



**Richard Mudariki**  
**MY REALITY**

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COVER AND BACK COVER

**The Battles of Life**  
(details of triptych)  
100 x 100 cm

OPPOSITE

**The Passover**  
(detail)  
Acrylic on canvas  
120 x 159,5 cm



# Richard Mudariki

## MY REALITY

2 – 23 June 2012

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FINE ART

IN COLLABORATION WITH MARC STANES

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## Old Masters and New Meanings: An Introduction to the Work of Richard Mudariki

Richard Mudariki is an award-winning Zimbabwean artist who has exhibited widely in Harare, Cape Town and Johannesburg. He has been living in South Africa for the past year, and *My Reality*, his first solo exhibition, presents a body of work that reflects the ongoing crisis that obtains in the country of his birth. However, despite the title, his paintings make no pretence to portray real events. They candidly admit that they are fabrications in which old master compositions, poses and plastic sequences of interlinked figures, are severed from their original historical context, and projected into a fresh frame of reference where their meaning is transformed, so that they comment on the iniquities of the Mugabe dictatorship, and draw attention to other injustices of far wider import.

Mudariki's work can be profitably compared to that of Johannes Phokela, an older South African artist who has made his mark both nationally and internationally. Phokela may well have come to Mudariki's attention and given focus to his oeuvre, as both artists rely on appropriation. The South African pillages the canon of the great Dutch and Flemish old masters of yore, such as Rubens, Brueghel and Jordaens. However, instead of using Western painting to cast light on contemporary Africa and its problems as Mudariki does, Phokela changes the race of the original 17th century Netherlandish figures from white to black in order to challenge the European myth of white supremacy, and condemn the racism and colonialism to which it gave rise.

Mudariki's art is issue-driven: it addresses the violation of animal and human rights, corporate greed, gender stereotyping, censorship and rape *inter alia*. Although such subject matter smacks of shrill, soap-box preachiness, the *mise-en-scene* proves so visually arresting that any specific political message becomes subsumed in a spectacular Breughel-like pageant of infamy and transgression. This transcends any chronological and geographic particularity, and becomes a timeless and universal statement conveyed with such gripping imaginative assurance that the resultant image entirely transcends the artist's activist goals.

Mudariki takes canonical masterpieces of the order of Goya's 'Third of May', Gericault's 'Raft of the Medusa' and Manet's 'Luncheon on the Grass' – works of such devastating impact that they have etched themselves indelibly in the memory of many successive generations – and he appropriates them without ever reproducing them. Although he retains the compositional formulae and poses, the physiognomies, anatomies, costume and other details are always transformed so as to shatter the illusion of reality, disorientate the viewer and make him question what he is looking at.

Mudariki's most startling transformation of these revered museum pieces is his transplantation of his borrowings into jarring settings completely alien to the backgrounds of the original paintings. Thus Gericault's 'Raft of the Medusa' no longer sails the high seas, but is decisively planted on *terra firma* with the smashed raft being equipped with humble box-cart wheels. This creates a deflationary effect of parody and burlesque, and there is indeed an element of send-up in many of Mudariki's paintings. Gericault's cast materializes on a corridor-like stage where they are penned in by claustrophobic, inward-pushing walls that steep the scene in menace. These stark, bare and emptied-out spaces, devoid of windows, doors or any kind of openings, appear to form part of a dark labyrinthine warren of sinister Kafkaesque design. Mysterious maze-like structures and slabby, cubic boxes occur throughout this body of work, injecting a surreal complication into imagery which was originally constructed in a purely naturalist manner, reproducing the viewer's own familiar world.

Ominous overtones go hand in hand with humor: the sight of Helen Zille leading her forces into battle is extremely amusing. So is the idea of placing Manet's two bachelors picnicking with a naked woman within a stadium or cyclorama where there is no vestige of privacy. Characters and juxtapositions, like the nude journalists earnestly poking microphones before the mouths of goats, in 'Goat Interview', and the rhinoceri in wheelchairs in 'The Scream for the Rhino' arouse laughter, but Mudariki's comic sense often verges on the kind of black or gallows humor that we associate with the theatre of the absurd.

Extremely obtrusive checkerboard patterns invade the walls and floors of Mudariki's walled spaces turning them into three dimensional chess boards. Chess is an ancient game where the two players enact medieval battles using stylized wooden kings, queens, knights and bishops, armies of pawns, and strongholds in the form of parapetted castles. Checkerboards are also associated with other games of skill and chance, such as checkers and draughts, which also involve combat, the capture of pieces and the conquest of territory. These allusions suggest that the paintings represent contests, and they identify life as conflict and strife. Mudariki's references to dice and card games intimate that the inhabitants of his world are not in control of their destinies, and that they are the playthings of sinister and malign forces.

