

# Zimbabwe Stone Sculpture

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Gallery Handbook



# Zimbabwe Stone Sculpture

## A BRIEF BACKGROUND

Born of an artistic environment free from the constraints of formal artistic rules & boundaries, the **Zimbabwe Sculpture Movement** has become known as the most compelling & evocative form of art to emerge from Africa in the 20th century. First appearing in the late 1950s, the art soon captured the attention of the west and has since been featured in many of the world's finest museums, galleries & private collections.

However, the significance of Zimbabwean stone sculpture lies not in the international recognition it has gained, but in its honest and emotional expression of the unique socio-cultural identity of the Zimbabwean community at large. The **Zimbabwe Sculpture Movement** reads as a testimony of time & place as the artists sculpt a cultural & spiritual induced depiction of the ever-changing Zimbabwean society. As their community changes, new styles emerge to document both the past, the present, and a vision for what's to come.

# Zimbabwe Stone Sculpture

## A BRIEF BACKGROUND - CONTINUED

In 1957, Frank McEwen was appointed as the first curator of the new National Gallery in Salisbury, Rhodesia (now Harare, Zimbabwe). He had previously been curator at the Musée Rodin, Paris and had links with various artists of the time, including Picasso (who was himself heavily influenced by African art) and Matisse.

McEwen was impressed with the talent of some of the artists he met in Zimbabwe, and he encouraged them to paint and later to sculpt. Because of his contacts in the international art world, he was able to give the movement that later became known as '**Shona sculpture**' (after Zimbabwe's most numerous tribe) its first international exposure. However, it is not fair to say that he created the movement.

McEwen encouraged the artists to look inward, to find their so-called 'tribal subconsciousness' and express it through their art. Much of the early work was inspired by Shona mythology.

# Zimbabwe Stone Types

## WHERE THEY COME FROM

The majority of stones used in Zimbabwean sculpture are locally sourced and belong to the geological family of Serpentine. They are sedimentary, having originally been laid down on a sandy sea floor and metamorphic, since subsequent exposure to intense heat and pressure over hundreds of millions of years has transformed them into hard stone. Serpentine is rich in iron, so when the stone weathers it turns a rust colour.

Zimbabwe houses The Great Dyke - a 2.5 billion year old horse-shoe ridge of 500km stretching through the North and East round to the centre of the country and is rich in minerals of every description.

Different areas of The Dyke produce a different variety of stone. Over 200 colours of stone have been geologically catalogued, ranging in Mohs scale of mineral hardness from 1-5.5 on the scale of hard stones, with Granite being 6.

# Zimbabwe Stone Types

## MOST COMMON VARIETIES

### **Serpentine**

A favorite among the carvers of Zimbabwe, it is found in many deposits throughout Zimbabwe and comes in various colors and hardness.

### **Springstone**

A very pure hard variety of Serpentine, Springstone has a fine texture with no cleavages offering a good resistance to the sculptor. Springstone is wrapped in an outer “blanket” of reddish brown oxidised rock. It emerges from the quarry like sculptures created by nature millions of years ago and is often a source of inspiration to the artist.

### **Opalstone**

A beautiful light greenish serpentine, Opalstone is a very hard stone with an almost translucent surface and known for its milky light colored greens and smooth texture.

### **Cobalt**

A beautiful stone often purple in coloration, with variations of yellow, blue and green markings mixed throughout.

# Media Quotes:

"THESE MARVELLOUS SCULPTORS FROM ZIMBABWE...SPEAK FOR AFRICA, BUT THEY SPEAK FOR ALL OF US. THEY RESTORE A DIGNITY TO ART WHICH IT IS IN DANGER OF LOSING."

- **SUNDAY TELEGRAPH, ENGLAND**

"IF THE PERFECTION OF ART IS MEASURED PURELY BY EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIVE POWER, THEN THIS ART IS BEYOND PERFECTION."

- **WEST INDIAN WORLD**

"SHONA SCULPTURE IS PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT NEW ART FORM TO EMERGE FROM AFRICA IN THIS CENTURY."

- **NEWSWEEK**

"THEY ARE PRODUCING SOME FINE STONEWORK, THE FINEST SOME SAY, IN THE WORLD."

- **THE ECONOMIST**

"PICASSO WAS AN ADMIRER OF EARLY SHONA SCULPTURE; NOW EVIDENCE IS SURFACING THAT HE WAS INFLUENCED BY IT TOO."

