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## **THE ART OF LAZARUS TAKAWIRA IN THE LIGHT OF FRANK MCEWEN'S THEORY OF INNER VITAL FORCES**

**Abstract:** Frank McEwen's theory of inner vital forces was developed in Paris in the 1930s, where he met Picasso, Leger, Braque, Miro and Brancusi - artists inspired by archaic and primitive art. These views complemented the teachings of Carl Jung, who described many positive aspects of spontaneity and vitality, most fully manifested in the works of primitive societies. McEwen was looking for a space where artists would not be influenced by outside factors. He found such an environment in the 1950s in what was then Southern Rhodesia, where he was the organiser of the National Gallery in Salisbury. The Shona people who live in these areas expressed their artistic creativity mainly through dance and music.

Frank McEwen created a school for sculptors where invited locals were to draw inspiration from everyday life, from the world around them, in the way they understood it. He worked with each one individually, trying not to impact the creative process. In 1971, his school succeeded. Musée du Rodin in Paris hosted an exhibition that garnered enthusiastic reviews, and all the exhibits were sold. Artists such as Joram Mariga, Tapfuma Gutsa, Bernard Takawira and Henry Munyaradzi exhibited their works there. Each of them has developed their own individual style. These artists passed on their ideas to the next generations, considering the perception of a work of art as a kind of a signpost in social life, and the artist himself or herself as an engineer and commentator of reality. The representative of the next generation was Lazarus Takawira, who followed the voice of his heart and abandoned his career in the Rhodesia police in favor of devoting himself to sculpture. Following his intuition and the guidance of Frank McEwen, he created a unique universe in which women and their role in society were central. His works have been exhibited at the Musée du Rodin in Paris, the World Bank in New York, the Africa Museum in Belgium and the Museum of Mumbai, India.

**Keywords:** sculpture, Africa, culture, tradition, exhibition, workshop

## Introduction

Southern Rhodesia was a land of great contradictions. On the one hand, it was a very rich country and part of the British Commonwealth, striving to assimilate with this colossus. This resulted in the development of education, culture and sport. Numerous mines, workplaces, museums and theaters were established. The landscape began to fill with buildings in the British colonial style, built of brick, estates with gardens and swimming pools, residents in colorful costumes, driving European cars. On the other hand, it was the rule of the white minority, where indigenous people lived better than in many other post-colonial countries, but were still secondclass citizens, with fewer rights and less lucrative jobs. Two characters from two different realities of the same country had to meet – a master and a student. Frank McEwen and Lazarus Takawira gave each other a lot, although they never formally worked together. Their cooperation allows us to trace how the secrets of artistic creativity can be explained. Lazarus Takawira, inspired by the teachings of Frank McEwen and his theory of inner vital forces, became an artist at a rather late age, one might say *ex nihilo*. In his works, he drew from the mythology of his own people and the surrounding reality. It was it that influenced Lazarus Takwira's perception of a work of art as a kind of a signpost in social life, and the artist himself or herself as an engineer and commentator of reality.

The article is partly based on the author's own memories, interviews and artistic projects organized jointly with Lazarus Takawira in the years 2008-2021.

## Frank McEwen and his theory of inner vital sources

Human life is made up of dozens of bricks, from which it is not always possible to put together a satisfying puzzle. In the case of Francis Jack McEwen, it is a fascinating combination of knowledge, skill, intuition and luck. Fate directed his life in such a way that *The Economist* of London wrote about the work of artists brought up by him: *they make good sculpture, one can say the best in the world.*<sup>1</sup>

Fate led Frank McEwen to Zimbabwe from his early childhood. Born in 1907, Frank grew up in a family of wealthy industrialists. His parents were great art lovers. His mother, of French descent, collected impressionist works, and his father collected works of African art, mainly from Ghana and Nigeria. African figurines were little Frank's first toys. The boy played with them so passionately that his father, out of concern for their safety, hid them from his

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.roomforart.co.uk/html/shona\\_sculpture.html](http://www.roomforart.co.uk/html/shona_sculpture.html). [accessed: 12.08.2008]