Both the checkerboard upon which the action of virtually all the paintings is set, and the walls cordoning off space, and denying one any glimpse of what lies beyond, imply captivity and confinement, and operate as metaphors for a people denied freedom of choice, and room in which to manoeuvre. All these walls, barriers and boundaries imply no exit, and distill a hallucinatory quality indicative of dementia and delusion. Mudariki's set-ups function as visual parallels to Zimbabwe, and all tyrannies, where a reign of terror prevails and life is a dicey and uncertain matter of continual jeopardy and risk. Under such pressure, one's mental state deteriorates into one of fear, apprehension, and eventually, paranoia.

Gericault's corpses are given a rag-doll limpness and preposterous green hue. The ranks of the original shipwrecked crew are swelled by cockerel and dog-headed sailors and masked figures both clad, and unclad. The *dramatis personae* freeze in poses identical to those of Gericault, provoking a double take in the viewer. We immediately recognize the familiar composition, but experience a jolt of shock as the characters and setting are so alarmingly different to those in the original painting.

The same applies to Mudariki's other works in which pig and baboon-headed therianthropes consort with human beings, and the naked rub shoulders with figures in business suits, army uniforms, tights, medieval robes, Victorian bourgeois attire, 17th century ruffed Dutch burgher apparel, top hats and a jester's motley and cap with three ass's ears with bell finials.

Mudariki's isometric boxes function exactly like a stage with the fourth wall removed, and the artist's décor exudes an overt theatricality, and conjures up a chimerical world that is both grotesque and macabre. The bizarre architecture, freakish hybrid beings and flamboyant costumes are scenographic fantasies. They remind us of the medieval visions of Brueghel and Bosch both of whom rejected the real world in order to construct *an infernal amusement park, a Disneyland of the afterlife* in the words of W.S. Gibson.

The masks and costumes of different eras and different societies smack of disguise, travesty and duplicity, and proclaim that appearances are deceptive, and nothing is what it seems. Mudariki's 'Pieta' reeks of corruption and graft: the Virgin, wearing a business tie, shirt and suit, weeps over a slain Muammar Gaddafi as an unholy coalition of war-mongering generals and venal capitalists look on.

In 'The Raft of False Hope', it is clear that the cast is aware of our presence, and that what they are doing is to act out the equivalent of a morality play or cautionary tale for our benefit. In every painting, the actors freeze and suspend the action in order to drive home the socio-political point, and usually one of the actors gazes directly at us. In 'The Raft of False Hope' the grey-faced man sandwiched between the two cockerels stares intently at us, his audience, in order to gauge how we are reacting, and whether we have learned any lesson from this parable which, as Mudariki writes, makes a *political and social statement* warning us of how the survival of the state is imperiled by *desertion in times of need*. The artist employs a euphemism, but obviously what he means is the mass emigration that has become such a feature of Zimbabwean life.

The assessor gaze of characters who solicit our opinion, and involve us in the action, gains even greater prominence in the third panel of 'The Battles of Life' where the two hand-wrestlers freeze as they turn round to scrutinize us. In the second panel of the triptych, five suited men become stand-ins for the viewer as they watch the action, while a humanized pig directs his gaze at us. Similar groups who, like the spectator, witness the action, occur in 'The Gentleman's Game', 'Goat Interview', 'The Dog Anatomy Lesson' and 'At the Theatre', while characters who use the gaze to address a direct appeal to the viewer are seen in 'The Passover', 'Pieta' and 'Church Women'.

Mugabe's state, and all repressive dictatorships, are portrayed as realms of random uncertainty where there are no laws upon which the citizen can rely, and no fellow beings that he can afford to trust. The principles governing the universe also no longer apply. The sail of the raft billows outwards as if in response to a gale yet this is a completely static composition where everybody remains motionless without a hair out of place. Unanswerable questions abound: Are we indoors or outdoors? Is it night or day? Has the clock been stopped? Our notions of time and place become confused, and we learn to distrust the evidence of our senses.

The artist ensures we never mistake his fictive universe with reality, and witty anachronisms are deployed to this end: Helen Zille becomes a jousting Quattrocento knight; Mugabe presides over the last supper; the Virgin Mary cradles a surrogate Christ wearing dark glasses; and beribboned and highly decorated militarists, straight out of the German Expressionist repertory, observe the Pieta.

The apparatus of naturalism is turned upside down. Light possesses either the floodlit brilliance of 'The Passover' and 'The Battles of Life', or the tenebrous dim of 'Goat Interview' and 'The Raft of False Hope' where the mast and sail are plunged in darkness while the adjacent figures are brightly lit. Color is keyed-up and given an unnatural, blaring stridency that reaches a crescendo in raucous greens, blues, reds, oranges, and purples.

