

dialogue

Zimbabwe Mobilizes

ICAC's Shift from Coup de Grâce to Cultural Coup

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To whom does Africa belong? Whose Africa are we talking about? ... It's time we control our narrative, and contemporary art is a medium that can lead us to do this.

National Gallery of Zimbabwe (2017)¹

Especially after having taken Zimbabwe to Venice, we needed to bring the world to Zimbabwe to understand the context we are working in.

Raphael Chikukwa (Zvomuya 2017b)

The International Conference on African Cultures (ICAC) was held at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Harare from September 11–13, 2017. Eight delegates write their reflections on the importance of this Africa-based event.

Ruth Simbao: Significant events took place in the study of the arts of Africa in 2017, registering a valuable geopolitical shift of the center of gravity in terms of knowledge creation. The Arts Council of the African Studies Association (ACASA), a US-based organization in the discipline, held its seventeenth triennial at the University of Ghana in Accra—the first to be held on the African continent. Opening the conference, Professor Kwesi Yankah² highlighted the significance of this meeting “on African soil” in a year that marks the sixtieth anniversary of Ghana’s independence, which was a moment in history that “had a ripple effect on the ... liberation of the entire continent” (2017: 2).

In the same year another important international conference on the arts of Africa took place on the African continent, this time at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Harare (Figs. 1–2), which celebrated its own sixtieth anniversary—that of the national gallery known during the colonial era as the Rhodes National Gallery. The 2017 International Conference on African Cultures (ICAC) engaged with processes of decolonization and questioned why most conferences on the arts of Africa take place in the north and why the dominant market for African art still remains outside of the African continent.³ The conference was organized by the director of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Doreen Sibanda, who stated in her opening speech that “there is



1 Delegates at the 2nd International Conference on African Cultures (ICAC), which was hosted by the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Harare, Zimbabwe, 11–13 September 2017.
Photo: courtesy of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe

2 The 2017 International Conference on African Cultures was held at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, and included the exhibition *African Voices*, curated by Raphael Chikukwa.
Photo: courtesy of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe

an urgent need for Africans to create the future *we want*,⁴ and the chief curator, Raphael Chikukwa (Fig. 3), who asked: “How do we harness Africa’s contribution to the global world?”⁵

This long-awaited second ICAC revived and reimagined the first ICAC (known as the International Congress of African Culture), which consisted of a congress, an exhibition, and a

music festival at the then Rhodes National Gallery in Salisbury from August 1–11, 1962 (Fig. 4). This congress drew delegates from the African continent, the United States, Europe, the United Kingdom, and the Caribbean⁶ and was meant to be a biannual event that would take place in different African cities. The director of the Rhodes National Gallery, Frank McEwen, stated in his opening ICAC address that it was crucial for an exhibition of African art to be “staged in Africa.”⁷ As Nzewi (2013: 98) argues,

The exhibition of visual art at ICAC marked the first time anywhere that a comprehensive collection of African art was displayed. The more than 350 works drawn from collections in Africa, Europe, and the USA, and from artists’ studios, occupied two floors of the Rhodes National Gallery.

Further, he highlights the importance of ICAC ’62 as the progenitor of the 1960s and 1970s festivals that espoused pan-Africanist





congress, however, remained a consideration of the impact of African culture on the rest of the world,⁸ rather than on African culture by and for Africans.

A number of participants of the 2017 ICAC questioned the impetus of this “northward-looking gaze.” Harare-based artists Chikonzero Chazunguza and Misheck Masamvu asked respectively, “You can join the global, but as *who?*”⁹ and “When do we participate like *us?* Why do we always leak outwards?”¹⁰ There was a sense of urgency in many of the 2017 ICAC discussions. As curator N’Goné Fall urged,

We can’t wait for state-level or top-down initiatives. We need to be relevant to our own contexts and to have platforms where we can make mistakes...There’s an urgency to make things happen and not to wait.¹¹

internationalism and “assembled and celebrated African and black expressive cultures in a global context” (Nzewi 2013: 67). These included the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Senegal in 1966, the First Pan African Cultural Festival in Algeria in 1969, and the Second World Festival of Black and African Arts in Nigeria in 1977 (FESTAC ’77).

ICAC ’62 was lauded as “the first international cultural event on African soil ... [representing] a bold shift from the diaspora as the physical site of pan-African internationalism to Africa” (Nzewi 2013: 95). According to Saburi Oladeni Biobaku (1962: 12), pro-vice chancellor and director of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ife, Nigeria, the congress aimed to correct the ways that Africa had been misconstrued and denigrated and to “refute past misinterpretations and place African Culture in its true perspective.” The overall focus of the 1962

Speakers articulated this urgency as a pressing need to “break open epistemologies [so that we] go beyond only receiving other people’s imaginaries” (Mpho Matsipa),¹² and as a need to ask “What is the language we use here on the continent [when] over 90% of writing comes from outside the continent?” (Bisi Silva).¹³ Strategies to counter waiting were articulated as “mischief-making” that embraces the “messiness of things” through a south-to-south lens (George Shire),¹⁴ and as “kicking out with the heels”—that is, being recalcitrant in terms of posture and attitude (Paul Goodwin) (Fig. 5).¹⁵

This accumulative sentiment that “time has now run out,” expressed by a number of participants in Harare, just two months before the *coup d’état* that ended Robert Mugabe’s thirty-seven-year-long rule in Zimbabwe,¹⁶ reflects the broader sociopolitical climate in Zimbabwe, Southern Africa, and elsewhere. The 1962

3 Marie Hélène Pereira, Dulcie Abrahams Altass, and Raphael Chikukwa (left to right) speaking on the ICAC panel Exploring Curating in Africa: Methods, Processes and Education. Photo: courtesy of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe

4 Participants at the International Congress of African Cultures at the Rhodes National Gallery (now the National Gallery of Zimbabwe) in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, in 1962. The photograph includes delegates Frank McEwen (director of the Rhodes National Gallery, Zimbabwe), Vincent Akwete Kofi (Winneba Teacher Training College, Ghana), Tristan Tzara (Romanian/French performance artist and founder of Dadaism), Pearl Primus (dancer and choreographer, USA), William Bascom (director of the Lowie Museum of Anthropology, USA), William Fagg (Department of Anthropology, British Museum), Roland Penrose (cofounder of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London), Selby Mvusi (South African artist and educator based in Kumasi, Ghana), and Alfred Barr (director of the Museum of Modern Art, USA). Photo: courtesy of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe





ICAC also took place in a climate of political change in terms of “a new chapter in the liberation of Southern Rhodesia” (Nzewi 2013: 95).¹⁷ It was a time of “toxic” politics, and “a few months before the conference, the conservative Rhodesian Front had been formed. This was the party which under Ian Smith would veer towards the extreme right” resulting in a “unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) from Britain, which then prompted an armed nationalist war which only ended in 1979” (Zvomuya 2017a). On the National Gallery website, organizers of the second ICAC positioned this urgency felt in 2017 as a need to challenge the ownership of artistic talent and the beneficiaries thereof, arguing that the brain drain—the loss of thinkers and artists to the West—was the *coup de grâce* that struck the final blow to continental cultural practice.¹⁸ This *coup de grâce* enabled the West to

claim ownership of African artistic talent and to shape a dominant discourse from its own perspective. In light of a geography of reason (Gordon 2006: 37) that critiques the fallacy that some people theorize and other people experience—that some people write about art and others “merely” create it (Simbao 2017: 5)—the strong emphasis on using an African lens and African script to “see and talk about our story”¹⁹ through dialogue, writing, and theorizing constitutes a cultural coup. Although the “preferred formats for art events on the continent and elsewhere seem to be the biennale and the art fair” (Zvomuya 2017b), the organizers emphasized the need for an international conference so that strong dialogue and theorizing would be driven by Africans based on the continent.

While the conference was the core of ICAC 2017, these dialogs were supported by an exhibition at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, as well as an inaugural art week in Harare that included visits to Gareth Nyandoro’s studio, Admire Kamudzengere’s studio, Chinembiri Studios (Fig. 6), Village Unhu,²⁰ Dzimbanhete Arts and Culture Interactions (Figs. 7, 16–17),²¹ Njelele Art Station (Fig. 8),²² the National Gallery School of Visual Art and Design, First Floor Gallery, Gallery Delta (Fig. 9), and Tsoko Gallery.²³ The ICAC exhibition at the National Gallery was titled *African Voices* and was curated by Chikukwa. It included the works of ten Zimbabwe-based artists²⁴ (see, for example, Figs. 10–11, 14) and other artists from Southern and East Africa²⁵ (for example, Figs. 12–13 and front cover). “The contemporary artist in Africa,” says Sibanda, “is engaged in a fight for a meaningful place in this urban space with its galleries, agents, curators, and collectors, most of whom encapsulate and largely represent Western and European values.”²⁶

A number of works in the exhibition also presented a sense of urgency in terms of the need for political, psychological, and personal change. Nyadzombe Nyampenza’s triptych *Double Life, Mediterranean Blues, For Emidio* (2017; Fig. 14) engages with ongoing Afrophobia within and beyond the continent. Nyampenza writes:

5 Paul Goodwin, UAL chair of Contemporary Art and Urbanism and director of TrAIN (Transnational Art, Identity and Nation Research Centre), presented the paper “(Un)curating and Recalcitrance: Notes on Opacity and the Undercommons of the Museum” at ICAC 2017. Photo: courtesy of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe

6 Takunda Regis Billiat at Chinembiri Studios in Mbare, Harare. Photo: Ruth Simbao





7 Virginia Chihota
I had to smile (2009)
 Screen print on archival paper; 45 cm x 60 cm
 Collection of Dzimbanhete Arts and Culture
 Interactions Trust
 Courtesy the artist and Tiwani Contemporary,
 © the artist
 Photo: Dzimbanhete Arts and Culture Interactions
 resident performance crew 2017

The question “Where are you from?” can have a shattering impact on the psyche. Prompted by a “strange” name, an “unusual” accent, or the color of one’s skin. It can easily escalate to “Where are you really from?” To be the other brings judgment and a heavy price to pay. For Emidio Josias Marcia, a Mozambiquen taxi driver, it was being dragged handcuffed to a police vehicle and later die in police custody in Johannesburg, South Africa. Erased on Humanity scores drown in the Mediterranean Sea time after time—coming from another place.²⁷

In her 2016 painting *Strategy* (front cover) in the *African Voices* exhibition,²⁸ Chemu Ng’ok relates personal psychological riot to acts of protest that attempt to reclaim power. While blue or green represent army or police officers and red is employed to “show a vulnerable flesh-like appearance of being easily hurt or immobilised as a group” (Ng’ok 2016: 51), splashes of red on these blue/green figures indicate that bloodshed in a protest effects everyone. “Systemic violence spills over from the oppressed to the oppressor” (Ng’ok 2016: 51) and when the two parties “meet at the boundary, bullets and stones will exchange sides. Both will sustain injuries as shown through the overall red flow of blood on the canvas.”²⁹

A number of works in the exhibition pushed for deeper processes of decolonization at this political juncture characterized by dissatisfaction and a sense of urgency. In *Spot Fine* (2017; Fig. 11), which comprises a series of repurposed sculptural heads on Plexiglas boxes, Masimba Hwati engages with the transgenerational impact of colonial trauma on the psyche and the body. The see-through boxes contain different currencies, such as Zimbabwean dollars, Euros, Ghanaian *cedi*, and Chinese *renminbi*, and the work grapples with issues of guilt and complicity in terms of shaping the colonial project.