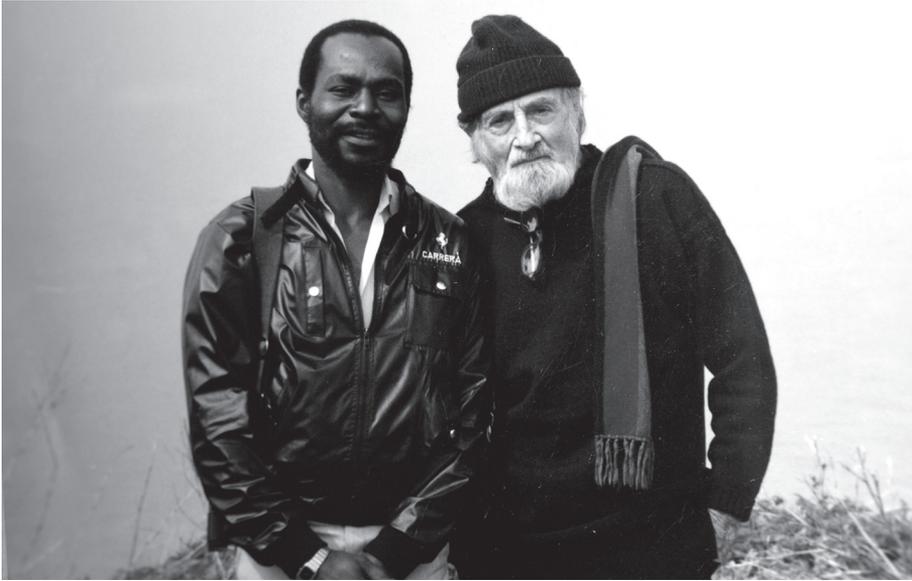


Fig. 1. Frank McEwen and Emmanuel Nakawale. Photo by Dariusz Skonieczko

son in the attic. Frank's early contacts with art made him decide to become an artist.<sup>2</sup> His parents forced him to promise that he would not become a painter and that art would remain only his hobby. Father wanted Frank to study at the University of Cambridge. However, his love for art turned out to be stronger than the promise he made to his parents.

A breakthrough moment was a visit to France, when the eighteen-year-old McEwen visited numerous museums and galleries. He then made his final decision and decided to join students of the Sorbonne. In 1930, he began to explore the secrets of painting in the class of Henry Focillon.<sup>3</sup> Paris of the 1930s was a very fertile place for the young artist. He met Picasso, Leger,

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<sup>2</sup> O. Sultan, *Life in stone, Zimbabwean Sculpture. Birth of a Contemporary Art Form*, Baobab Books:Harare, 1999, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Henri Focillon (born 7 September 1881 - died 3 March 1943) was a French art historian. He was the son of the printmaker Victor-Louis Focillon. He was the director of Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lyon. Professor of Art History at the University of Lyon, at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Lyon, at the Sorbonne, at the Collège de France and then in the United States, where he went into exile and taught at Yale University. A poet, printmaker and teacher, Focillon trained generations of art historians including George Kubler. He remains best known for his works on medieval art, most of which were translated into English -[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri\\_Focillon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Focillon) [accessed: 25.06.2023].

Braqua, Miro and Brancusi, artists inspired by archaic and primitive art. McEwen let himself be carried away by this trend. He was fascinated by the otherness brought by primitive art, more exciting than the canons of academic art. He found vitality, extraordinary expression and new horizons in it, as well as new possibilities resulting from different handling of proportions and asymmetry. At the same time, he came into contact with the teachings of Gustave Moreau.<sup>4</sup> Moreau's theories that expression flows from within the artist fit perfectly with McEwen's views, who believed that true art should flow from mythology and folklore, which, if properly interpreted, would show the relationship between the physical and spiritual worlds.<sup>5</sup> These views perfectly complemented the teachings of Carl Jung<sup>6</sup> who described many positive aspects related to spontaneity and vitality most fully manifested in the creativity of primitive societies.<sup>7</sup> Frank McEwen believed that the culture dormant in the tradition and history of primitive societies, in their consciousness and roots, must be awakened. He spoke about the need to promote art related to mysticism and spontaneity, which is an alternative to the logical and objective art of the modern West.<sup>8</sup> He did not have a high opinion of modern art. In an interview with the New York Times, he said:

Vinyl sausages: modern art in New York is reflection of reflection. This is one percent of art inherited from Parisian schools. This is not to say that I am against such trivial art, I just wanted to say that there is no power in it.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, in the catalog for the painting exhibition at the Ecole de Paris, he wrote:

If there is a new vital art somewhere, professional aesthetes are the last to notice it. Such art can manifest itself anywhere and can spring from a different lifestyle and different causes. It will not depend on the opinion

<sup>4</sup> Gustave Moreau (born 6 April 1826, Paris, France - died 18 April, 1898, Paris), French symbolist painter known for his erotic paintings of mythological and religious subjects. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gustave-Moreau> [accessed: 14.06.2023].

<sup>5</sup> C. Winter-Irving, *Stone Sculpture in Zimbabwe. Context, content & form*, Roblow Publishers: Harare 1995, pp. 45-46.

