

An abstract portrait painting featuring a face with a prominent red horizontal stroke across the mouth area. The background is composed of various colors including purple, blue, green, and red, with visible brushstrokes and textures. The text 'smac' is in the top left corner.

smac

**MOSTAFF MUCHAWAYA**

Kwandinobva

08 . 02 . 20

30 . 04 . 20



# Negotiating Memory and Place

Text by Fadzai Muchemwa

Place, memory and healing are key participants of Mostaff Muchawaya's work. *Where I come from/Kwandinobva* can be seen in terms of pieces and places that have shaped Mostaff Muchawaya's life and career which has been one of struggle, patience and trying again.

In his work, Muchawaya constantly references the people who shaped his life. Quite apparent in this current body of work are the influences that other people have had on his practice. The female form holds a particular fascination for him. The faceless women that he so often depicts point to his upbringing on a farm owned by Nicole Sanderson's<sup>1</sup> father (who facilitated his going to art school) with the numerous women who fended for the children. It was not an easy upbringing. Tobacco farming is hard, back-breaking work for which farmhands are the faceless and unacknowledged facilitators of wealth creation. Tandazani Dhlakama writes, "We see in his work the processes of erasure and struggle merge to create unrecognizable forms."<sup>2</sup> (2018).

His way of working is typical of painting from the National Gallery School of Visual Arts<sup>3</sup>, in Zimbabwe and has been described "(as an) example of Mukarobgwa's expressive line and dreamlike depictions of the world finds resonances in the work of many later artists"<sup>4</sup>. The colours, inner energy and deliberate brush strokes make it easy for him to bring his people and their experiences to the fore.

Muchawaya starts off each painting the same way: a generous layering of paint, shaving and scraping off some of the dried paint, followed by the chemical erosion of the canvas with thinners and other household cleaning substances, and then painting again. He might go through the cycle of layering/painting and obliteration several times until he is satisfied. Like it's an exorcism. Eventually the portrait that he then presents is one that eerily reminds one of a sculptural forms and a haunting—a haunting by places, by people and by what used to be or could be.

The portraits show a people frozen, stuck even, in a time that Muchawaya may feel nostalgic of or traumatised by. These portraits can be seen as thresholds of anxiety which he has described as "a search for peace and mercy" for the troubled souls of his past and his present. All the women are beautiful—some are recognizable, others not. A form that looks like a baby appears and can be seen to represent Muchawaya locating himself in the struggle that characterize(s)(d) the women of his life. These flawed memories and the ritualized way of working can be seen as a form of somatic therapy.

The unravelling of connections to valued memory, person or community is clear in his work. He was introduced to Nicole Sanderson when he was 12 years old and his artistic interests were further encouraged. The brief drawing lessons he got at Gallery Delta from Helen Lieros<sup>5</sup> are manifest in his expressive line. The time he spent with Amos Supuni<sup>6</sup> after

he had finished school is apparent in the sculptural way of working as is the abstraction influence that reminds one of Robert Paul<sup>7</sup> who figured prominently in his landscape work for a while. After Supuni's death in 2008, Muchawaya had to start over again. He struggled to find his voice and was rudderless when the Sanderson's were kicked off their farm in 2007<sup>8</sup> which meant finding art materials became a fight. Muchawaya became a security guard for a while, working at night and painting during the day. The deliberate and contemplative way of working reflects the time he spent at Village Unhu<sup>9</sup>, in Harare, Zimbabwe. In 2012, he started working with Misheck Masamvu and Gareth Nyandoro in Athlone. Misheck was instrumental in him getting on to the journey of discovery that saw him finding his voice.

The constant negotiation with places throughout our lives shape the threshold moments that manifest as memory. Muchawaya excavates memory through the very process of how he works. What Antonio Damasio calls "somatic markers"(1994) may very well be an interpretation of what Mostaff Muchawaya's work provides. This allows for alternative models of socially engaged practice to explore the tools which can control definitions of self and identity. Subjective experiences, absence and invisibility—as forms of somatic violence—are mediated, enabling one to understand and express the pain of Muchawaya's trauma and vulnerability. It is an intervention that

invites everyone to imagine and realise social life otherwise. Muchawaya's body of work *Where I come from* reveals how lived, traumatic experiences and their cultural representations are linked—daring to try out many ideas on art, power, society and transformation as tactical strategies to find treatment for the struggles Muchawaya has had to deal with. Whether Muchawaya's ritualised way of exorcising the past will allow him to either let go of the past or to fix his past into the present is yet to be seen.