In small but important ways the National Gallery and the ICAC participants created interventions in order to shift dominant discourses and museum practices. The evening before the conference opened to the public, a *musumo* ceremony was performed in the gallery and, led by Raphael Chikukwa with the

assistance of Papa Ndasuunje Shikongeni and Dineo Bopape, traditional beer was offered to the ancestors to ask them to bless the conference (Fig. 15). As part of the sixtieth anniversary of the gallery, certain gallery spaces were renamed to “honor a number of the early artists who contributed to the growth of the gallery and the Zimbabwean art scene such as Bernard Matemera, Lazarus Takawira, Nicolas Mukomberanwa, and Thomas Mukarobgwa.”³⁰ The walkabout of the ICAC exhibition was conducted by Chikukwa in collaboration with word artists who engaged directly with the visual artworks with poetry and word art. The conference ended with a tour to Great Zimbabwe that aimed to “reinforce Africa’s own narrative” (Fig. 16–17).

Raphael Chikukwa: The significance of ICAC was being able to host it again as the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, fifty-five years after the inaugural conference in 1962. The 1962 conference saw the coming of museum professionals from all over the world, mostly from Europe and America. Furthermore we wanted this one to be different and reflect the current situation and the recent developments that have taken place in Africa in the past twenty years or so. The idea of bringing a new crop of curators, artists, museum managers, and cultural gurus from around Africa and the world over to deliberate on concerns that affect our institutions and us as cultural practitioners was also momentous. Some of these voices that came from around Africa and the diaspora included N’Goné Fall (Senegal), Gabi Ncgobo (SA), Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung (Cameroon/Germany), Papa Shikongeni (Namibia), Ruth Simbao (SA), John Gibling (UK), Lupwishi Mbuyamba (Mozambique), Azubuike Nwagbogu (Nigeria), Bisi Silva (Nigeria), Chikonzero Chazunguza (Zimbabwe), Mhoze Chikowero (Zimbabwe/USA), Jimmy Ogonga (Kenya), Paul Goodwin (UK), Dana Whabira (Zimbabwe), Doreen Sibanda (Zimbabwe), George Shire (Zimbabwe/UK), Andrew Mulenga (Zambia/SA), Jorge Gumbe (Angola), George Kyeyune (Uganda), and Molefi Asante (USA), to mention but a few. The theme of the conference, “Mapping the Future,” stressed the fact that we as Africans wanted to plot this new roadmap of Africa’s future, and

there could be no better way to do this than hosting this international conference on African soil.

Most of the times we are invited to the West (beyond African soil) to discuss issues to do with Africa. As I have regularly asserted, “We should not remain passengers in our own ship,” and the idea of taking ownership of our narrative is key to the cultural development in the continent and beyond. Why Harare? It was the host of the first ICAC in 1962, during the colonial era, and for us at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe this was the right time as it coincided with our celebration of the National Gallery’s sixtieth anniversary. What better moment to host the second ICAC?

Delegates encouraged us to consider hosting such a conference annually or biannually, as the audience was keen to further discuss issues of maintaining culture, identity in relation to culture and religion, the effects of globalization on culture, and the importance of language to culture. Other important issues that came out of the second ICAC were the need to build audiences for museums and other cultural institutions, the need for regular publications of art discourse, further collaboration between African art institutions, the need to address the contested issues of repatriation of African art artifacts that are housed in Western museums, the curatorship of human remains, and capacity building for museum professionals on the continent, such as the training of curators, art restorers, museum managers, and conservators as well as professional development for artists and art critics.

After the second ICAC at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in 2017, we have realized that it’s not business as usual and it is not the time to wait for others to do things on our behalf. As African people, we need to take ownership for our narratives. We have also realized the possibilities of organizing such a huge conference to network and share ideas as Africans. It remains our hope that we will continue to do this conference in Zimbabwe or any other African country, because these are the platforms needed to exchange and dialogue as African museum professionals, artists, and scholars.

Jimmy Ogonga: I think it is important to note that this conference comes as sequel to the first ICAC conference that took place in 1962. A staggering fifty-five years stands between these two events. In marking the sixtieth anniversary of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, and considering the fifty-five years between 1962 and 2017, I am concerned with both agency and urgency, and the question of how institutions manage to decolonize and realize their sovereignty and independence.

From the outset, ICAC 2017 set the theme as “Mapping the Future,” stating that the conference “will be a platform to reimagine the future of art, art and cultural institutions, and heritage industries in the face of the current socioeconomic and political challenges on the continent ...” further adding that “... ICAC comes at a time when art institutions around the world need urgent attention from both the local authorities, corporations and their governments ...”³¹

I see the conference as an act of commemoration. The urge to record, recall, and even reenact the past remains an important process in contemporary cultural practice. Memorial narratives (politicized as they may be) also provide intellectual and emotional gravity. These narratives provide references and fodder for collective memory, affecting the manner which we remember the past, think about the future, while providing stimulus with which



8 Founded in 2013, Njelele Art Station is an urban laboratory for critical dialogue and contemporary experimental and public art practice in downtown Harare. The mural was produced by Breeze Yoko, graffiti writer and filmmaker from South Africa who visited Njelele in 2013.
Photo: Ruth Simbao

more vibrant forms of discourse can be articulated. I think that in the process of commemoration, the opportunity to problematize, politicize, and employ a range of criticalities while replaying these narratives could be key elements in writing histories and mapping futures afresh.

I also think it is important for the arts, and especially on the continent, to stage situations where professionals can share their experiences and in-depth knowledge about ideas, practices, and contexts. In addition to education initiatives, biennales, art fairs, photo festivals, workshops, and so on, I think there are many other nuances that get lost and are therefore out of scope when discourses and historiography of contemporary art takes shape.