Shadow is often excised as in 'The Passover', but when it is present, as in 'The Raft of False Hope', some objects do cast shadows like the horses, whilst others, such as the people on the raft, do not. When shadow is applied consistently, it falls in different directions as both 'Laundry Day' and 'The Battle of Cape Town' illustrate.

Space is warped and distorted. The pattern of alternating orange and red squares in 'Political Prostitution' is wrenched out of true, revealing that the floor is not flat, but curved, and the same phenomenon occurs in 'Laundry Day'. In 'The Dog Anatomy Lesson' the ground lists downwards to the right. Tinkering with perspective occasions further disruptions. The orthogonals recede at a hectically accelerated pace, engineering spatial jumps whereby the viewer is hurtled from foreground to background in one abrupt, rushing movement. This technique is used in almost all the paintings, though the most dramatic example is 'Capital Punishment'.

In 'Goat Interview' the parallel orthogonals of the checkerboard floors, approach each other far faster than they would in a scientifically accurate perspectival scheme, and the vanishing point occurs in an unlikely position. In 'The Passover' only the Queen and President Mugabe are seated, and although the other figures stand in tiers behind them, they remain as tall or taller, and fail to diminish in scale as they recede into depth. In this picture, the figures are also jammed into a space far too small to accommodate them. They stand three deep, one behind the other, in the exiguous area on the far side of the table.

The point of view too is manipulated. In 'The Gentleman's Game', for example, we look down at the floor from a steep raking angle, but see the billiard players and observers from head on, while the ceiling is viewed from below. The triptych, 'The Battles of Life', portrays a continuous space, or, according to convention it should, yet the left wall in the first and second panels is black as if covered in shadow, while the right wall of the third panel is dark. This defies the scientific law that shadows lit by a single light source must always fall in the same direction. To complicate things even further, we cannot decide whether the diagonals on the rear walls in panel one and panel two indicate contrasts of light and shade, or architectural projections and recessions.

The incoherence of scale is flagrant. In 'The Battle of Cape Town', the frogs and cock involved in the skirmish, loom as large as the equestrian warriors, and in 'Capital Punishment' the head of the rapist with outstretched arms appears opposite to those of his executioners, and behind that of one of his female victims, yet his head remains far larger than theirs. All these logical inconsistencies draw our attention to the confected quality of Mudariki's imagery and emphasize their sheer factitiousness.

Mudariki's debts to other artists are almost exclusively limited to quotation. The suited militarists, businessmen and politicians often vaguely remind one of those of the German Expressionists. The forced perspectives and love of dusky blue and greens owe something to Giorgio de Chirico, and the animal-headed beings, especially the rhinoceri in wheelchairs and on crutches, recall the half-animal, half-human creatures of Alberto Savinio, and of course, Brueghel and Bosch. Many paintings create a surreal atmosphere, yet do not suggest the influence of any one particular painter. These are indeed lean pickings.

No artist emerges from a void, and one is forced to ask oneself, what tradition produced Mudariki? The answer is that the artist takes the paintings of the old masters and transforms them into allegories. This makes him something of an odd man out, as this mode of communication became increasingly spurned over the last century because it reeks of the Symbolist movement, and the outmoded art of the turn of the 19th century.

Allegory is a device used in art to signify a meaning that is not literal. It presents abstract ideas, meanings or messages in visual form by employing symbolic figures, actions or representations. Everyday items like candles and lilies can symbolize concepts such as mortality, faith and virginity, and suggest that a parallel and far more profound symbolic meaning underlies the image. Simple examples are the grim reaper, a symbolic representation of death; a lady standing on a wheel to personify chance, and a blind woman holding up a pair of scales to represent justice.

Both Gericault's 'The Raft of the Medusa' and Mudariki's 'The Raft of False Hope' are based on allegorical premises. Gericault used the shipwreck to symbolize the poor statecraft that prevailed in the French government of the day. The raft, a variation of the familiar trope of the Ship of State, thus represents a regime foundering and coming adrift. In Mudariki's painting, the raft is equated with Zimbabwe and the dead and dying aboard it become metaphors for a society on the brink of death and disaster.