<sup>6</sup> Carl Gustav Jung (born 26 July 1875 - died 6 June 1961) was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology. Jung's work has been influential in the fields of psychiatry, anthropology, archaeology, literature, philosophy, psychology and religious studies. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl\\_Jung](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Jung) [accessed: 24.06.2023].

<sup>7</sup> O. Sultan, *Life in stone...*, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> B. Joosten, *Sculptors from Zimbabwe. The first generation. Lexicon*, Galerie de Strang, 2001, p. 19.

of the critic, but on the mind and interior of the artist who creates it based on it about your own being.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, McEwen deeply believed that Africa was the only place uncontaminated by Western culture.<sup>11</sup>

Convinced of the rightness of his ideas, he opened a workshop in Toulon in 1938, where he refined the concept of a work of art as a product of inner vital forces<sup>12</sup> of the artist. At the same time, he became known as an excellent critic and organizer of exhibitions. The Parisian magazine "Le Vingitime" wrote that he played a leading role in the Parisian art world throughout the pre-war decade.<sup>13</sup> The war briefly interrupted his artistic career.<sup>13</sup> In 1945, he was employed at the British Consulate in Paris, where he dealt with artistic exchange between England and France.<sup>15</sup>

His organizational skills resulted in the invitation by the government of Southern Rhodesia, present-day Zimbabwe, to Salisbury<sup>16</sup> to create a modern art gallery. The entire project was led by Sir Stephen Courtauld<sup>17</sup> who held Frank McEwen in high esteem. McEwen acted as an advisor to the architects erecting the National Gallery building and prepared a memorandum. The building of the Rhodesian National Gallery was completed in 1955. It was considered the most beautiful and modern building in Africa.<sup>18</sup>

In 1957, McEwen helped organize an exhibition on an unprecedented scale in Africa in the new facility. Works by such masters as Picasso, Goya, Rodin, Henry Moore, Rembrandt and Murillo were exhibited. Largely thanks

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> For this reason, he interrupted his trip to India, where he became disappointed with Hindu mysticism. Ibid., pp. 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> O. Sultan, *Life in stone...*, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Frank McEwen was an officer at the Allied Headquarters in Algeria, which he reached on a fishing boat. B. Joosten, *Sculptors...*, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> In 1945, he organized the first joint exhibition of Picasso and Matisse in London, which turned out to be a success; he promoted the works of Henry Moore in France, and such artists as: Braque, Bonnard, Leger and Duffin in England. O. Sultan, *Life in stone...*, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> The former capital city of Southern Rhodesia. In 1980, the city changed its name into Harare (author's note).

<sup>17</sup> Sir Stephen Lewis Courtauld (born 27 February 1883 – died 9 October 1967) was an English philanthropist associated with geographical exploration, the restoration of Eltham Palace in south-east London, and cultural and educational activities, both in the UK and in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), where he and his wife Virginia also donated to organisations promoting racial equality. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen\\_Courtauld](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Courtauld) [accessed: 24.06.2023].

<sup>18</sup> He received very favorable opinions in the Parisian magazine „Art d’Aujourd’hui” in 1955 and in 1959. Ibid. p. 17.

to this success, which cemented his position as an outstanding organizer and art expert, he was appointed the first director of the National Gallery in Rhodesia. His main goal was to create an exhibition of the works of natives. However, he ran into a serious problem. He wrote about it in *Art d'Aujourd'hui* in 1955:

In Southern Rhodesia, whites and blacks have almost completely forgotten their cultural traditions. The Europeans who settled here fifty or sixty years ago are mostly farmers and merchants who brought no art, old or modern, with them. The local blacks, as far as I know, have no tradition of creating representational art, expressing their artistic expression through dance and music.<sup>19</sup>

