbare, Harare. The Residency culminated in his first solo exhibition, titled MAZUVA OZE (Everyday), held at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Harare in 2008. Mapondera has since held multiple solo shows and participated in various local and international art fairs and group exhibitions. In 2015, he was the recipient of Zimbabwe's prestigious National Arts Merit Award – in the Visual Arts two-dimensional work category – given by the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe in recognition of outstanding achievement in arts and culture.

In 2016, Mapondera was a winner of the AIR (Artist-in-Residency) Award Laureate, awarded by the African Centre, and subsequently took up residency at the Kuona Trust in Nairobi, Kenya. The residency was concluded with his solo presentation, titled *Paint My Tea Pot*, at the Tafaria Castle in Kenya. Earlier solo exhibitions include: *Social Zoometry* at Gallery Delta in Harare, Zimbabwe (2014); *Ani-Man (a human in an animal)* at the Association for Visual Arts Gallery (AVA) in Cape Town, South Africa (2013); and *Turning Tables* at the Red Mill Gallery in Vermont Studio Center, Vermont, USA (2012).

Notable group exhibitions include: *Nothing Personal* at SMAC Gallery in Stellenbosch and *Suddenly A Dissident (Two Man Show)* at the Point of Order Gallery in Johannesburg, both in South Africa in 2016; *Between the Sheets* at Gallery East, North Fremantle in Western Australia in 2012; *Colour Africa, Zeitgenössische Kunst Aus Simbabwe, Kulturallmende* in Munich, Germany in 2011; as well as *African Expressions* at the University of Avignon in Avignon, France in 2010. Mapondera also participated in multiple group exhibitions in Zimbabwe, many of them at Gallery Delta in Harare.

**Wallen Mapondera**  
Tsananguro | Clarifications  
Installation View

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**STELLENBOSCH**  
1st Floor, De Wet Centre  
Church Street  
Stellenbosch, 7600  
T +27 (0)21 887 3607

**CAPE TOWN**  
1st Floor, The Palms  
145 Sir Lowry Road  
Woodstock, 7925  
T +27 (0)21 461 1029

**JOHANNESBURG**  
1st Floor, The Trumpet  
19 Keyes Avenue  
Rosebank, 2196  
T +27 (0)10 594 5400

[www.smacgallery.com](http://www.smacgallery.com)  
[info@smacgallery.com](mailto:info@smacgallery.com)