The conference provided an important place to deliberate and advocate the need for government and institutional support in the arts and to discuss strategies for the articulation and engagement of progressive cultural policies. On a personal note, the conference came as the fifty-seventh Venice Biennale took place, with Kenya celebrating its first legitimate national pavilion, for which there was critical need for government and institutional support. Unfortunately, the Kenya pavilion was not provided the necessary support. Maybe such conferences are an additional



9 Wallen Mapondera
Identity II (2016), on display at Gallery Delta
 during the ICAC 2017
 Cardboard and plastic on board; 42 cm x 55 cm
 Courtesy of the artist
 Photo: Ruth Simbao

ingredient in expanding the circle and inviting more policy-level actors to the conversation.

It is important to consider the fact that the beginnings of some important initiatives on the continent are inspired and provoked by other initiatives taking place elsewhere. The Dak'Art biennale references the Festival of Black Arts and African Culture—FESTAC '77 (Lagos), and the Addis Foto festival was greatly influenced by Bamako encounters. Something always happens out of these fellowships. It is like a wave formation, where one wave gives thrust and urges the next. Just like the seed for this text is, in a way, watered by the conference.

I am particularly impressed by individuals' visions and practices. In some cases, it is important to note how these are able to shape an institution's vision. For example, Bisi Silva's curatorial practice and her work with CCA Lagos and Asiko exemplify her vision. I find the idea of Asiko, a roving curatorial program, to be a revolutionary one that is capable of massive transformation in terms of education and action. I also find it to be an uncharacteristically adaptable model, which could be replicated and disbursed efficiently across multiple settings. Similarly, Gabi Ngcobo's presentation on the CHR (Centre for Historical Reenactment) and NGO (Nothing Gets Organized) lends us

an understanding of her curatorial practice and collaborative impulse, such as Xenoglossia, a research project that "... employs historical references that foregrounded questions around language and its central role in shaping some of our recent history, contradictions and misunderstandings."³²

In Ngcobo's presentation,³³ certain phrases and positions highlighted the complexity and paradoxical nature of contemporary art. In particular, I noted down provocative phrases such as, "whom do you believe, your eyes or my words," "knowledge is a position, not a collection," "gentrification of memory," and "inanimate objects have a life of their own," which are interesting starting points for complex conversations. I was also struck by a proposal by Mpho Matsipa³⁴ that the city is a site of refuge, and later on at Njelele Station, I posed the question whether we, as city dwellers, are all refugees.

It is important that practitioners tap into each other's resources, especially in terms of knowledge, capacity, and networks. The role of the academy is a particularly important one, especially considering projects such as Asiko and Xenoglossia. On the continent, there is a catastrophic deficit in terms of resource allocation and expertise in both education and the arts, even in seemingly progressive societies. The quality of education is sometimes unremarkable and inconsistent. The conversations that took place at the ICAC conference go a long way in ensuring a kind of stock-taking, and the role of peer review is critical. The synergy and dialogue between academics, artists, writers, thinkers, curators, bureaucrats, and students works in important ways to further articulate and strengthen the collective efforts.

Berry Bickle: ICAC 2017 was framed within the celebrations of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe's sixtieth anniversary. The direct reference to the first ICAC, hosted by the Rhodes National Gallery in 1962, is useful as a historic timeline as one assesses the confluence of contributions that the ICAC 2017 platform opened to presentations, discussions, and exchanges at the time of the gallery's sixtieth anniversary.

In his preface to the exhibition catalogue *The Influence of Africa*, Frank McEwen (1962) made this statement:

There have been many in recent years, almost too many, great exhibitions of African art both in Europe and America. Beginning in the 1910s and early '20s, they have now become frequent necessities especially in America. It is therefore high time that African art were shown more often in Africa and reclaimed culturally by its creators.

From the depths of the colonial era, McEwen seems to have articulated what has been a pertinent element to the staging of ICAC 2017 in Harare by the institution that he helped establish. The ICAC platform of 2017 focused essentially on the contemporary mobility of the arts practitioners whose identity is framed as "African". This constitutes a paradigm shift, in which among many influences and postcolonial geopolitical changes are diaspora experiences, mobility and a global presence of contemporary African artists across media. Contemporary timelines are fluid with initiatives that exchange and intertwine African cities such as Harare, Addis Ababa, Lagos, Dakar, Bamako, Lubumbashi and Johannesburg, as some of the power pins in a remapping alluded to by ICAC'17. This is no longer a national agenda, for it is African cities that have become the identifying entities of exchange. This offers artists a



10a–b Moffat Takadiwa
The Urinari/Chinjausi (2017)
 Found computer keys and medical bottle
 tops; 700 cm x 500 cm
 10a Photo: © Moffat Takadiwa, courtesy
 Tyburn Gallery
 10b (detail, right) Photo: Ruth Simbao

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variety of centers within Africa that reverberate with historical significance they can form strong linkages to. They do not have to leave the continent to be validated.

The Asiko program, initiated by Bisi Silva, is a curatorial intervention that in its trans-African collaborations has hosted artists and curators in various African cities for intensive exchanges that disseminate and collect the contemporary experience. Participants evaluate, critique, and share histories that become a rich pool of thought for and by African artists. Asiko as an intuitive has established a latticework of exchange that was not institutionalized and burdened with historic or national identities, but rather flowed from city to city as a pop-up laboratory, leaving the intensive experience for the artists to continue to explore. The reclamation of cultural ground has, as a necessity, been stimulated by a trans-African flow of contemporary artistic practices. The smudging of borders and language barriers that have divided the African experience have been eclipsed by the drive to share and exchange critical thought. ICAC 2017 was an important platform to highlight the commitment of curators, artists, and intellectuals whose arts programs are a remapping of Africa and to open the future to artistic practices that claim an African identity as one enmeshed in trans-African experiences.