- **TOWN & COUNTRY MAGAZINE**

"DURING THE PAST DECADE, ZIMBABWE SHONA SCULPTURE HAS BECOME THE MOST COLLECTED FORM OF AFRICAN ART. IT HAS FOUND ITS WAY INTO IMPORTANT REPOSITORIES SUCH AS THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART IN NEW YORK AND THE RODIN MUSEUM IN PARIS, AND INTO THE HOMES OF THE ROCKEFELLERS AND THE PRINCE OF WALES."

- **THE OREGONIAN**

UNLIKE ART FOUND IN MUCH OF THE REST OF AFRICA, SHONA SCULPTURE HAS BECOME A WHOLLY INDIGENOUS MODERN ART FORM CREATED EXCLUSIVELY AS A FORM OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION."

- **NEW YORK TIMES**



# The Family Nyanhongo

The Nyanhongo family name resonates with a ring of enduring legacy. Born into an artistic family, **Agnes &**

**Moses** were heavily influenced by their father,

Claud Nyanhongo, a “First Generation” pioneer artist who helped ignite the “Shona Sculpture” movement in the 1960’s.

Carrying the family name across oceans through exhibitions in Europe, Asia, North America and beyond, the Nyanhongo family has carved their place as international artists of the highest regard.

“Transforming”

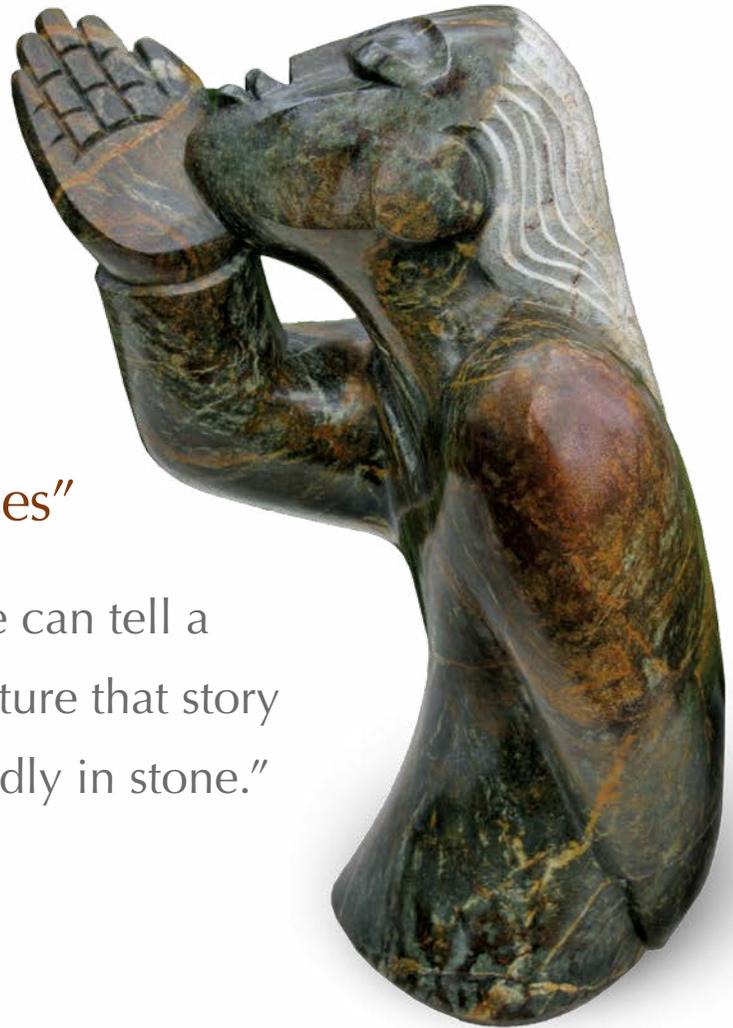
By Claud Nyanhongo



## “Blowing Kisses”

“A simple gesture can tell a story. I try to capture that story and express it vividly in stone.”

- Moses Nyanhongo



## THE ART

“Our traditional culture is very influential in my work. Each sculpture carries a message to the coming generations, who are at risk of forgetting what our elders did to make life comfortable.”

- Moses Nyanhongo



“Emphatic”