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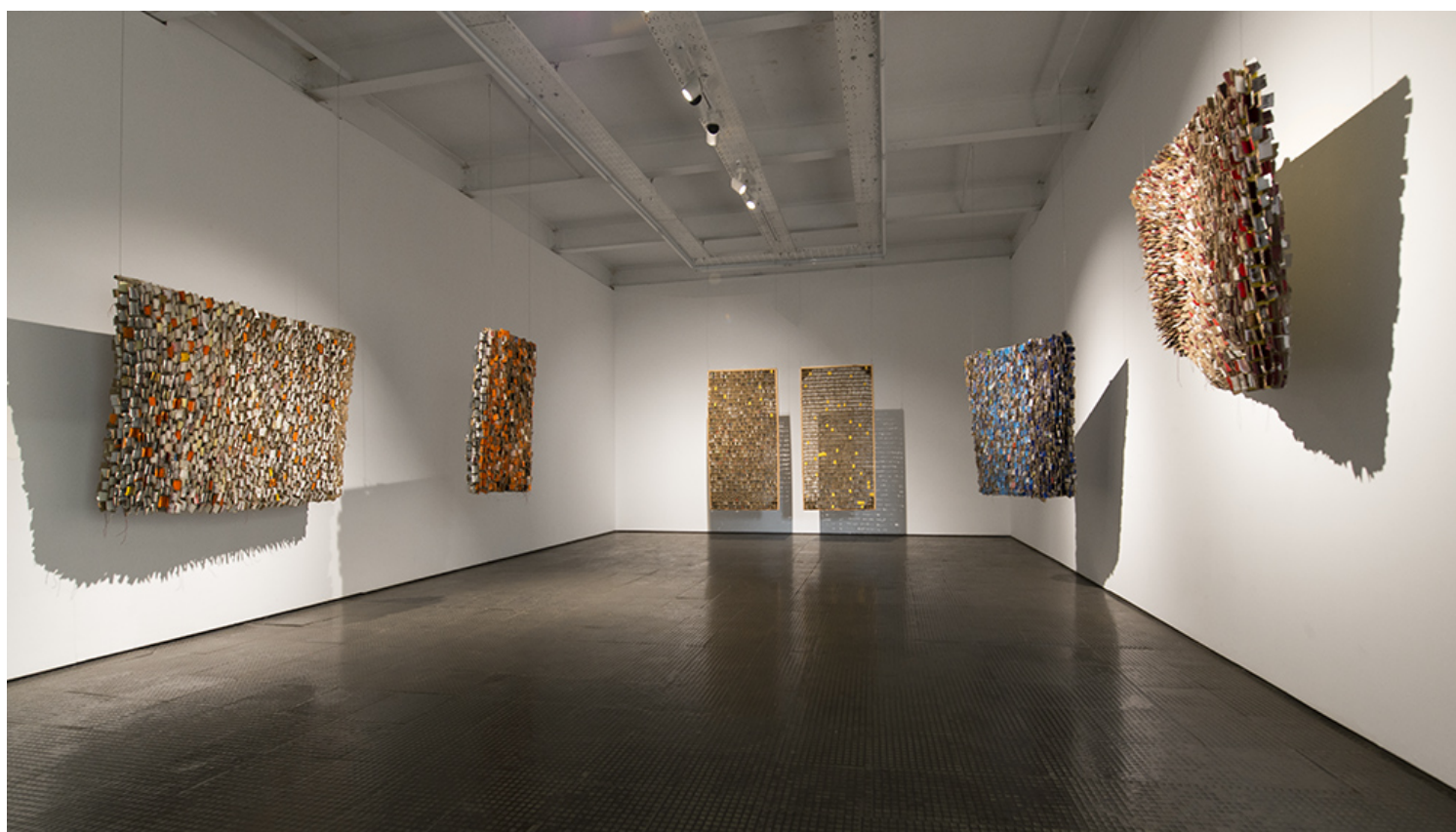


**STELLENBOSCH**  
1st Floor, De Wet Centre  
Church Street  
Stellenbosch, 7600  
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**STELLENBOSCH**  
1st Floor, De Wet Centre  
Church Street  
Stellenbosch, 7600  
T +27 (0)21 887 3607

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1st Floor, The Palms  
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**JOHANNESBURG**  
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**Wallen Mapondera**

*Mai Musande*

2017

Oil on Canvas

158 x 180 cm

Unique

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**STELLENBOSCH**

1st Floor, De Wet Centre  
Church Street  
Stellenbosch, 7600  
T +27 (0)21 887 3607

**CAPE TOWN**

1st Floor, The Palms  
145 Sir Lowry Road  
Woodstock, 7925  
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**Wallen Mapondera**

*Tsvera 1*

2017

Oil on Canvas

205 x 180 cm

Unique

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**STELLENBOSCH**

1st Floor, De Wet Centre  
Church Street  
Stellenbosch, 7600  
T +27 (0)21 887 3607

**CAPE TOWN**

1st Floor, The Palms  
145 Sir Lowry Road  
Woodstock, 7925  
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**JOHANNESBURG**

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**Wallen Mapondera**

*Circus Boys*

2015

Oil on Canvas

191 x 140 cm

Unique

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**STELLENBOSCH**

1st Floor, De Wet Centre  
Church Street  
Stellenbosch, 7600  
T +27 (0)21 887 3607

**CAPE TOWN**

1st Floor, The Palms  
145 Sir Lowry Road  
Woodstock, 7925  
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**JOHANNESBURG**

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**Wallen Mapondera**

*Just a Dream*

2016

Oil on Canvas

150 x 110 cm

Unique

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1st Floor, De Wet Centre  
Church Street  
Stellenbosch, 7600  
T +27 (0)21 887 3607

**CAPE TOWN**

1st Floor, The Palms  
145 Sir Lowry Road  
Woodstock, 7925  
T +27 (0)21 461 1029

**JOHANNESBURG**

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[info@smacgallery.com](mailto:info@smacgallery.com)