Marie H len  Pereira and Dulcie Abrahams Altass: To provide some background to our participation in ICAC Mapping the Future: RAW Material Company is an art center that creates programs that reinforce the intersections among art, knowledge, and society. RAW was established in 2011 by independent curator Koyo Kouoh, who is also its artistic director. Kouoh has, since the center's genesis, placed great importance on developing the appreciation of artistic and curatorial practice on the African continent, with discussion and exchange being cornerstones of

RAW's programs. One of the most pertinent examples in the context of this discussion is our biannual symposium Condition Report, a platform for exchange among practitioners from the continent to reflect on the *now* and *after* of contemporary art in Africa. The first edition of Condition Report took place in 2012 and focused on the building of art institutions in Africa. It was a three-day conference that served as a laboratory for thinking about how small-scale art institutions contribute to shaping the landscape of contemporary art in Africa.

Numerous initiatives like this have taken place on the continent, and the ICAC is one such platform that fosters moments of exchange, contributing to building a better future for the arts in Africa. They are opportunities, in the midst of often-sensitive programming and perpetual project development, for practitioners to take stock and gain perspective through formal presentations and discussions and informal, more intimate moments of exchange. One of the successes of ICAC was the way its format shifted from lectures to smaller panel discussions and more convivial trips around the city, allowing participants to zoom in and out, to both speak and listen, on current and future art practice.

Welcoming artists, curators, academics, independent and public institutions, alongside other art professionals, the conference gave a voice to every field of art, allowing for a general sense of how to build the future. Dialogue and diversity came up in most of the panels, taking into account our histories in relation to colonialism and the West's influence on the arts, while actively engaging with the variety of local contexts represented. This was one of the highlights of the conference, and to be in Harare, all the way on the other side of the continent to Dakar, gave us the opportunity to experience this diversity in real time.

We often say that "nothing is new, everything is recreated." It is important that such events be archived in order to be useful



11a-b Masimba Hwati
Spot Fine (details) (2017)
 Found materials (repurposed wooden sculptures,
 Plexiglas, multinational currency, synthetic hair,
 warthog task and nuts and bolts); 50 cm x 15 cm
 x 15 cm
 Photo: Wallen Mapondera, courtesy of the artist



for the next generation. Our elders continue to shape our understanding of the world through their writings, speeches, and actions, and this must be a cycle that continues. Drawing on the fact that the first ICAC took place fifty-five years ago while Zimbabwe was still a British colony, it was also deeply moving and interesting to see how Doreen Sibanda and her team realized the importance of us telling our own stories and the role that was accorded to a younger generation.

Continuing to reflect on the legacy of ICAC, a danger that such gatherings face is the possibility that the knowledge generated during their existence loses traction with the last remarks at the closing ceremony and becomes restricted in its potential by remaining beholden to only those present. This conversation is one excellent way to archive and activate that knowledge, alongside the publication project we understand the organizers have in mind.

Mhoze Chikowero: To me, this conference was important for several reasons. As I remarked in my keynote and closing comments, this conference, following the first one held in 1962, in the least gestured towards—and at some level demonstrated—the obvious demographic shift in knowledge production in/on Africa. Going through the 1962 published proceedings, I got the overwhelming feeling of what it must have been like to sit there—as a lone African (there must have been no more than a handful of Africans there)—and to listen to oneself being theorized. This is what all those Africanists were doing in their papers and conversations: theorizing Africans. As I listened to proceedings at ICAC 2017, I was hoping to hear some commentary on that heritage of colonial knowledge production, and I didn't get much. This left me wondering about our sense of the meaning of history, and particularly whether we consciously chose to ignore those ideas that must have been foundational at that conference in 1962, or if we didn't see ICAC 2017 as having learned much from those ideas, which, in my own remarks, I called “moldy.” So, as we as Africans have now taken command in thinking and

defining ourselves as philosophers, artists, and scholars, this is one interesting disjuncture that I thought deserves further thinking. This is important at various levels.

As I asked during the closing session, what does the demographic shift signify, beyond itself? The ICAC was composed of a good mix of makers and interpreters, and as a historian who reads art and culture as archives, I felt there was greater need for interpretation—to read meaning in what all those mostly young African artists are producing. This brings me back to 1962. Most of those presenters called themselves anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, and art historians, and they presented papers on such subjects as what it means to talk about African aesthetics, the origins of African art, the influence of African art on the West, etc.; others presented their work on the “preservation” of African culture which, in their interpretation, was threatened by “civilization.” Others presented their activities in this regard with such projects as the construction of “African cultural villages” in such places as Livingstone. That was in 1962. Listening to the ICAC 2017, I was happy to see that the tenor had decidedly shifted, because Africans were not solely preoccupied with defining who or what “the African” is, but were making their own art without too much regard to self-legitimization. At one level, there was insufficient articulation of the meaning of artistic and cultural production. At another, many in the ICAC 2017 crowd also called themselves ethnomusicologists and anthropologists even as all they were studying is African cultures—that is, themselves. To me, this brought to the fore two further issues.

First, there is the need to rethink the disciplines and definitions that we have inherited from the colonial register. What I mean is that we, as Africans, cannot seriously study ourselves



12 Dineo Seshe
Bopape, Mavhu, Ivhu, Pasi (2017)
 Soil, clay, herbs and seeds; dimensions variable
 Main photo: courtesy of the artist and the National
 Gallery of Zimbabwe
 Detail photos: Ruth Simbao



as an “other,” because that is what these disciplines mean. Ethnomusicology came as the study of “primitive music,” and this is how it was practiced by such people as Hugh Tracey and others, whose weight loomed heavy at the 1962 conference and whose legacy—institutionalized at the International Library of African Music at Rhodes University—heavily shapes the study of African music and cultures today. While there has been effort to do so, these disciplines have not succeeded in cleansing themselves of their historical legacy in terms of the accumulated, problematic archive, self-definition, and method, all of which were deeply implicated with the colonial agenda. When Westerners, who imposed these disciplines on us, study their own music, for instance, they are musicologists, not ethno- or anthro-scientists, categories they reserve for their study of “others.” Now, as the arbitrarily othered, when we call ourselves ethnomusicologists or anthropologists when all we study are our own musics and cultures, are we agreeing with this Western colonial gaze that views our musics and cultures as primitive? What is the value of our thought when we look at ourselves through the eyes of the white man? Why do we have whole departments of anthropology, ethnomusicology, etc., at our universities and colleges? This means we are still intellectually colonized; the demographic shift does not matter too much.

