



## Zambia: the Making of Contemporary Art

This is the first time the African Studies Gallery organizes an exhibition focused on a single African country. The last decade has seen growing interest in contemporary African art, and yet Zambian art and artists do not receive much attention by museums and art markets throughout the world. We have therefore decided to provide a platform to this exciting artistic scene and to invite several artists to represent it.

The scholarship of Western art world sometimes divides the art history into periods, based on the assumption that there exists a grand narrative of progression with which all artistic expressions should align. This leads, unwittingly, to a dichotomy between centre and periphery, between 'insiders' who innovate and 'outsiders' who merely imitate. In the globalization of today's art world, these taxonomies frequently serve to reinforce the circulation of Western elitist taste. Moreover, this forced periodization undervalues the agencies of local artists, writers, and other cultural agents and overlooks the elements shaping their daily existence.

This collective exhibition of works by contemporary Zambian artists offers to view contemporary Zambian art from an African perspective, shedding categories of modern and contemporary that are rendered incoherent when applied to the continent.

One way to understand Modernism is to see it as an aesthetic movement that emerged in the first half of the 20th century as a reaction of European artists to their boredom with Western art traditions. Nonetheless, African modernism is not simply an African manifestation of 20th-century European art. Granted, it too broke dramatically with past traditions, but in the case of African, these involved the scars of colonialism. African modernism is the story of a long process of decolonisation, independence and constant negotiation of identity. In Zambia's particular case, it is also the story of the triumphant post-independence period and the disenchantment that followed the collapse of Zambia's copper economy in the late 1970s that spelled the end of the country's cultural ambitions. Zambian artists could not escape this course of events and it is echoed vividly in their works.

As seen in this exhibition, Zambian artists create a natural synthesis inspired by internal resources that draw upon traditions, masquerades and folktales as much as to their daily concerns, and at the same time explore techniques and materials brought from the West. Their art, therefore, is a dynamic combination of materials, methods, concepts, and subjects that challenge Western concepts of modern or contemporary and defy easy definition.

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Idit Toldedano



Ngandwe Mwaba  
***Dance and liberty***  
Mixed media  
1850 × 1300 mm