1. Nicole Sanderson is a Zimbabwean born artist currently living in Harare, Zimbabwe

2. Tandazani Dhlakama on *Five Bhobh: Painting at the End of an Era*, Zeitz MOCAA

3. Mostaff Muchawaya attended the National Gallery School of Visual Arts and Design, Zimbabwe from 2002-2003

4. Gemma Rodriguez, 'Traditions of Abstraction: Feeling Our Way Forward' in *Five Bhobh: Painting at the End of an Era*, Zeitz MOCAA

5. Helen Lieros is a Zimbabwean painter who together with Dereck Huggins founded and run Gallery Delta

6. Amos Supuni was a sculptor from Zimbabwe (1970 – 2008)

7. Robert Paul was an abstract painter who passed away in 1979

8. The Sanderson's lost their farm during the 2007 Land Reform Programme

9. Village Unhu is an artist run space founded by Misheck Masamvu, Georgina Maxim and Gareth Nyandoro in



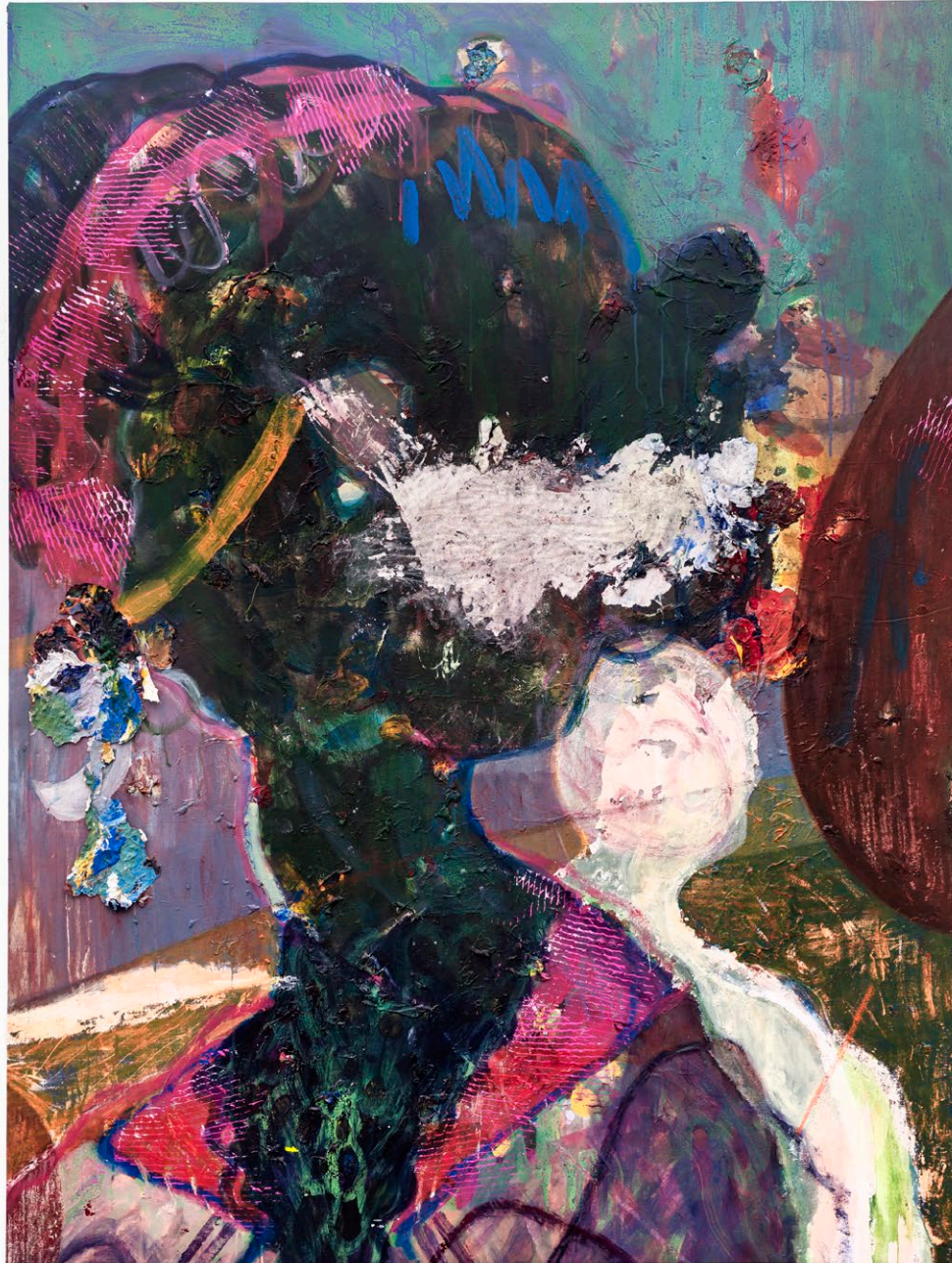
Vatete Gire  
2019  
Acrylic and Ink on Canvas  
180 x 147.5 cm