**Wallen Mapondera**  
*Love Or Something Like That*  
2016  
Oil on Canvas  
150 x 110 cm  
Unique

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1st Floor, De Wet Centre  
Church Street  
Stellenbosch, 7600  
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**CAPE TOWN**  
1st Floor, The Palms  
145 Sir Lowry Road  
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**JOHANNESBURG**  
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**Wallen Mapondera**

*Growing Things*

2015

Oil on Canvas

191 x 140 cm

Unique

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**Wallen Mapondera**

*Bed of Prophecy*

2017

Oil on Canvas

81 x 125 cm

Unique



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1st Floor, De Wet Centre  
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T +27 (0)21 887 3607

**CAPE TOWN**

1st Floor, The Palms  
145 Sir Lowry Road  
Woodstock, 7925  
T +27 (0)21 461 1029

**JOHANNESBURG**

1st Floor, The Trumpet  
19 Keyes Avenue  
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**Wallen Mapondera**  
*The Body Within The White Collar*  
2017  
Oil on Canvas  
183 x 130 cm  
Unique



**STELLENBOSCH**  
1st Floor, De Wet Centre  
Church Street  
Stellenbosch, 7600  
T +27 (0)21 887 3607

**CAPE TOWN**  
1st Floor, The Palms  
145 Sir Lowry Road  
Woodstock, 7925  
T +27 (0)21 461 1029

**JOHANNESBURG**  
1st Floor, The Trumpet  
19 Keyes Avenue  
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**Wallen Mapondera**

*Following Flowers*

2017

Oil on Canvas

125 x 81 cm

Unique

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**STELLENBOSCH**

1st Floor, De Wet Centre  
Church Street  
Stellenbosch, 7600  
T +27 (0)21 887 3607

**CAPE TOWN**

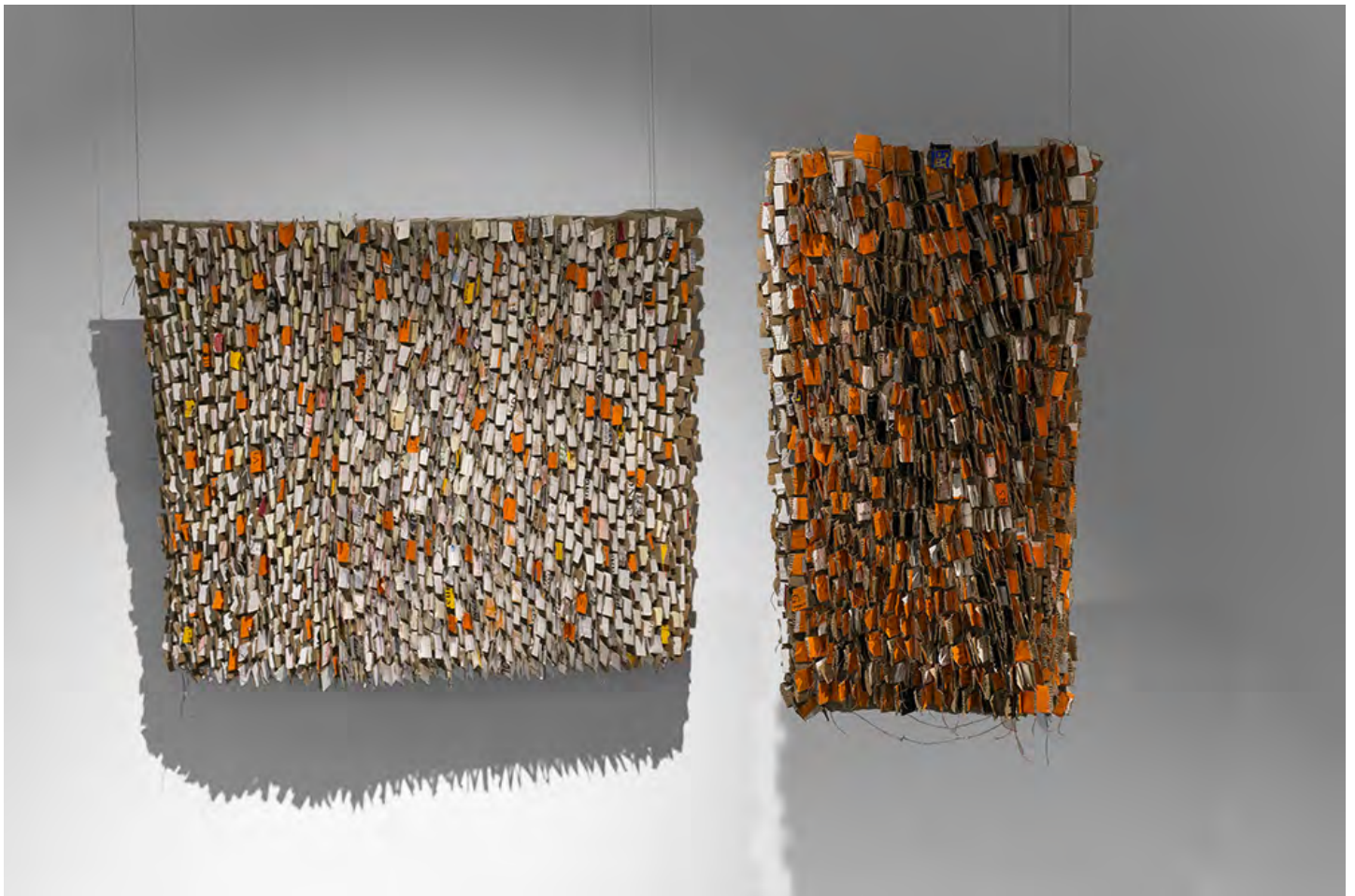
1st Floor, The Palms  
145 Sir Lowry Road  
Woodstock, 7925  
T +27 (0)21 461 1029