The local Africans, mainly from the Shona people, had indeed lost the ability to create representational art. This was due to many factors – years of life in captivity under the yoke of attackers from the south, originating from Zulu tribes, and the lack of any centralized power since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Difficult conditions and an unstable lifestyle combined with a calm character caused the disappearance of the ability to produce artistic objects.<sup>20</sup> Frank McEwen then uttered the significant words: *there is only one solution to art here. One has to create art.*<sup>21</sup> Already in 1956, he began to implement his plan. He learned the local language, met people from whom he learned a lot about the local culture and traveled around the country, collecting as much information as possible about folklore, history and tradition. Legend says that during one of McEwen's expeditions, a great eagle<sup>22</sup> settled near his camp and accompanied him for the next fifteen years. On his way, he also encountered missionaries who tried to evangelize local people through art.<sup>23</sup> Most of Frank McEwen's first charges came from their missions, where the natives learned the basics of painting and woodcarving. In Rhodesia, he could begin to implement the idea of creating art based on the artist's inner vital forces,<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> It should be noted, however, that in earlier centuries, the Shona people felt the need and had the ability to present their life, political or religious needs in the form of sculptures. This is evidenced by soapstone figures of birds found in the ruins of Great Zimbabwe. Arnold M., *Zimbabwean stone sculpture*, Louis Bolze: Bulawayo 1986, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> O.Sultan, *Life in stone...*, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> The eagle, *chupungu*, is a very important element of Shona mythology. M. Arnold, *Zimbabwean stone ...*, p 15.

<sup>23</sup> The most important of them are: the mission in Cyrene founded in 1939 by Canon Edward Peterson and the mission in Serima founded in 1948 by Father John Groeber. C. Winter-Irving, *Stone Sculpture in Zimbabwe. Context, content & form*, Roblow Publishers: Harare 1995.

<sup>24</sup> It should be added that he was not the only white person dealing with art, not only as

convinced that the art of Africans springs from expression dormant in them, from the relationship between the spiritual and material worlds, and tradition and modernity.

The breakthrough moment for the creation of a painting workshop at the National Gallery was the exhibition of 1957. Then and there the black candidates for artists saw the works of European masters. They were amazed by paintings hanging on the walls,<sup>25</sup> airconditioning necessary to keep the paintings safe and the scale of the whole enterprise. Seeing the reaction of the local people, Frank McEwen's assistant, Rowena Pearce, gave them paints and asked them to try to paint something themselves. Expressionist paintings were created, a direct impetus for the opening of an art workshop in Southern Rhodesia.<sup>26</sup> Frank McEwen's first pupils included artists such as Charles Fernando, Thomas Mukarobgwa, Paul Gwishiri or Joseph Nandarika.

In the first period of the workshop, McEwen wanted artists to draw inspiration from everyday life, from the surrounding world, in the way they understood it. I was a group of individualists who developed their skills drawing inspiration from their own culture and tradition. McEwen himself was very involved in the activities of the workshop and worked with each artist individually. He called this way of working an *experiment*, and the *art of adult children*, speaking about the creativity of his pupils.<sup>27</sup> He worked a lot and persistently, always had time to listen to these *adult children*, and they were fascinated by his personality. Thomas Mukarobgwa recalled McEwen this way:

He always had time to explain everything, and everyone wanted to listen to him. He could translate very well; he knew why the color was where the artist put it. He was such a great genius. He knew so many things.<sup>28</sup>

In 1962, the First Congress of African Cultures was held at the National Gallery in Salisbury, where works by adepts of Frank McEwen's workshop were exhibited.<sup>29</sup> The works met a lot of criticism from the white part of the audience,

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a collector and merchant, but above all as a manager and teacher. The activities of such people as Ulli Georgina Beier and Susanne Wenger in Nigeria, Pierre Romain and Pierre Lods in the Belgian and French Congo, Pancho Guedes in Mozambique and Cecil Skotnes in South Africa fit into this new trend. S. Littlefield Kasfir, *Contemporary African Art*, Thames & Hudson: London 1999, pp. 64-66.

<sup>25</sup> In the local tradition, it was not customary to hang pictures. Houses were decorated outside by decorating the walls with clay and natural pigment. B. Joosten, *Sculptors...*, p. 16.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> S. Littlefield Kasfir, *Contemporary...*, p. 68.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>29</sup> *Exhibition on the occasion of the First International Congress of African Culture*, National Gallery Salisbury August 1 - September 30, 1962. Exhibition catalogue.

who called the paintings of Charles Fernando and the others a *grotesque type of art*.<sup>30</sup> McEwen, however, found sympathizers for his charges. *The experiment* was supported by artists such as Tristan Tzara, Henry Kahnweiler, Michael Leiris and William Fagg. McEwen was aware, however, that *the experiment* was not over and that appropriate solutions should be sought so that the *inner vital forces* of the artist could develop as fully as possible.