Second, as creators of our own knowledge, we need to think clearly about our methods to make sure that we do not reproduce colonial frameworks. I was fascinated by the works of Amagugu International Cultural Heritage Centre and Dzimbanhete

Interactive Arts, and I recall questions were posed about whether or not projects that seek to preserve or showcase our sociocultural environments in these ways might not unconsciously reproduce colonial categories. In my book *African Music, Power, and Being in Colonial Zimbabwe* (2015), I write about the “African Village” that was erected during the Rhodes Centennial Exhibition in 1953 in Bulawayo, and I argue that this was a colonial simulacrum of African communities that the colonial state had destroyed in the process of constructing the city and asserting colonial power. Now defeated and destroyed, African culture could be re-presented (and misrepresented) for touristic pleasure, as some kind of cultural zoo. That is the legacy of anthropology. This is not a critique of the particular models that I mention here. Rather, it is a challenge that I hope they share.

Here is the challenge. Do these projects represent efforts to reconstruct different modes of African life and self-development that might become viable alternatives to the exhausted colonial models of development that pit the African community versus so-called Western modernity as represented by the self-same city? This is important because, to think with a colleague, Professor Mandivamba Rukuni (2012), if one looks closely at the idea of development as given us by the West, we have in every manner conceded to the notion that the further Africans move away from their Africanness the more successful they are. This is true in terms of national development (metal roads, shiny glass buildings, factory farming, etc.) and in individual definitions of success (leaving the village for the boarding school, boarding



13 Cyrus Kabiru
Mali Ya Mfalme, Macho Nne/Caribbean Lango (Caribbean Gate) (2016)
 Pigment ink on HP premium satin photographic paper; 150 cm x 120 cm, ed. of 5 + 2 AP
 Photo: courtesy of SMAC Gallery, © the artist

14 Nyandzombe Nyampenza
Double Life, Mediterranean Blues, For Emidio (triptych) (2017)
 Photographic print, dimensions of triptych variable
 Photo: Ruth Simbao



school to the city, leaving the country for overseas, and helping relatives “left behind” to “achieve” the same). To come back to the question in a different way: Why do we not have Amagugu influencing or rivaling Bulawayo, and Dzimbanhete influencing or rivaling Harare, both architecturally and culturally? Why do we build one type of house in the rural areas and a completely different type in the city? What is the power of art and culture in redefining African ideas in terms of recentering the self? Why do we continue to build cities modeled after London and New York, and not after Madzimbabwe or the African village? Are our cultural philosophers content with tiny, strange cultural cocoons built in strange places for strange people to look at in strange ways? Are we happy to remain curiosities and spectacles in the eyes of the same world that violently redefined us? Can we decolonize development, education, culture, and tourism? I listened to Butholezwe Kgosi Nyathi eloquently articulating the work and vision of Amagugu, and I felt our artists are broadening the scope of possibility. But what is our power to reshape policy? What is the value of celebrating the inclusion of art in the new school curriculum and being indifferent to the exclusion of history (which is now an elective in the newly passed Zimbabwean school curriculum)? Is it a cataract removed from one eye and placed in the other. Art needs history, and vice versa; the tons of work of art displayed at the NGZ, for example, require historically informed interpretation for meaning.

On a related point, I was fascinated to participate in the *musumo* ceremony that opened the ICAC, and I was sore to miss the tour to Dzimbanhete Guru that closed the conference. I think this properly framed the conference. I was a little concerned, however, that we did not have live *ngoma* or *mbira* performances, the epitomes of Madzimbabwe cultural and artistic creativity and performativity. This created a disjuncture that militated against wider participation, particularly given that these cultures were the prime targets of the colonial disarmament of Africans (Chikowero 2015). I kept imagining that if we had lunch and evening sessions with Mbira DzeNharira, Mawungira eNharira, the various Zimbabwean or other African dancers, we could have managed to make a more significant statement about recentering the self by bridging “thinkers” from “doers” and destigmatizing



(clockwise from top left)

15a–b The events of ICAC 2017 were framed by a *musumo* ceremony performed at the National Gallery by Raphael Chikukwa, Papa Ndasuunje Shikongeni, and Dineo Bopape before the public opening (above left); and a visit to Great Zimbabwe, where the director, Zvakanyorwa Sadomba, presented a paper on African epistemology and material culture (above right).

Photos: Ruth Simbao

16 Kenya-based artist and producer, Jimmy Ogonga (left) and Namibia-based artist Papa Ndasuunje Shikongeni (right) at Dzimbabwe Arts and Culture Interactions.

Photo: courtesy of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe

17 This performance that took place at Dzimbabwe Arts and Culture Interactions is in the Chidzimba genre of the Karanga performances. It is associated with praises and appeasement for the Guardian Spirits who are also known to be the hunters or warriors, the givers of talent, skills for survival, and well-being.

Photo: Ruth Simbao



African cultures. I say this because I know that Zimbabwe (and Harare itself) was largely unaware that something called ICAC was happening right in the city. Nonetheless, the fact that the conference did happen in an economically challenging environment, drawing participants from around the world and representing the African continent fairly well, is something to be emulated and celebrated.