Untitled  
2018  
Acrylic on Canvas  
157 x 140 cm





Tinaye  
2019  
Acrylic and Ink on Canvas  
210 x 159 cm





*Untitled*  
 2018  
 Acrylic and Glue on Canvas  
 69.5 x 59 cm



*Untitled*  
 2019  
 Acrylic and Glue on Canvas  
 130.5 x 103 cm





Magumba Mana  
2019  
Acrylic on Canvas  
89 x 88 cm





Shamiso  
2019  
Acrylic on Canvas  
159.5 x 148.5 cm





*Namete*  
2019  
Ink and Acrylic on Canvas  
80 x 56 cm



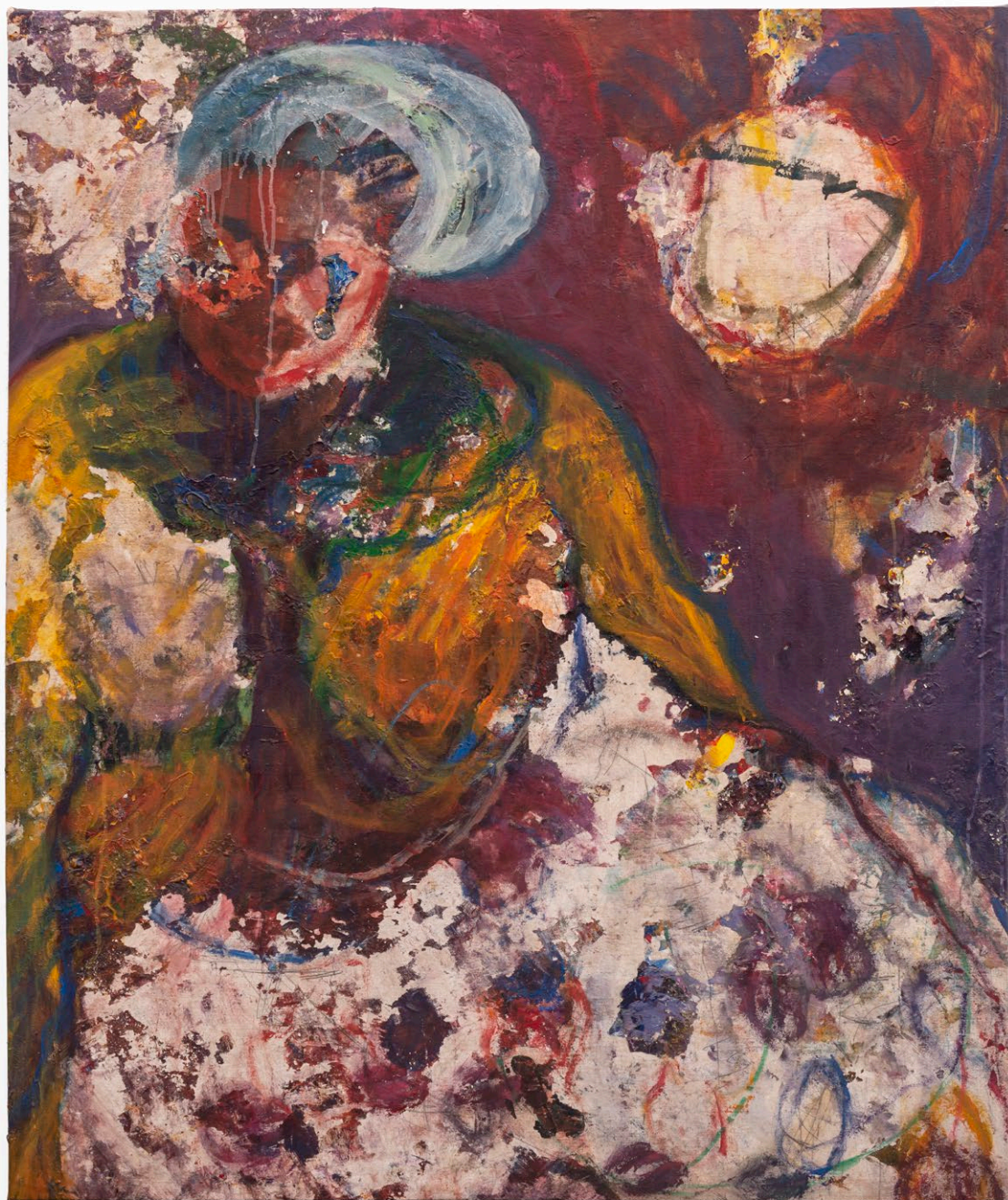
*Untitled*  
2018  
Acrylic on Canvas  
92 x 78 cm