Granted 'The Raft of the Medusa' possesses elements of allegory, but Mudariki twists masterpieces entirely devoid of any allegorical implications, like Matisse's 'The Dance', Uccello's 'The Battle of San Romano', Rembrandt's 'The Anatomy Lesson', and da Vinci's 'The Last Supper' into allegories where every visual element becomes the embodiment of an abstract idea. 'The Passover', a rephrasing of Leonardo da Vinci's 'The Last Supper', is based on an implicit comparison between the Israelites' escape from Egyptian captivity, and the plight of Zimbabwe and its President. Mudariki insists that no divine intervention like the parting of the Red Sea, will save the country and its people from disintegration and collapse. The finality of Christ's Last Supper becomes emblematic of the disaster that will inevitably overtake the country. The objects strewn over the dinner table are replaced, as Mudariki writes, by *a feast of symbols... A central hour glass suggests that the President's time is running out. The vulture, usually a symbol of renewal, here becomes the harbinger of death, feeding on others' misfortune. Two locusts, destroyers of crops during the Egyptian plagues, are branded with the flags of two international powers.* The cards lain on the table reveal that Mugabe has a weak hand, implying that he does not command sufficient power to prevent his overthrow. *The severed head of the common man is served on a platter, a metaphor for those preyed on to keep the ruling party in power.* The wine glasses are filled with the blood of the President's victims.

Although allegory is distinctly *passé*, Mudariki rejuvenates and modernizes it. The means it employs to disseminate its message present close affinities with Soviet Agitprop, and its offspring, the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht. Mudariki is obviously a highly educated man, but I am not necessarily suggesting that he was directly influenced by either Agitprop or Brecht. Artists who are geographically far apart and completely unaware of each other's existence, often come up with very similar innovations entirely independently of each other, because their work reflects the same *zeitgeist*, and by chance, they discovered similar means of giving it expression.

The term *Agit-prop* is applied to drama, especially street theatre, movies, and other art forms including painting and the posters designed by leading 20th century Russian artists. These relay an explicitly political message as does Mudariki who adopts an adversarial, even incendiary stance *vis-à-vis* the Mugabe regime. His oeuvre could be dismissed as mere propaganda, however, as stated before, it is redeemed from that abject condition by the artist's wit, conceptual ingenuity and imaginative power.

Agitprop's goal was to promote Communist ideology and exhort the masses to commit themselves wholeheartedly to its ethical ideal of boosting the wealth and power of the state, and contributing to the welfare of its people.

A much later offshoot of these historical developments is the agitprop idiom that the American artist, Barbara Kruger devised from the 1980s onwards. Kruger juxtaposes large, poster and billboard-sized black and white photographic images with pithy, feminist comments that criticize the massive power of the state and pick holes in capitalist ideology and its concepts of gender, race, religion and sexuality.

The proselytizing and conversionary ethic of agitprop gave rise to agitprop theatre, a highly-politicized leftwing form of drama that originated in the 1920s, spread throughout Europe and America, attaining its supreme expression in the oeuvre of Bertolt Brecht, a Marxist playwright who later established the Berliner Ensemble in post-war East Germany. Brecht adapted the theories of earlier Russian Communist directors to create what he called *epic theatre*, a form of dramatic expression that relies on exactly the same methodological foundation as Mudariki's art.



Epic theatre ensures that the audience remains conscious at all times that what they are watching is not a slice of life, but a production. It employs a whole battery of devices to shatter the illusion of reality, interrupt the action, and break the fourth wall.

Realistic sets, costumes and props are replaced by highly simplified and stylized substitutes that no one could possibly mistake for the real thing. Typical Brechtian practices are continual interruptions of the action. The actors break into song and dance routines, address the audience directly, or comment upon the action like the chorus in ancient Greek drama. Slogans, visual captions and film projected onto the stage, and announcements either tape-recorded, or delivered by a master of ceremonies, distance the audience even further from the action.

All these devices correspond to what Brecht called the *alienation effect*. The alienation effect introduces a barrier between the play and the audience, preventing identification with the cast and involvement in the drama. As the term suggests, the alienation effect alienates us from what we see on the stage. This, Brecht hoped would foster a rational and reflective state of mind in which the audience would critically evaluate the drama, recognize the abuses and injustices it underlines, and strive to remove them and thus build a more just and equitable world.

Alienation devices form a parallel to Mudariki's use of old master imagery to immediately remind the viewer that what he is looking at is art, and the fact that it is recycled art, makes the distinction even more glaring. His introduction of logical inconsistencies into his handling of light, space, perspective and scale sabotage illusionist goals, and underscore the identity of his paintings as representations of reality, rather than reality itself. There is no narrative; no temptation for the viewer to lose himself in the unfolding action, and involve himself with the characters and their predicament, for that action is always arrested, and left hanging in the air. There is no *dénouement* for the artist portrays the course of the action, but not its conclusion, so that the viewer will never know what fate awaited the shipwrecked crew of 'The Raft of False Hope', who won the round of billiards in 'The Gentleman's Game', or who proved triumphant in 'The Battle of Cape Town'.

The static character of the scenario and the absence of any resolution or catharsis, eliminates action and suspense. It enables the viewer to remain completely detached from what he witnesses, and invites an analytic rather than an emotional response, encouraging us to consider the political and social implications of the image just as we do in a Brechtian production. Such is the rationale of Mudariki's painterly re-enactments of the iconic masterpieces of the European tradition.