Fig. 2. *Cymbal Sound*, Charles Fernando, oil. Photo by Dariusz Skonieczko

In 1962, fate brought him together with Joram Mariga, an extraordinary man who perfectly fitted into the world of views and concepts of Frank McEwen. Joram Mariga was an agricultural engineer working in the Nyenga Mountains. While working in the mountainous areas of present-day Zimbabwe, he came across rich deposits of soapstone. He started using it for carving. Initially, he made conventional sculptures, such as ashtrays, cups and realistic busts. He said the following about his work from that period: *I didn't know what art was then, I carved in stone for pleasure, not thinking seriously about the sale*.<sup>31</sup> It is known from his son Jonnah's account that he believed in the traditional Shona religion. He believed in the spirits of his ancestors, whom he contacted

<sup>30</sup> O. Sultan, *Life in stone...*, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

while sleeping. To have better contact with them, he always slept on a wooden headrest – *mutsago* – typical of the Shona people. He believed that spirits enhanced his creative abilities and introduced him to the spiritual world.<sup>32</sup> The powers that govern the physical and spiritual worlds are the two leading forces in Shona religion. Joram Mariga was greatly influenced by them. In addition, he believed that each stone has a soul that needs to be known for the sculpture to be authentic and powerful. One could say that the creative process brought to mind a dialogue that connected the artist with the material. It was stone that inspired him. Frank McEwen simply had to meet a man like Joram Mariga on his way – a man who would embody the idea of *inner vital forces*. The meeting took place in 1962, when Pat Pierce, the wife of a local farmer and friend of Frank McEwen, interested in the works of Joram, introduced the two men to each other. This is what Jonnah said about their first meeting: *Joram showed McEwen a mug he had made in which he served the visitor's tea. The English-style mug appealed to the Englishman, and the tea turned out to be delicious.*<sup>33</sup> McEwen asked Mariga to show him a bust he had sculpted. The bust was also made in a European style, so McEwen asked: *If you weren't doing it for me, but for your family or ancestors, what would this head look like?* Joram replied: *Then it would look completely different* and showed McEwen another sculpture, which he had created according to his African ideas.

In 1962, Frank McEwen found a man who became a working leader in the workshop for artists and at the same time drew attention to stone and the possibilities of its use. During this time, many talented sculptors appeared in the workshop, such as Bernard Takawira, John Takawira and Bernard Manyandure. The workshop quickly gained fame. McEwen ran it according to his experimental methods. He said:

(...) my method is different from the old model of teaching in art schools. Instead of pumping a lot of information into unformed minds, I stimulate the spirit and mind of my creators, I try to make them discover the spirit of art in themselves.<sup>34</sup>

At the same time, he tried to ensure that his artists were not inspired by the works exhibited in the National Gallery. This art movement was named *Shona sculpture*.

In 1968, McEwen decided to move the workshop to Vukutu, to a property acquired by his wife, Mary. The reason was the unfavorable attitude of the

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<sup>32</sup> The author interviewed Jonnah Mariga in March 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> M. Arnold, *Zimbabwean stone...*, pp. 33-34.

authorities to McEwen's activities and his workshop. Ian Smith's racist government believed the group was politically motivated and undermined the perceived lack of culture and traditions of black Rhodesians. The workshop was slowly running out of space and money, and the artists were being harassed by the police. In addition, Joram Mariga parted ways with Frank McEwen, unable to stand his principled methods, which meant that the workshop lost its natural leader. In addition, Mariga wanted to create a sculpture center in the Nyenge Mountains, which McEwen did not even want to talk about. Under such conditions, McEwen feared, on the one hand, the repression of the authorities, and on the other, fearing that his charges would start doing commercial work to earn a living, he decided to move to hard-to-reach mountains.

*Shona sculpture* was a great success in 1971. In Paris, an exhibition was held at the Rodin Museum, which received rave reviews, and all the exhibits were sold. In 1973, Frank McEwen, discouraged by financial and political problems, decided to leave Rhodesia, never to return to it.<sup>35</sup> He left with his wife to Toulon, where he bought a yacht that he named *Chupungu*. Frank McEwen died in a small seaside resort - Ilfracombe, in the North Devon coast in England, on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1994.

### Lazarus Takawira

Lazarus Takawira was born in 1952 in Zimbabwe, Nyanga, and came from the Shona people. He was the younger brother of John and Bernard Takawira, students of Frank McEwen. Lazarus met him in the early 1970s. He was a police officer at the time. His intelligence and imposing posture (he is almost 2 meters tall) foretold him a career in this formation. During conversations with his brothers and McEwen, however, he began to think about leaving the police and starting an artistic career. It was a huge dilemma because working in the police gave him secure family support and a relatively high social rank. However, he considered the struggle for independence of his nation, and did not want to continue working as a policeman out of loyalty towards it. Years later, he said that it was an impulse of the heart, that he wanted to be an artist because he felt happy in this role.

