

# GALERIE MITTERRAND

## WALLEN MAPONDERA

*CHIKOKOKO (Little Pleasures that Counts)*

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PRESS RELEASE

As we were growing up with my siblings, we were privileged enough to have experienced both urban and country life. In the city, not many people owned a television set. We were not allowed to stay out late with other kids of our age to watch ezomgidho (our favorite musical program on television) at our neighbor's place. By the time when almost every household could afford a television set, we were only interested in watching evening programs because games kept us entertained during day time after school and on weekends. In the rural area, we played games when we were herding cattle. Knowledge is imparted in various forms at different stages of life. One of these forms is through playing games. Before technology took over, games have always been a way of teaching children different cognitive and physical life skills such as leadership skills, alertness and bodily stamina through play. I am fascinated by traditional games in Zimbabwe which are similar to those played in most parts of Africa.

Some of the games we used to play as kids include nhodo, raka-raka, hwishu and tsoro. As much as games are fun, they are also packed with emotions. The winner will always be happy and the looser will be sad but at the end of the day, players remain friends. The way failure and success is handled in these games is a valuable moral which is also pertinent in later stages of life. People do not always get what they want, sometimes we fail and sometimes we win.

The exhibition *Chikokoko (Little Pleasures That Counts)* derive the name from a game called Pada. It is a game whereby a set of eight rectangle and square shapes are drawn next to each other on the ground, be it by hand on sand or by chalk on slab. The player will be throwing a small and flat stone (mubhoga) in each box starting with the closest to the player, hops on one leg to the end of these boxes and back, collects the mubhoga on the way back and then throw it in the next closest box until the player has finished throwing the mubhoga in all the boxes. When the player throws the mubhoga and misses the box, it is considered a failed attempt and the player's opponents will then play. The player will resume play after all the opponents have played and failed. When the player has finished throwing and collecting the mubhoga in all the boxes, only then will the player be eligible to throw the mubhoga while blind folded. If the mubhoga lands in one of the boxes, this box is known as chikokoko and no other player is allowed to set foot in that box except for the owner. The player starts again to throw the mubhoga from the nearest box to attain more zvikoko (Plural of chikoko). When playing, the player is allowed to stand on two legs or even sit if he or she wants to.

The chikokoko becomes the players pride because they chant some boring words while standing in the chikokoko. To some, the chants become encouragement to play harder but to some the chant can be dispiriting. It is a combination of hard work and precision for one to have a chikokoko. The player who would have chikokoko in most of the boxes will be the winner of the game, and besides, it leaves other players without boxes to lend on as there will be few or no boxes at all.

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I personally equate the sensation of accomplishment that one gets when having a chikoko to that of simple pleasures that counts, simple pleasures we do not often pay attention to, identify, acknowledge and enjoy their happenings. A person will appreciate being able to do simple things such as breathing, talking and peeing when he or she is sick and facing difficulties in doing so. Most of the times simple pleasures are overshadowed by constant search for big opportunities, money and all other things that comes with having it (house, car, travelling), whereas having a glass of water after a long walk can be fulfilling for a moment. A poem by William Martin resonates well to the chikoko idea. He wrote;

*“Do not ask your children to strive for extraordinary lives.  
Such striving may seem admirable, but it is the way of foolishness.  
Help them instead to find the wonder and the marvel of ordinary life.  
Show them the joy of tasting tomatoes, apples and pears.  
Show them how to cry when pets and people die.  
Show them the infinite pleasure in the touch of a hand.  
And make the ordinary come alive for them.  
The extraordinary will take care of itself”*

In some artworks which form the *Chikokoko* body of work, I used different kinds of fabric for the background to resemble how clothes add or subtract value to a person. People feel confident and contented when they are dressed nicely. I collected off-cut fabric that was used to make clothes from local tailors. Clothes define and classify people, for example; one can quickly judge that a person is holy through wearing a church uniform. Clothes are really a big deal hence I used fabric off-cuts as a background. Something which connects to *chikokoko* erects differently from the background on each work, something opening up possibilities of new and simple pleasures. I glued a layer of newsprint paper on top of the fabric and used a grinder to reap the paper off. The paper does not fall off completely, in some parts it leaves the fabric visibly open and in some parts it leaves it blur. The background becomes less dominant, leaving my focal point outstanding and suggesting the need for new simple pleasures indeed.

Interestingly, when people agree on playing pada, each player carefully finds a mubhoga which lands firm when thrown in one of the boxes, a mubhoga which does not roll onto other unwanted boxes. The player entrusts the chosen mubhoga to get the job done. I liken the process of choosing the mubhoga and trusting it to make the player win the game to a lot of everyday situations. Deciding on food to make for dinner, clothes to wear on a date and choosing a perfect spot to watch the sun set are all examples of mubhoga because they are meant to impress. My initial plan in this body of work was to identify, comment and encourage simple things that bring pleasure in life. As I worked, I moved beyond the surface and the ordinary. I realized that *chikokoko* can be both simple and extraordinary. As William Martin affirmed ‘the extraordinary will take care of itself’, I believe that the value placed on ordinary things transforms them into extraordinary. Spending time with family might be simple and ordinary because we get to see them often, but those moments can be priceless depending on how we value them. When one is gone, that is when most of us treasure the moments we spent with them.

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