**Lloyd Pollak**

May 2012

Cape Town

This painting deals with issues of animal rights. It is interesting to imagine if animals (in this case, goats) were to be interviewed and asked what their rights were, what each and every animal would say. As Charles Darwin believed, there is no fundamental difference between man and animal in their mental faculties. Animals, like man, feel pleasure and pain, happiness and misery.

**Goat Interview**

2011

Acrylic on canvas

80 x 80 cm

Signed and dated bottom right



This painting portrays a game of etiquette for the gentry with a military connection. In war, as in billiards, opponents strategize and move their resources in order to reach their goal – in billiards the black ball, in war, victory. My observation of contemporary society is that the all-consuming anxiety to win and succeed has led to deceitful actions and behaviour; and big business and politics becomes the playing field. Strategically getting the edge over one's opponents, no matter the cost, has become as important as playing the game itself.

**The Gentleman's Game**

2011

Acrylic on canvas

69,5 x 70 cm

Signed and dated bottom right





'The Raft of False Hope' is inspired by Théodore Géricault's 1818 French Romantic masterpiece, 'The Raft of the Medusa' (*Le Radeau de la Méduse*). The original depicts a scene from the aftermath of the wreck of the French naval frigate *Méduse*, which ran aground off the coast of today's Mauritania in 1816. Approximately 147 people were set adrift on a hurriedly constructed raft; all but 15 died in the

13 days before their rescue, and those who survived endured starvation, dehydration, cannibalism and madness. Similar to the message and theme of the original painting, 'The Raft of False Hope' makes a political and social statement about desertion in times of need. The raft is motionless as the horses walk away. Those on it reach out for them, but without hope. They do not move forward. Some die. The horses represent those who abandon a society which is desperate for assistance. Two parents lift up their child to see ahead. But is there hope, even for the young, with the widening gap between the rich and poor in our society?

### **The Raft of False Hope**

2012

Acrylic on canvas

80 x 138 cm

Signed and dated bottom right







The word triptych has its origins in the Greek *triptychos*, meaning three-layered. The triptych format comes from early Christian art, and was a popular standard format for altar paintings from the Middle Ages onwards. In a modern context this format can be used as a three-act dramatic structure to represent a beginning, a middle and an end. In the triptych 'The Battles of Life', the stage is set as a battlefield. This constructed environment with its chequered floor presents three different acts: armies fighting for resources, sexes fighting for equality, and races fighting domination. They are all engrossed in the game of arm wrestling, each competitor hoping to pin down the arm of the other in victory. Unlike a triptych used for dramatic structure where a conclusion is reached, these paintings capture a continued confrontation, each competitor locked in a battle which seems to be hopeless, aimless and without outcome. A continuous battle, a circle of victories and defeats...



### **The Battles of Life**

2012

Acrylic on canvas (triptych)

Each panel 100 x 100 cm (3)

Signed and dated bottom right





In the original artwork 'The Last Supper' by Leonardo da Vinci, the artist depicts the final meal shared by Jesus and His Apostles in Jerusalem before his crucifixion. During this meal Jesus announces that one of his Twelve Disciples will betray him. The bread and wine are symbolic of the body and blood

of Christ. 'The Passover', the title of this painting, refers to the Jewish holiday and festival commemorating the story of the Exodus – the emancipation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt after the ten plagues. In this painting the President invites all of his friends, his enemies, as well as Jesus, to eat and drink with him. The original bread and wine are replaced by a feast of symbols which provide clues about the choice of names on his guest list – all important players in world politics. A central hour glass suggests that the President's time is running out. The vulture, usually a symbol for renewal, here becomes the harbinger of death, feeding on others' misfortune. Two locusts, destroyers of crops during the Egyptian plagues, are branded with the flags of two international powers. Calling his bluff, his cards are exposed and strewn around the table. The severed head of the common man is served on a platter, a metaphor for those preyed on to keep the ruling party in power. Their chalices filled with the blood of the innocent, the guests confer whilst millions wait for a change in fortune.

## **The Passover**

2011

Acrylic on canvas

120 x 159,5 cm

Signed and dated bottom right





This artwork merges two original paintings – ‘The Dance’ (*La Danse*) by Henri Matisse and ‘At the theatre’ by Honore Daumier. The theatre and the media have always been used as instruments to pass on political messages for and against ruling governments. Here, the audience looks onto the stage with awe. The businessman, represented by a man in a suit, and the politician, portrayed as a chicken, dance around in a circle with the citizens whom they deceive. In some countries, such as Zimbabwe, some theatre productions have been banned and actors arrested due to the content of their plays which criticize the government.