N’Goné Fall: In July 2015, I was giving a presentation about my practice as a curator and art writer at the Circle Art Gallery in Nairobi. The audience comprised a combination of mainly local visual artists and a few art lovers. I could see that the crowd in front of me was a bit confused, so I stopped and asked if they wanted me to reduce the speed of my talking. One about forty-plus Kenyan man answered: “No, the point is that we don’t know what you are talking about. Can you please spell the names of those two guys and tell us who they are?” I raised an eyebrow and asked: “No one knows whom I am talking about?” No reaction from the audience. It was my



turn to be confused, and actually I felt very, very lonely. In my presentation I was quoting Cheikh Anta Diop and Aimé Césaire. I might expect someone from Central America or Asia to ask

turn to be confused, and actually I felt very, very lonely. In my presentation I was quoting Cheikh Anta Diop and Aimé Césaire. I might expect someone from Central America or Asia to ask



18 Mhoze Chikowero (left) and N'Goné Fall (right) at the International Conference on African Cultures 2017. Photos: courtesy of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe

such a question, but never in my life did I think that this question would come from an African born in Africa, raised in Africa, and living in Africa. I grew up reading all the Black writers and writing dissertations about their work in secondary school in Dakar. African and Black literatures were part of the curriculum. I grew up learning, from my parents and at school, all the stories related to the Black struggles and what Black intellectuals stand for. The nation-building strategy of Senegal, my country, was to use culture as the avenue to bind people and to empower citizens. The generation of Senegalese leaders involved in the independence of the country were all intellectuals who strongly believed that the only way to reclaim Black African consciousness and pride was to use culture and knowledge as powerful weapons to turn down the heavy loaded clichés related to the Myth of the Good Savage.

Alioune Diop, a Senegalese professor of philosophy, founded *Présence Africaine* (African Presence), a pan-African biannual cultural magazine, in 1947 in Paris and a publishing house of the same name in 1949. Focusing on Black writers, *Présence Africaine* was the preeminent voice of the Négritude movement. While being the first imprint to publish most of the best-known Francophone African writers of the twentieth century, the magazine always had English abstracts, occasional English articles, and even an English edition between 1955 and 1961. Editions *Présence Africaine*, the publishing house, was the first to publish French translations of writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Kwame Nkrumah, and Julius Nyerere. The Black writers are my intellectual reference and background. I grew up trying to live up to the spirit and legacy of these great men. I grew up being nourished and inspired by their writings and ideologies. I was told that I have to cherish their memory and give the torch to the next generation. I was told that the struggle was global and that my weapon was to produce, to deliver, and to share knowledge. I was told that Africans must contribute to the evolution of human kind. I am Senegalese. I am a pan-African. I was told that African thoughts matter and must impact the world.

The moment of solitude I felt in Nairobi still has a bitter taste today. It is obvious that I took for granted that all African kids grew up reading all the books of the great African intellectuals, regardless the language they speak. It is obvious that I took for granted that we all call ourselves Africans because we all know what African intellectuals, writers, and decision makers have been producing and fighting for since the end of World War II. When Raphael Chikukwa first told me about the ICAC project in

2016, it reminded me of another landmark event held sixty-one years ago. Alioune Diop was one of the organizers of the first International Congress of Black Writers and Artists held at La Sorbonne University in 1956 in Paris. The congress included Aimé Césaire, Franz Fanon, Édouard Glissant, Richard Wright, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Cheikh Anta Diop, Amadou Hampaté Bâ, Jacques Rabemananjara, Joaquim Pinto de Andrade, and Ben Enwonwu, to name a few. W.E.B. Du Bois could not attend as the US administration refused to deliver him a passport. I always wished I was born earlier to be able to attend that congress.

ICAC was, in my opinion, the opportunity to gather all the African voices to reenact, on African soil at last, the spirit of the Paris congress. I saw ICAC as the occasion to look at the journey of my continent, to autopsy its failures, missed promises, successes, and dreams. ICAC was my opportunity to listen, learn, be inspired, and exchange in Africa with the contemporary family of African intellectuals and artists. ICAC was a family gathering, the opportunity to think collectively about smart strategies to move forward. ICAC reminded me that too many of us operate in isolation, that we are not challenging language barriers, and that we are not always aware of what others are producing on and off the continent. ICAC is the proof that we cannot keep on quoting Western intellectuals while not referring to and celebrating our fellow African creative thinkers. ICAC gave me energy and optimism. I hope that all the videos of all the presentations and panel discussions will be uploaded on Internet, thus available to everyone.

I had a three-hour conversation with Ruth Simbao in the bus driving us to the mythic site of the Great Zimbabwe. That conversation is still in my mind and I am not surprised that she took the initiative to gather some of the voices of the conference in one African publication, so we can keep on talking to each other. The conversation has just started. It should not stop. It cannot stop. We have to keep on producing, disseminating, and sharing our knowledge. We owe it to the generations of African intellectuals who preceded us and make me state with an infinite sense of responsibility, belonging and pride: I am African and I am not passive.

