

DIGITAL **AGNES**

Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University
agnes.queensu.ca

Chaka Chikodzi

SPEAKERS

Chaka Chikodzi, Brent Raycroft

KEYWORDS

Kingston artist, African diaspora, sculpture, time travel

TRANSCRIPT

[Music]

Chaka Chikodzi: Geologists, they say the stone is about 3.5 billion years old. Stone has many layers that are embedded, just like a tree. I believe it has had a life. It has its own history. It has its own sense of time. I'm trying to see whether this stone can transport me to the past or transport me into the future.

[Music]

It's going to stop raining. That's what the weatherman says.

[Music]

I've been here since 6:30. We arrived here. Yeah, just waiting for a 40-foot container load of stone coming from -- all the way from Zimbabwe. I'm born and raised in Zimbabwe. I have a studio in a town called Mvurwi. Zimbabwe means "house of stone." The name of our country comes from the Shona Empire.

The stone I work with comes from one of the biggest volcanic regions in the world that did not erupt. And when it rose, it rose in many different layers. And each layer would have rose at different times of the year. So the different minerals now determine the colour and the grain structure. We're not necessarily using any equipment or machinery to lift these pieces. We are using what we have.

[Music]

My first introduction to stone carving was through my older brother. He apprenticed with our uncle. It was the only kind of opportunity that was presented to me. If I can hammer a rock into shape, I can go buy myself a pair of shoes. I could see myself going places with it. It's been many months of putting it together, so a closed chapter. Then I got to move on to the next. So if you ever heard of lithium, this is it. This is lithium right here, lepidolite. So when they polish, they turn purple. So I guess I feel like it's my birthday.

[Laughter]

Yeah, don't judge a book by its cover. You see this and you think it's just a rock. Right? [tongue clicks] Maybe you're probably seeing like 0.1% of an object. Right? Because the rest is all inside. You have to go in there and discover it. Yeah, a little piece of Africa.

[Music]

I have experienced 22 Canadian winters. I arrived with a small suitcase, a pair of pliers, the wire cutter, and the chising hammer, and a few pairs of jeans. Cup of tea.

[Laughter]

No sweater.

[Laughter]

The longer I was away from home, the more connected I was with the stone. We were colonized by the British for almost 100 years, 1980s was when we became independent. That's when commercialization of the work happened. People like my grandfather, he was a sculptor but not by profession. He just made sculptures for the family or for the homestead. He never felt the need to actually sign his work. It was something that was about us together.

Hey, Brent.

Brent Raycroft: How are you?

Chaka: I'm good.

Brent: I'm just tidying up the dirt around the bottoms.

Chaka: Thank you. I'm going to give you some instructions on how to take care of your sculptures. Using a finer rust, so it gets rid of all the bigger marks.

Brent: It's really workable.

Chaka: Yeah. That's the joy of it.

When I first started showing my work, I was trying to show my work through galleries but then it wasn't really working out. But then I decided to show the work direct to the people myself. What's really important to me is, like, the small relationships that I create with people.

I never expected my work to be part of a permanent collection for museum like the Agnes. It was a big milestone for me. I created this piece in response to the African Lang collection. The easy part.

The name of this piece is *Munhu munhu nekuda kwe munhu*, meaning "people are people because of people."

It's one of the proverbs that is actually universal. You could find it in Nigeria, in Kenya.

The Serpentine, it has many different minerals that contributed to the grain structures that you see. There's a bit of iron in it mixed in with copper, probably oxidized over a very long period of time. The stone is the first source of inspiration. The stone hasn't changed me. It has brought me places. Even when I'm long gone, I know that my sculptures will outlive me.

[Music]