### **At the Theatre**

2012

Acrylic on canvas

45,5 x 61,5 cm

Signed and dated bottom right







This work is inspired by a panel from the triptych 'The battle of San Romano', painted by Paolo Uccello in the mid-1400s. The original painting portrayed part of the battle of San Romano that was fought between Florence and Siena in 1432. The central figure is Niccolò da Mauruzi da Tolentino on his white charger,

the leader of the victorious Florentine forces. In my interpretation the battle scene is moved to Cape Town, a place with historically disproportionate development that has created societal groups who live together, but still apart. Politicians now fight their battles in the media and in cyberspace, and social media networks have become one of the new battlefields. The premier of the Western Cape, Helen Zille, who was accused of racism after some comments she posted on twitter, is portrayed here in combat with an anonymous black warrior. A variety of animals represent Cape Town's various cultures, all participating in the clash for equality.

## **The Battle of Cape Town**

2012

Acrylic on canvas

120 x 165,5 cm

Signed and dated bottom right







'The Pieta', Michelangelo's famous sculpture, depicts the body of Jesus on the lap of his mother, Mary, after his Crucifixion. Inspired by this masterpiece, 'Pieta' depicts Muammar Gaddafi – once also bestowed the title of 'King of Kings' by a meeting of traditional African rulers – during his final bloody moments. The circumstances surrounding his execution are today still shrouded in mystery as little is known about who actually killed him. Pulled out from a drain under a motorway, still alive, he begged for mercy from his captors, but died a pitiful death.

## **Pieta**

2011

Acrylic on canvas

150 x 93,5 cm

Signed and dated bottom right





This artwork is inspired by Édouard Manet's 1863 painting 'The Luncheon on the Grass' or *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, originally titled *Le Bain (The Bath)*. In the original, a scene from the Parisian bohemian lifestyle is captured in harsh contrast to the puritan morals of that time. It was a controversial piece not only because it broke away from the Academic tradition of the day, portrayed stark nudity, and even featured recognizable models, but mostly due to the contemporary theme

which referenced the rampant prostitution in Paris at the time. 'Laundry Day' portrays a washing day; the female nude and the scantily dressed female bather from the original painting are dehumanized by the addition of chicken heads, symbolising them as objects manipulated by big business and powerful politicians. Have their soiled feathers been removed, washed and hung out to dry? The two men in suits, although appearing relaxed, are still in control, one holding the scissors used to cut the feathers. The women are both subservient, one washing, the other a naked object in obedience to her male counterparts. Have the politician and the business man conspired to clean up the mess?

## **Laundry Day**

2012

Acrylic on canvas

73 x 89,5 cm

Signed and dated bottom right





This painting refers to the game played by political superpowers involving less powerful nations. These superpowers, who direct the outcome of events and control the power game, are represented here by the king and queen of a deck of cards. The less powerful nations are symbolized by the joker, seated in a subservient position below his superiors.

**The Game**

2011

Acrylic on canvas

120 x 119,5 cm

Signed and dated bottom right







This work was inspired by the famous 1632 oil painting by Rembrandt, titled '*The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*', in which Dr Tulp, as official City Anatomist, explains the musculature of the arm to medical professionals of the Amsterdam Guild of Surgeons. The concept of dissecting a subject in an effort to learn and understand more of its functions, becomes a metaphor for the *suits*, or those in charge,

analysing their constituency in a *dog-eat-dog* world. There is, however, a striking difference here – the marked-up dog subject is alive and well, challenging its audience of dog-like personae. A possible interpretation of this scenario could be the analysis of society by the ruling elite in an effort to determine the best strategy to divide and rule.

### **The Dog Anatomy Lesson**

2011

Acrylic on canvas

61 x 91 cm

Signed and dated bottom left



This painting makes a political statement by comparing dictatorship to prostitution. Politicians use their positions of power to manipulate their constituency through speeches and propaganda, creating a false sense of hope for a better life. Voters are prostituted by such unscrupulous politicians who would quickly move on to a different support base as soon as their power is threatened. In this painting the cockerel represents a dictator who refuses to step down, whilst everything around him – symbolised by the tethered prostitutes and the limbless man on a broken chair – is falling apart.

**Political Prostitution**

2011

Acrylic on canvas

40 x 40 cm

Signed and dated bottom right



The character in this painting represents greedy politicians who are in the business of assuming power and privilege through manipulation; benefitting themselves without virtue or merit.