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1st Floor, The Trumpet  
19 Keyes Avenue  
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**Wallen Mapondera**  
*Clarifications (Dptych)*  
2017  
Cardboard, Canvas  
120 x 70 cm and 120 x 146 cm  
Unique



**STELLENBOSCH**  
1st Floor, De Wet Centre  
Church Street  
Stellenbosch, 7600  
T +27 (0)21 887 3607

**CAPE TOWN**  
1st Floor, The Palms  
145 Sir Lowry Road  
Woodstock, 7925  
T +27 (0)21 461 1029

**JOHANNESBURG**  
1st Floor, The Trumpet  
19 Keyes Avenue  
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**Wallen Mapondera**

*Cleansing*

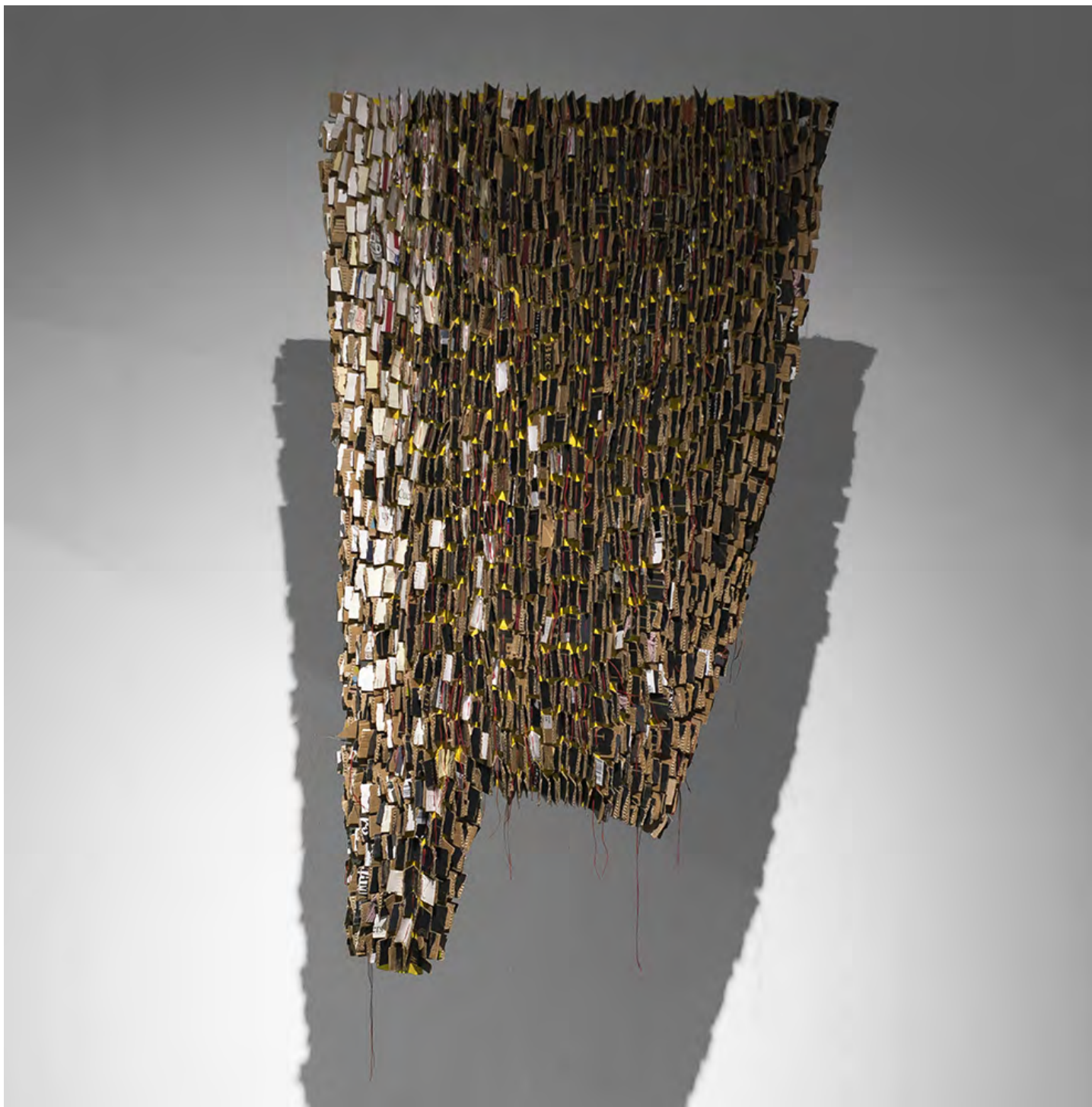
2017

Cardboard, Laminated Hessian

170 x 90 cm

Unique

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1st Floor, De Wet Centre  
Church Street  
Stellenbosch, 7600  
T +27 (0)21 887 3607

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1st Floor, The Palms  
145 Sir Lowry Road  
Woodstock, 7925  
T +27 (0)21 461 1029

**JOHANNESBURG**

1st Floor, The Trumpet  
19 Keyes Avenue  
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**Wallen Mapondera**

*Deedzerwa*

2017

Cardboard, Laminated Hessian

115 x 100 cm

Unique

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**STELLENBOSCH**

1st Floor, De Wet Centre  