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<sup>35</sup> The war for independence began in Rhodesia, ending only in 1980 with the election of Robert Mugabe as president -<http://www.zim.gov.zw/index.php/en/my-government/government-ministries/about-zimbabwe/460-history-of-zimbabwe?showall=1> [accessed: 25.06.2023].

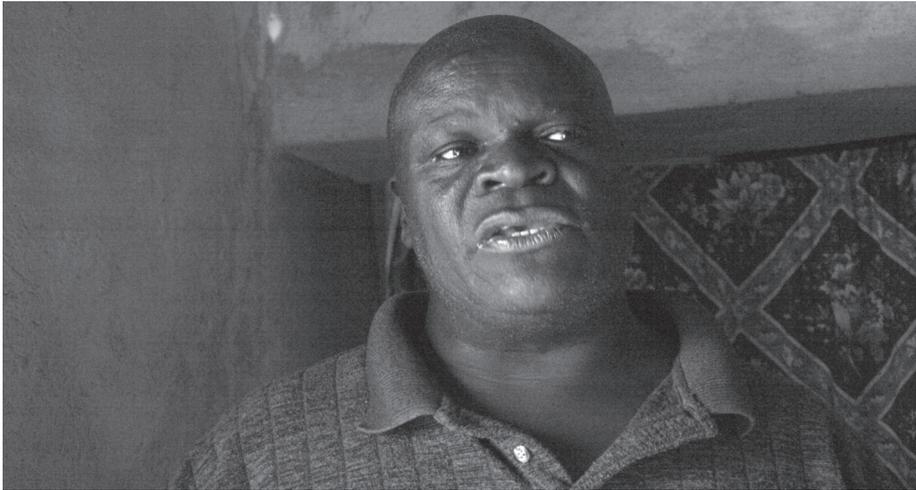


Fig. 3. Lazarus Takawira at his Workshop in Ruwa. Photo by Dariusz Skonieczko

He officially began learning sculpture in 1974 under the supervision of his brothers.<sup>36</sup> However, by his own admission, his first teacher was his mother – Amai Takawira.<sup>37</sup> Her influence is visible in all his works, dominated by themes related to femininity in various aspects of this concept. He himself admitted: *I have never sculpted any man; all my work is related to women. My first teacher was a woman.*<sup>38</sup> Just as his mother was his first teacher, Frank McEwen was his great mentor. McEwen was also a promoter for the artist and the man who made him realize what art is. Lazarus Takawira emphasized his importance by saying: *Today I am one of the best artists, but it would be a mistake and tactless if I forgot about him now.*<sup>39</sup> The influence of McEwen's teachings and methods on the work of the Zimbabwean was noticed by Celia Winter Irving. In her opinion, Takawira's *works are not the result of an academic mode of study. They are more in line with the atmosphere of Greek marbles or sculptures by Rodin or Epstein.*<sup>40</sup> Indeed, his work escapes any classification, and the process of their creation is dictated solely by inner vital forces.

<sup>36</sup> C. Winter-Irving, *Stone Sculpture...*, p. 137.

<sup>37</sup> Amai Takawira, mother of John, Bernard and Lazarus Takawira, deals with pottery and, occasionally, sculpture. One of her terracotta sculptures is in McEwen's Collection at the British Museum in London. B. Joosten, *Sculptors...*, p. 134.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Lazarus Takawira, conducted by the author in Ruwa in August 2008.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> C. Winter Irving, *Lazarus Takawira - Master of Serene Madonna*, Celia Winter Irving and Lazarus Takawira, 2001, p.1.

Lazarus Takawira's favorite stones were leopoldite, springstone and opal. He created sculptures both on a large garden scale and on a small several-centimeter scale. In fact, he never added a pedestal to them. His works were often a combination of the natural features of the stone, such as shape and color, with elements made by himself.

The artist's works depicting human figures were far from naturalistic, rather capturing the body in a pose characteristic for a given action. Let us take the female figure in *She is taking a bath* as an example. The artist showed a female figure made in opal, bathing in a river, according to an old African custom. In this work, we see a slightly bent woman with her hands in a gesture of washing herself with water just taken from the river. At the same time, the figure has hands and arms arranged in a way that suggests that the water, marked by the rough planes left on the hair, arms and thigh, is cold. The figure has female shapes typical for Lazarus Takawira: round buttocks in a tight skirt, made in detail by the artist, stopped in the phase of hip movement. The whole figure gives the impression of innocent frivolity, which is suggested by the newly born femininity.