**Politician**

2011

Acrylic on canvas

57 x 49,5 cm

Signed and dated bottom right







'The Scream for the Rhino' was inspired by Edvard Munch's Expressionist painting, 'The Scream' (1893). Munch's original German title for the work was *Der Schrei der Natur* (The Scream of Nature). In his diary, on a page headed *Nice 22.01.1892*, Munch describes a feeling of anxiety he experienced during a walk with friends at sunset by saying, *I sensed an infinite scream passing through nature* – this later became the inspiration for the artwork. In a modern day African context, terrifying reports say that about 40 rhinos are killed each month by poachers. This artwork serves as a distress-call; a scream, for the plight of the rhino. It speaks for the animals who are unable to speak for themselves.

### **The Scream for the Rhino**

2012

Acrylic on canvas

67,5 x 47,5 cm

Signed and dated bottom right





I am fascinated by the characteristics shared by humans and animals. By placing animals in human contexts in my work, I hope to gain a better understanding of the similar behavioural patterns. A good example is the prevalence of a dominant male to maintain the discipline and unity of the flock. The symbolism of the goats stems from my background where they would represent the authority of the state or government. Metaphorically, the different coloured goats attending the conference represent various nations, submitting to the dominant leader.

### **The Conference**

2011

Acrylic on canvas

40 x 40 cm

Signed and dated bottom right





'Capital Punishment', inspired by Spanish painter Francisco Goya's painting 'The Third of May 1808', portrays a man about to meet his fate. However, in contrast to the original work which sought to commemorate Spanish resistance to Napoleon's armies during the occupation of 1808, this artwork addresses the continued rape and abuse of women and girls. The martyr in Goya's work is replaced by a man caught red handed,

exposed by the light shone upon him to uncover his deeds. Rape is the most grotesque form of violence against women, and in most African societies it originates from male dominance and cultural belief systems that degrade women. Horrific recent reports tell of the gang rape and sex slavery of a 17 year old girl by a group of youths. Will the protesting voices for women's rights end this abuse or succeed in changing these beliefs and practices?

## **Capital Punishment**

2011

Acrylic on canvas

100 x 100 cm

Signed and dated bottom right







In the bible, 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 states ...

*As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*

Despite many such verses in the Bible which paint women as inferior to men, in some cultures women are the more dedicated churchgoers, making up the majority of the congregation. There exists in the Church an imbalance as the upper hierarchy is still very male dominated – in the Roman Catholic Church women are still unable to even become priests, and in most other denominations they are excluded from leadership roles.

## **Church Women**

2010

Acrylic on canvas

60,5 x 40 cm

Signed and dated bottom right



This work comments on child trafficking and the exploitation of children – both drastic violations of human rights, which destroy their innocence and potential. It is estimated that about 1.2 million children fall victim to human trafficking each year (International Labour Organisation, 2002). Are governments and non-governmental organisations doing enough to reduce these numbers?

**Childs Play**

2011

Acrylic on canvas

82 x 82 cm

Signed and dated bottom right



## RICHARD MUDARIKI

### Solo Exhibitions

2012

June My Reality, Johans Borman Fine Art, Cape Town, South Africa

### Group Exhibitions

2011

Oct Rendezvous Art Focus Painting, (Travelling Exhibition) North West University Gallery, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Oct Persona, Johans Borman Fine Art, Cape Town

Aug At Night we Dream, at day we see, AVA, Cape Town

July Colour Africa, Ort der Ausstellung: Amalienstraße 81, Gebäude im Hof, Munich, Germany

June Contrasts, Gallery Delta, Harare

May Under the Magnifying Glass, Junction Art Gallery, Johannesburg

May Art Zimbabwe Today, Gallery Delta, Harare

Apr ZIMAGES Contemporary, Zimbabwe German Society, Harare

Feb Group Artists Exhibition, Junction Art Gallery, Johannesburg

Jan Emerging Artists Exhibition, Gallery Delta, Harare

2010

Oct Amani Arts Festival, Khayelitsha, Cape Town

Sept FACET, Zimbabwe Now, sponsored by the Germany Embassy, Gallery Delta, Harare

Aug Mother Earth, Gallery Delta, Harare

July reflections.co.zw, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Mutare

July Drawings and Graphics, Gallery Delta, Harare

July Insight – Fund Raising Exhibition, Gallery Delta, Harare

June Live and Direct 2010, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare.

May Past and Present: 35 Years, Gallery Delta, Harare

April Roots – an art Exhibition in collaboration between Dendera Gallery and Gallery Delta, Gallery Delta, Harare

Feb Young Artist Exhibition, Gallery Delta, Harare,

2009

Dec FACT 2009, Cottco Art Exhibition, sponsored by the Cotton Company of Zimbabwe, National Gallery of Zimbabwe

Dec Summer Exhibition, Gallery Delta, Harare

Nov Walls: Competition and Exhibition. Sponsored by the Germany Embassy Gallery Delta

Oct Unity Exhibition. Sponsored by the European Commission, Gallery Delta. Harare

June Ani-mal, Group Exhibition – Veo Gallery, Cape Town

2008

Dec Post Election Selection, sponsored by the Embassy of Spain, Gallery Delta, Harare 2008

Dec Miniature Group Exhibition 2008, Veo Gallery, Cape Town

Nov Salon 91 Art Exhibition, Salon 91, Cape Town

Oct Enriching Women, an exhibition for the International Women's Film Festival, Gallery Delta, Harare.