Church Street  
Stellenbosch, 7600  
T +27 (0)21 887 3607

**CAPE TOWN**

1st Floor, The Palms  
145 Sir Lowry Road  
Woodstock, 7925  
T +27 (0)21 461 1029

**JOHANNESBURG**

1st Floor, The Trumpet  
19 Keyes Avenue  
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[www.smacgallery.com](http://www.smacgallery.com)  
[info@smacgallery.com](mailto:info@smacgallery.com)

**Wallen Mapondera**

*Untitled*

2017

Cardboard, Laminated Hessian

123 x 118 cm

Unique

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**STELLENBOSCH**

1st Floor, De Wet Centre  
Church Street  
Stellenbosch, 7600  
T +27 (0)21 887 3607

**CAPE TOWN**

1st Floor, The Palms  
145 Sir Lowry Road  
Woodstock, 7925  
T +27 (0)21 461 1029

**JOHANNESBURG**

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**Wallen Mapondera**

*Kumba Kwababa Vangu (My Father's House)*

2016

Cardboard Box

90 x 180 cm (Each)

Unique



**STELLENBOSCH**

1st Floor, De Wet Centre  
Church Street  
Stellenbosch, 7600  
T +27 (0)21 887 3607

**CAPE TOWN**

1st Floor, The Palms  
145 Sir Lowry Road  
Woodstock, 7925  
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1st Floor, The Trumpet  
19 Keyes Avenue  
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[info@smacgallery.com](mailto:info@smacgallery.com)