Notes

- 1 <http://www.nationalgallery.co.zw/icac/>
- 2 Professor Kwesi Yankah is the minister of state for tertiary education in Ghana. Prior to taking up this position he was the vice chancellor of Central University of Ghana. He is the associate director of the African Humanities Program of the American Council of Learned Societies, which has played a significant role in providing African scholars to pursue postdoctoral fellowship at African universities.
- 3 <http://www.nationalgallery.co.zw/icac/>
- 4 Notes taken by Ruth Simbao during Doreen Sibanda's opening remarks (September 11, 2017).
- 5 Notes taken by Ruth Simbao during Raphael Chikukwa's comments during the session "Exploring Curating in Africa: Methods, Processes and Education" (September 11, 2017).
- 6 Thirty-five delegates are listed in the congress proceedings. Other people also participated in the other components of the congress, and according to the 2017 ICAC press pack, there were "more than seventy delegates, who included museum professionals and directors, artists, poets, writers, critics and other scholars from around the world." As Nzewi (2013: 97) points out, there were "leading cultural figures from the Western world ... [such as] William Fagg, Alfred Barr, Tristan Tzara, Jean Rouch, Michel Leiris, Robert Goldwater, Roger Bastide, Udo Kulterman, and Roland Penrose" as well as "black cultural figures from the United States and the Caribbean such as dancers Pearl Primus and Percy Border, and African modernist artists including Ben Enwonwu (Nigeria), Vincent Kofi (Ghana), Felix Idubor (Nigeria), Valentine Malangata (Mozambique), and Selby Mvusi (South Africa)." Vincent Kofi was a member of the Ghanaian delegation at the First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar, 1966.
- 7 ICAC 1962 proceedings (National Gallery of Salisbury 1962: 11).
- 8 In his opening speech, McEwen (1962: 7) stated that "Ideas for our congress were born in Paris," referring to the Congress of Black Writers that took place in Paris in 1956. The emphasis of the first ICAC was to "explore the influence of art and culture from Africa on the world" (ICAC website, 2017, <http://www.nationalgallery.co.zw/icac/icac-the-business-end-of-art/>).
- 9 Notes taken by Ruth Simbao during Chikonzero Chazunguza's talk in the session "Rewriting, Revising, and Remixing Narratives" (September 13, 2017).
- 10 Misheck Masamvu, interview with Ruth Simbao, Village Unhu, Harare, September 14, 2017.
- 11 Notes taken by Ruth Simbao during N'Goné Fall's talk in the session "Exploring Curating in Africa: Methods, Processes and Education" (September 11, 2017).
- 12 Notes taken by Ruth Simbao during Mpho Matsipa's talk on the panel "Space Inherited and Spaces Created: Examining the Impact of Public, Private, and Inherited Spaces" (September 12, 2017).
- 13 Notes taken by Ruth Simbao during Bisi Silva's talk on the panel "Space Inherited and Spaces Created: Examining the Impact of Public, Private, and Inherited Spaces" (September 12, 2017).
- 14 Notes taken by Ruth Simbao during George Shire's comments on the panel "Evolution of Histories: Reflection of New Narratives Around Art from Africa" (September 11, 2017).
- 15 Notes taken by Ruth Simbao during Paul Goodwin's talk "(Un)curating and Recalcitrance: Notes

on Opacity and the Undercommons of the Museum" on the panel "Art, Migration, and Radical Urbanism" (September 11, 2017).

16 Mugabe was prime minister from 1980 to 1987 and president of Zimbabwe from 1987 to 2017.

17 "On the one hand, it was a political struggle between the white minority government and Britain; on the other hand, it was a fight between African nationalists and the white minority government and colonialist Britain. The Rhodesian Front, a white minority party, emerged victorious in the 1962 elections" (Nzewi 2013: 95).

18 "ICAC, the Business End of Art," National Gallery of Zimbabwe ICAC website, <http://www.nationalgallery.co.zw/icac/icac-the-business-end-of-art/>

19 Doreen Sibanda, cited in "African Voices: Confronting the Frontiers of Reality," National Gallery of Zimbabwe website www.nationalgallery.co.zw

20 This is an art studio that provides space for residency programs, workshops and exhibitions.

21 Dzimbanhete Arts and Culture Interactions is a resources center and meeting place for artists. It was established in 2008, 25 km outside Harare, Zimbabwe. The organization has grown to become a visual center for re-learning, sharing, and archiving artistic knowledge <https://www.musicinafrica.net/directory/dzimbanhete-arts-interactions>

22 "Njelele Art Station is a meeting place for critical dialogue where ideas are generated and resonate out into the city through projects that provoke discussion and engage with the general public. Njelele is the name of a sacred shrine in Zimbabwe, and is located on the oldest street built in the city of Harare. It is a space for creative ritual that exists between two points, the historical and the future, that is in the contemporary, which is key to understanding the city and ourselves" (www.njelele.com).

23 Tsoko Gallery was founded in 2016 at Doon Estate and aims to promote the work of emerging artists, while critically engaging and educating a diverse audience. During the ICAC, recent works by Shalom Kufakwatenzi, Clive T. Mukuchu, and Terrence Musekiwa were on display.

24 Evans Mutenga, Virginia Chihota, Moffat Takadiwa, Portia Zvavahera, Masimba Hwati, Lilian Mugodi, Terrence Musekiwa, Gideon Gomo, Nyandzombe Nyampenza, and Mukudzeishe Muzondo.

25 Mohau Modisakeng, Mario Macilau, Ogopoleng Kgomoethata, Longinos Nagila, Aida Muluneh, Cirus Kaburi, Peterson Kamwathi, Dineo Seshee Bopape, Sikhumbuzo Makandula, Chemu Ng'ok, Mulenga J. Mulenga, Yonamine, Sanele Omari Jali, Lhora Amira, Thenjiwe Nkosi, and Ralph Borland.

26 Doreen Sibanda, cited in "African Voices: Confronting the Frontiers of Reality," National Gallery of Zimbabwe website, <http://www.nationalgallery.co.zw>

27 Nyampenza, cited in "African Voices: Confronting the Frontiers of Reality," National Gallery of Zimbabwe website, www.nationalgallery.co.zw

28 This painting was part of Ng'ok's MFA exhibition titled *Riot at the Albany Museum* in Grahamstown, South Africa in 2016.

29 Personal correspondence with the artist, December 10, 2017.

30 Interview with Doreen Sibanda, National Gallery of Zimbabwe website, <http://www.nationalgallery.co.zw/icac/reflections-at-60-with-doreen-sibanda/>

31 ICAC 2017 website, <http://www.nationalgallery.co.zw/icac/>

32 http://historicalreenactments.org/blog_27May2011.html

33 Gabi Ngcobo, Gazebo 1 Panel Discussion: "Cultural Institutions as Knowledge Hubs: Diversity, Audience, and Relevance" (September 12, 2017).

34 Mpho Matsipa, Courtauld Gallery Plenary Session: "Spaces Inherited and Spaces Created: Examining the Impact of Public, Private, and Alternative Spaces" (September 12, 2017).

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