In a leopoldite sculpture entitled *Old Auntie*, Lazarus Takawira depicted a symbol of certain marital duties rather than a specific old aunt. The meaning of the sculpture is reflected in the artist's words: *the sculpture shows what happened in the beginning between me and my wife. We fought. We told each other what was right and what was wrong, and that's why we're together.*<sup>41</sup>



Fig. 4. *Old auntie*, Lazarus Takawira, soapstone.  
Photo by Dariusz Skonieczko

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Lazarus Takawira conducted by the author in Ruwa, August 2008.

*She is taking a bath* and *Old Auntie* are Lazarus Takawira's characteristic sculptural comments on women and femininity – movement, gesture carved in stone and a moment of transformation through life experiences. A sculpture similar to *Old Auntie* was made by Takawira at the *Between good and evil*<sup>42</sup> international sculpture workshop, which took place in 2010 in an agritourism center near Piotrków Trybunalski. Lazarus sculpted it in one day, even in a few hours.

*Muroora* is a work depicting a daughter-in-law. In Shona culture, this is a unique character. In ancient times, the husband's father had the right to spend the first night with his daughter-in-law. To this day, although this custom is no longer cultivated, the issue remains quite sensitive and is a frequent topic of passionate conversations. Lazarus Takawira's work shows the head of a young woman with characteristic hair. The daughter-in-law looks coquettish and at the same time defiant, as if she wanted to say: *Come and get me if you're not afraid*. This is the artist's commentary on this interesting and at the same time compelling topic.



Fig. 5. *Muroora*, Lazarus Takawira, soapstone.  
Photo by Dariusz Skonieczko

Sculptures of women are not only representations of the fair sex. Lazarus Takawira tries to show men and their position in relation to the world of women. *One side is enough* is the artist's voice on polygamy. In a society where

<sup>42</sup> It was an international sculpture workshop organized by the Władysław Strzemiński Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź and the Art Dimension Association. Artists from Poland, Hungary, Zimbabwe and Spain, and students of the Academy of Fine Arts were invited.

it is allowed and often used, Takawira says that one wife is enough for him – he loves her and does not want more. Love for the chosen woman is a dream come true. If he was rejected, he would be a man who runs with the wind, submits his fate to chance and can only count on chance acquaintances. The fate of a man who lost his beloved woman was presented in the work *Running with the wind*.



Fig. 6. *One side is not enough*, Lazarus Takawira, verdite. Photo by Dariusz Skonieczko

The works of Lazarus Takawira do not only depict femininity and the world of women. In his works, he speaks about social and political issues, although, as he himself said, *I'm not talking about politics*. In a blue leopoldite sculpture entitled *The Judge*, he says that Zimbabweans are very fond of judging others, although they have no knowledge. It says that people in power are ignorant, they deal with issues they have no idea about and, because of this, the country is very bad. This is why *The Judge* keeps his eyes closed and remains in a closed pose suggesting selfishness. The essence of the performance is emphasized by the blue color of the stone, reflecting the coldness of the figure, which becomes expressive only after being washed with water. Celia Winter Irving writes the following about the sculpture *Land Hunger* made in opal: *the sculpture depicts huddled people sleeping on the earth that has always been theirs, protesting, trying to find their heritage, a land in terms of sweat and blood. It is a sculpture with strong political overtones, a drum voice speaking about human rights in an African context.*<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> C. Winter-Irving, *Lazarus...*, pp. 6-7.



Fig. 7. *The Judge*, Lazarus Takawira, leopoldite.  
Photo by Dariusz Skonieczko

The issue of heritage raised in the above quote is very important to Lazarus Takawira. In *Bathing*, he refers to traditional Shona customs, such as bathing in the river. Issues related to local beliefs are also a frequent theme of his works. This is the case with Tsuru's work, which formally depicts a rabbit curled up. However, the sculpture has a second meaning – a key theme in Shona beliefs – the rabbit represents the spirit of a deceased ancestor. The viewer has the impression that he or she sees a rabbit endowed with a magical aura. The characteristic pose of the rabbit curled up in a ball suggests a metamorphosis, a transition from one being to another. Lazarus Takawira, despite being a Christian, is a eulogist of the traditional values, lifestyle and beliefs of his people. It is very sad that the younger generations are departing from tradition: *they don't know our legends anymore, they don't drink Chibuku, they drink this new beer in large bottles, Scud. They don't know that a cow gives milk (...)*.<sup>44</sup>

Analyzing and summarizing the specificity of Lazarus Takawira's style, one should emphasize the exuberant hairstyles typical for his depictions of

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Lazarus Takawira conducted by the author in Ruwa, August 2008.

human figures. Most often, these hairstyles are presented in the form of an almost unprocessed raw part of the given stone, which the artist gives some shape and direction, framing a small face with only schematically marked eyes, mouth and nose. Similar heads placed on long slender necks have been described by Celia Winter Irving as *Egyptian in style with the eyes of Cleopatra and the mysterious face of Nephretiti*.<sup>45</sup> Add to this the unique shapes and locally grounded subject matter, and one might be tempted to argue that Lazarus Takawira is trying to understand not so much the mystery of the Sphinx, as the essence of African womanhood.

