

N O M A D G A L L E R Y

Richard Butler Bowden, Gresham Tapiwa Nyaude, Helen Teede : Allegory & Intent

“Every true writer is like a bird; he repeats the same song, the same theme, all his life.” Albert Moravia

Albert Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, uses the mythological Sisyphus as an allegory for arguing absurdity and pointlessness of life and human endeavour, and the recognition of this pointlessness as liberation and happiness. The drama of Sisyphus of never being able to rest and enjoy one’s achievement is very familiar to all painters. No matter how high one rises in a previous canvas, no matter the elation of completion and celebration of achievement, no one is spared the moment and the challenge of facing new empty canvas.

While all painters share this allegorical drama, for Butler Bowdon, Nyaude and Teede, the idea of allegory itself, is built into their process and is a vital element of their artistic intent. Their individual practices might appear disparate, however modus operandi of working on a very precise spectrum of utilising painting as an articulate tool to address the matrix of language, history and politics. More than that, each has built a practice on the concept of hiding in plain sight, presenting something which appears easy to engage with but that engagement leads down a rabbit hole of the less expected.

Richard Butler Bowdon with a virtuoso sleight of hand delivers paintings, which manifest as portraits and touch us with poignancy of real individuals, while in fact opening up intimate and sometimes uncomfortable conversations about the nature of looking. The questions “What does what we see, say about us?” is at the heart of each painting. A conversation, which takes us as much into history of art, symbolism of colour and shape, history of race representation and development of modern art itself, with Butler Bowdon part of a genealogy, which began with African masks, adopted by Picasso and morphed through by Francis Bacon. Everyone of his portraits is a world in itself, and a world reconstructed with almost surgical precision and intentionality anew in each work.

For Gresham Tapiwa Nyaude, allegory of vernacular politics is masked by deceptive hint of the familiar and the accessible. What is to misunderstand in a laughing face, feet not quite connected to a body, or a simple chair, his canvases seem to be asking and simultaneously suggesting, that it is quite a lot.

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In a tradition of symbolic coding, not dissimilar to that of Flemish masters of the still life, Nyaude's images are shorthand for terse, satirical commentary on frictions and debates in Zimbabwean politics and societal ills. Painting used as the ultimate tool for evading censorship and social opprobrium - honesty through concealment. Allegory and metaphor used as tools to excoriate authority.

In the trajectory from individual to social, Helen Teede's work completes the trio with work addressing the personal and the political through the perspective of the universal. For Teede, our environment, nature and its forces are the primary drivers for human action and also the forces which hold us accountable and inescapably so. Using the female as point of origin, Teede arrives at the female exasperated by the failure of the patriarchal to see unity in diversity, perhaps the most Sisyphean task of all, that of Nature observing the history of man repeat itself.

In the Sisyphean labour of Butler Bowdon, Nyaude and Teede, however the joy and liberation of the process is the sublimation, which delivers not just the paintings we see but also those we are yet to see. One might return to Moravia to conclude that, *"The less one notices happiness, the greater it is."*

Valerie Kabov
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