

Wycliffe Mundopa & Gresham Nyaude

DAY & NIGHT

July 5th — August 10th, 2019

The logo for GNYP (Gresham Nyaude and Wycliffe Mundopa) is displayed in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letters 'GNYP' are centered within a light gray rectangular background.

The paintings of artists Wycliffe Mundopa and Gresham Nyaude have one thing in common - they each feature strong figures made up of more or less abstract forms, and bold colour combinations and contrasts. They also each engage intensively and critically with their home, the Zimbabwean capital of Harare. Both Mundopa's and Nyaude's vibrant canvases critique the living conditions in the city, but take very different approaches.

Mundopa gives a voice to the country's most underprivileged people, prostitutes. He depicts them interacting with stylised dogs - from pets to hyena-like beasts - as well as bananas and watermelons. Mundopa uses formalised motifs of this kind as symbols or metaphors, referencing popular African figures of speech and generating specific patterns of meaning for viewers with the same native language. Even the revealing presentation of the women's bodies is loaded with specific, localised significance. Although it gestures towards the women's work as prostitutes, their nudity is not indecent or shameful here. Rather, this baring-all expresses a strong protest - it is an act of criticism, of public anger. This explains why Mundopa's women also confidently assert their dignity in grotesque poses, constellations of images and exaggeration: Mundopa's dense weave of vibrant, violent colour and loud symbolic language is intended to highlight political and socio-cultural reality. He asks why people are in such need with a biting cynicism, holding up a mirror to the society of his native land.

Nyaude's work on the other hand is formed much more from the internal, from the world of the emotions, than from the hard realities of life. His paintings comment on Zimbabwean politics from the perspective of experience, and thus with the voice of ordinary people like his neighbours in Mbare - arguably the most notorious ghetto in Harare, where he himself grew up. Nyaude transforms the common vernacular and colloquial forms into symbolic images. Wide, laughing mouths express derision or despair, for example, rather than real joy. Some of his other figures stand on their heads or squat, clutching their legs, in nondescript surroundings. It is also striking that Nyaude's style of painting also changes with his project to depict Zimbabwe's emotional landscape. Just as the mood of the country has plunged into a bottomless pit in recent months, Nyaude's latest paintings in particular have become more abstract, transforming into oceans of meandering, curling patterns that predominantly express the deep uncertainty.

Whereas Mundopa's approach is ultimately almost feminist and the injustices suffered by the women he paints are intended to be an example of society's ills, Nyaude expresses his criticism in a more abstract way, as an expression of the feelings of the people. So while Mundopa's and Nyaude's perspectives differ, they both make use of unique and powerful imagery. As is typical of Zimbabwean painters, they relate to their native language by making its metaphors and symbols visual.

Klara Niemann