Untitled  
2018  
Acrylic on Canvas  
100 x 73.5 cm





*Kukwatuka III*  
2018  
Acrylic on Canvas  
158 x 133 cm



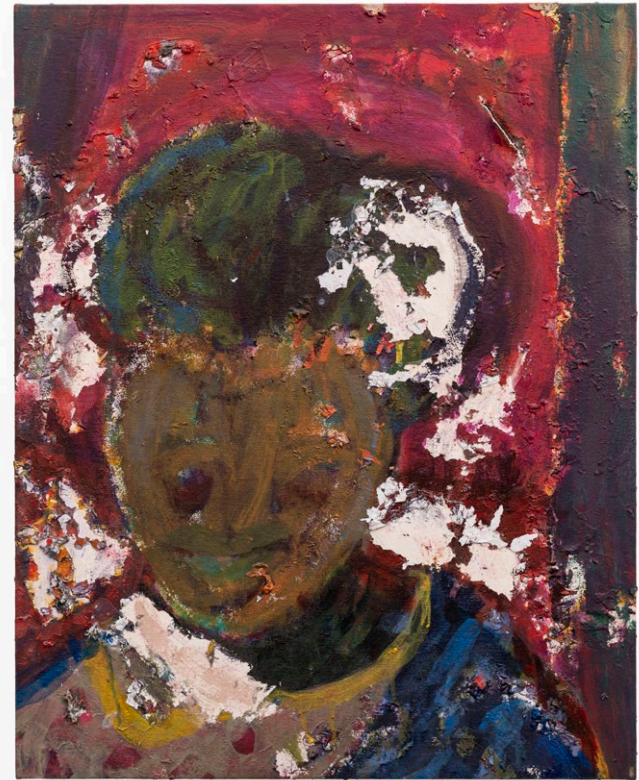


Hanzadzi dzangu  
2019  
Acrylic and Glue on Canvas  
171 x 144 cm





*Ndinewe*  