Lazarus Takawira died at his workshop in Ruwa on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

### Summary

In the works mentioned above, Lazarus Takawira's fresh perspective on traditional topics is present, alongside the influence of the teachings of Frank McEwen, who denied any imitation approach to tradition. It can be said that Lazarus Takawira became a completely new individual who did not so much reject traditional values as tried to modify and discuss them. He created new things inspired only by his intellect and the talent of his hands. Although Frank McEwen and Lazarus Takawira were not formally bound in the relationship of a master and an apprentice, it seems that their approach to art is the result of McEwen's teachings and beliefs, which were perfectly absorbed by Takawira. McEwen undoubtedly felt the great message flowing from the Zimbabwean's works, which is why he promoted him in the world. Takawira drew a lot from the culture of his people and his own soul, implementing the theories of inner vital forces in the fullest form.

The works of not only Lazarus Takawira, but also other artists from Zimbabwe, allow us to look at a work of art as an autonomous object inspired by the surrounding reality, being the voice of the creator of a social event. Such an artifact is embedded not only in the present, but also in the spirituality of the people and their traditions. It is a pictorial expression of the perception of both material and extrasensory space. Such art, based largely on intuition, shows the world through the eyes of the artist's soul. Artifacts become a materialization of the sculptors' thoughts and beliefs. The theory of internal vital forces, assuming the rejection of all aesthetic influences, allowed for the full expression of the artist's inner world.

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<sup>45</sup> C. Winter-Irving, *Lazarus...*, pp. 5-6.

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## SZTUKA LAZARUSA TAKAWIRY W ŚWIETLE TEORII WEWNĘTRZNYCH SIŁ WITALNYCH FRANKA MCEWENA (streszczenie)

Frank McEwen zaczął tworzyć teorię wewnętrznych sił witalnych w latach 30. w Paryżu, gdzie współpracował z P. Picassem, F. Legerem, J. Miro i C. Brancusim - artystami zainspirowanymi sztuką archaiczną i prymitywną. Jego koncepcja wpisywała się w nauki Carla Junga, który dostrzegał wiele aspektów z manifestowaniem sztuki przez ludy prymitywne związane z witalnością i spontanicznością tej sztuki. McEwen szukał miejsca, gdzie artyści nie ulegaliby wpływom i inspiracjom innych artystów. W latach 50. Znalazł takie miejsce w Rodezji Południowej, gdzie pracował nad powstaniem Galerii Narodowej w Salisbury. Mieszkający tam Szonowie wyrażali swoją ekspresję artystyczną w formie tańca i muzyki nie zaś sztuk plastycznych.

Frank McEwen stworzył tam szkołę rzeźbiarską dla miejscowej ludności, która miała się inspirować codziennym życiem i otaczającym ich światem w sposób w jaki oni go rozumieci. Postrzegali dzieło sztuki jako swego rodzaju drogowskazu w życiu społecznym, a artystę jako inżyniera i komentatora rzeczywistości.

Z każdym artystą pracował indywidualnie starając się nie wywierać presji na ich proces twórczy. W 1971 r. jego szkoła odniosła sukces. Na wystawę w Muzeum Rodina w Paryżu publiczność zareagowała entuzjastycznie, a wszystkie obiekty zostały sprzedane. Artyści tacy jak Joram Mariga, Tapfuma Gutsa, Bernard Takawira, Henry Munyaradzi zostali gwiazdami. Każdy z nich reprezentował swój odrębny i indywidualny styl. Artyści ci przekazywali idee Franka McEwena kolejnym pokoleniom. Przedstawicielem kolejnej generacji był Lazarus Takawira, który porzucił karierę w rodezyjskiej policji na rzecz zostanie rzeźbiarzem. Kierowany intuicją i z wsparciem Franka McEwena stworzył indywidualne uniwersum, w którym centralne miejsce zajmowały kobiety. Jego prace wystawiane były m.in. w Muzeum Rodina, Banku Światowym w Nowy Jorku, Muzeum Afrykańskim w Belgii czy w Muzeum Mumbaju w Indiach.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rzeźba, Afryka, kultura, tradycja, wystawa, warsztat

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