Let's Get Together: a group exhibition and competition sponsored by the French Embassy, Gallery Delta, Harare

Aug Africa University Annual Festival of Art and Culture: a group exhibition of Paintings and Graphics, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Mutare

Aug Drawings and Graphics Exhibition, Gallery Delta, Harare, Zimbabwe

June Onai Exhibition, Three Man Group Exhibition, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Mutare

Feb The Young Artists Exhibition, Gallery Delta, Harare

2007

Dec The Summer Exhibition, Gallery Delta, Harare

Sept The Young Painters Artist's Exhibition, Gallery Delta, Harare

Aug Drawings and Graphics: An Overview, Gallery Delta, Harare

July The Sixth Sense, an exhibition of paintings and graphics, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Mutare

April Peace through Unity and Diversity, an exhibition and competition sponsored by the European Commission, Gallery Delta, Harare

Feb The Young Artist Exhibition, Gallery Delta, Harare



## 2006

- Dec The Summer Exhibition, Gallery Delta, Harare  
Dec Verandah Gallery Portfolio Exhibition, Verandah Gallery, Emerald Hill, Harare  
Aug Manicaland Visual Arts and Craft Association (MANISA) Annual Exhibition, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Mutare  
Sept Rembrandt: An African Response, an exhibition and art competition sponsored by Embassy of Netherlands, Gallery Delta, Harare  
July Our Thoughts, Three Man Exhibition, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Mutare  
Mar Don Quixote: An African Perspective, an exhibition sponsored by the Embassy of Spain, Gallery Delta, Harare

## 2005

- Sept African Contemporary Art, Gallery Delta, Harare  
Jan Young Artist Exhibition, Gallery Delta, Harare

## 2003

- May IKONS – An Exhibition of Greek, Serbian and Russian Icons for the Greek Cultural Week, Gallery Delta, Harare  
Jan The Twenty Seventh Annual Young Artist Exhibition, Gallery Delta, Harare

## 2002

- Apr Explorations II (Student Work) Gallery Delta, Harare

## 2001

- Feb The Pritt Annual National Schools Exhibition, National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare. 2001

## Awards and Recognition

- 2010 Award for Painting, 'Artists in the Stream', the Young Artist Exhibition, sponsored by HIVOS Foundation, Gallery Delta, Harare.  
2010 Third Prize (Painting) from the Embassy of Germany and Gallery Delta Foundation, Gallery Delta, Harare.  
2009 Special Mention Award from the European Commission in Zimbabwe and Gallery Delta Foundation, Gallery Delta, Harare  
2006 Fourth Consolation Prize for Don Quixote: An African Perspective – art exhibition and competition sponsored by the Embassy of Spain, Gallery Delta Foundation, Harare

- 2004 Best Visual Artist (Painting), The German Inter Afrika Art Competition, sponsored by the Embassies of Germany and Switzerland, Zimbabwe German Society, Harare

- 2003 Award of Merit (Drawing) for an art exhibition and competition for the Greek Cultural Week sponsored by the Embassy of Greece and the Hellenics Community in Zimbabwe, Hellenic School, Harare

## Publications

- Johans Borman, 2011. *Persona*, Exhibition Catalogue, Cape Town, South Africa  
Richard Mudariki, 2011. *Contents, Contexts and Creators – An introduction to the contemporary visual arts of Zimbabwe*. Unpublished paper presented at the African Arts Institute, Cape Town, South Africa  
Rendezvous Art Project, Focus Painting 2011 – 2012.

## Residencies

- 2010 Resident artist, Good Hope art Studios, Cape Town, South Africa

## Workshops

- 2008 National Mining Museum Exhibition Design Workshop, facilitated by the British Council and the National Mining Museum of Wales, Harare 2008.  
2001 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) HIV/AIDS Art Workshop: 'Men Make A Difference', National Gallery Of Zimbabwe, Harare. 2001

## Voluntary Work

- 2011 Committee Member, Association for Visual Arts (AVA), Cape Town, South Africa  
2005 Mural Artist – Paintings and Decorations for the Greek Cultural Week, Hellenic School, Borrowdale, Harare  
2006 Khami World Heritage Site International Youth Volunteer Restoration Camp, supported by the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ), Association CHAM, United Nations Educational and Scientific Organization (UNESCO), French Embassy, Bulawayo



**johans borman**

F I N E   A R T