2018  
Acrylic on Canvas  
109.5 x 80.5 cm

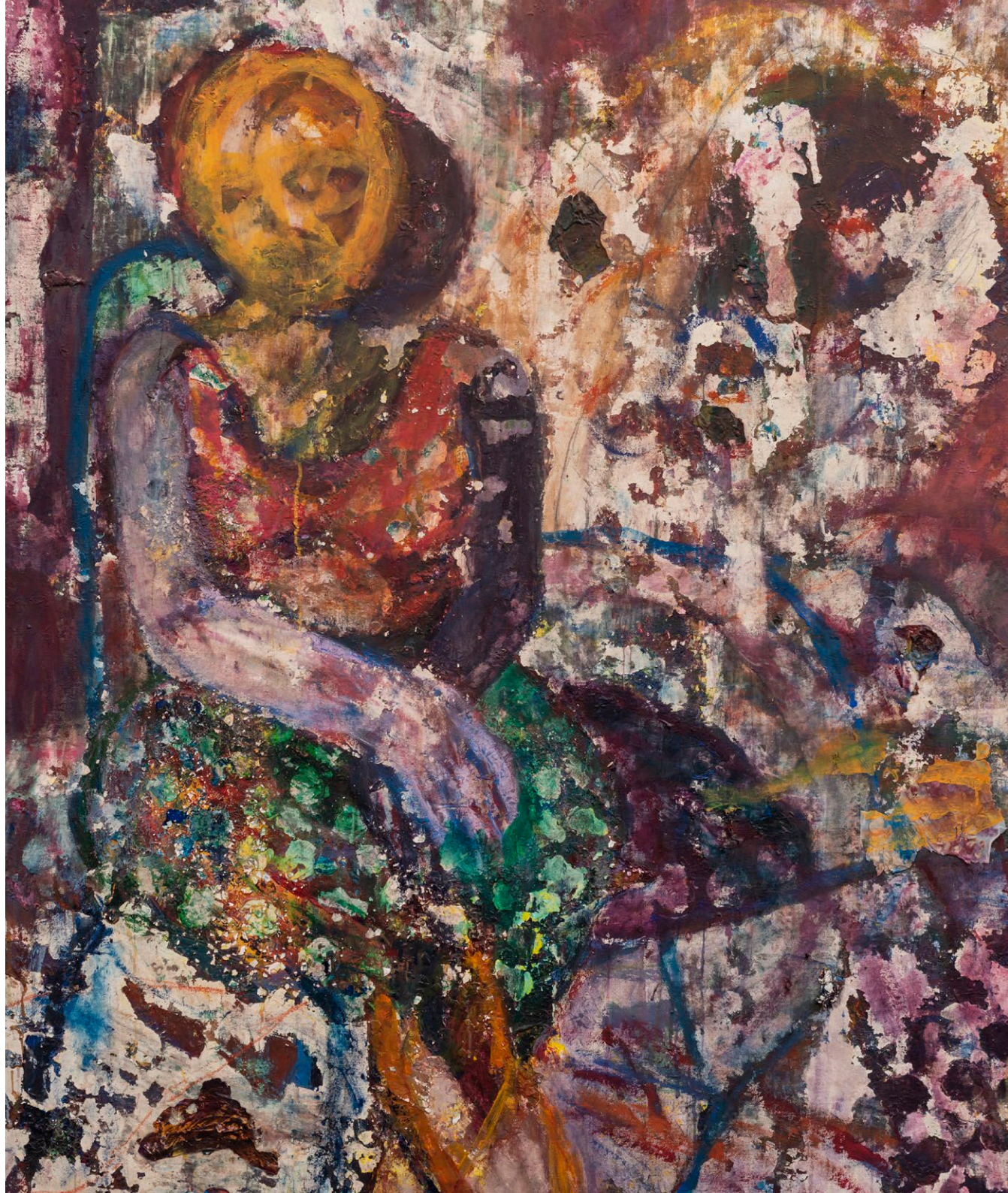


*Untitled*  
2017  
Acrylic on Canvas  
81 x 65 cm



# MOSTAFF MUCHAWAYA

b. 1981, Nyazura, Manicaland, Zimbabwe.  
Lives and works in Harare, Zimbabwe.





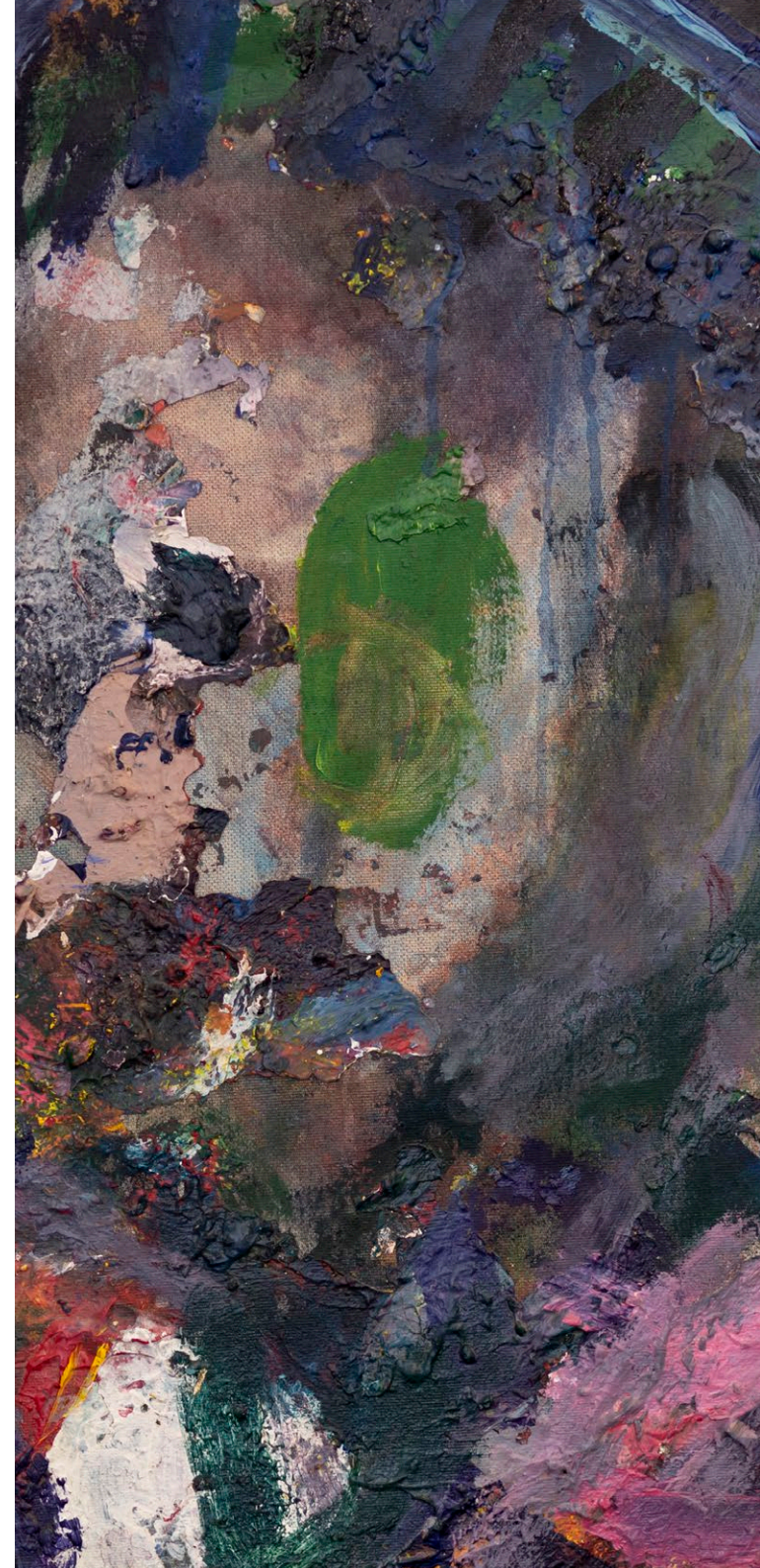
## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Mostaff Muchawaya was born in 1981 in Nyazura, Manicaland, Zimbabwe, and currently lives and works in Harare, Zimbabwe. He received formal art training from the National Gallery of Zimbabwe School of Visual Arts and Design from 2002 to 2003. Muchawaya presented his first solo exhibition in 2013, titled *My Entire People and Places*, At Alliance Française in Harare, Zimbabwe. In 2017 he completed a three-month residency at Greatmore Studios in Cape Town, South Africa, culminating in a solo exhibition at SMAC Gallery in Cape Town, titled *Memory / Ndangariro*, marking his debut in South Africa.

In 2018 he was an exhibiting artist in *Five Bhobh – Painting at the End of an Era*, a group exhibition at Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town, South Africa, and presented a solo exhibition, *Zviso Zvangu*, at SMAC Gallery in Stellenbosch, South Africa. Notable group exhibitions include *Zimbabwe Meets Italy* in 2018, and *Mharidzo* in 2015, both at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in

Harare; *Landmark* at Gallery Delta in Harare, Zimbabwe in 2016; *Artists in the Stream V* at Gallery Delta in Harare, Zimbabwe in 2014; *100 Hundred* at Old Mutual Theatre in Harare, Zimbabwe in 2013; *Mharidzo* at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe; and *Terra III* at Gallery Delta in Harare, Zimbabwe.

In early 2020, Muchawaya's work form part of *NIRN*, the 22nd Sydney Biennale, curated by Andrews, in Sydney, Australia.





## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact SMAC Gallery for more information regarding the availability of the works included in this portfolio, or for any other queries.

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