



MAONERO ANGU (MY REALITY II)

RICHARD MUDARIKI: OUT OF AN ART HISTORY BOOK



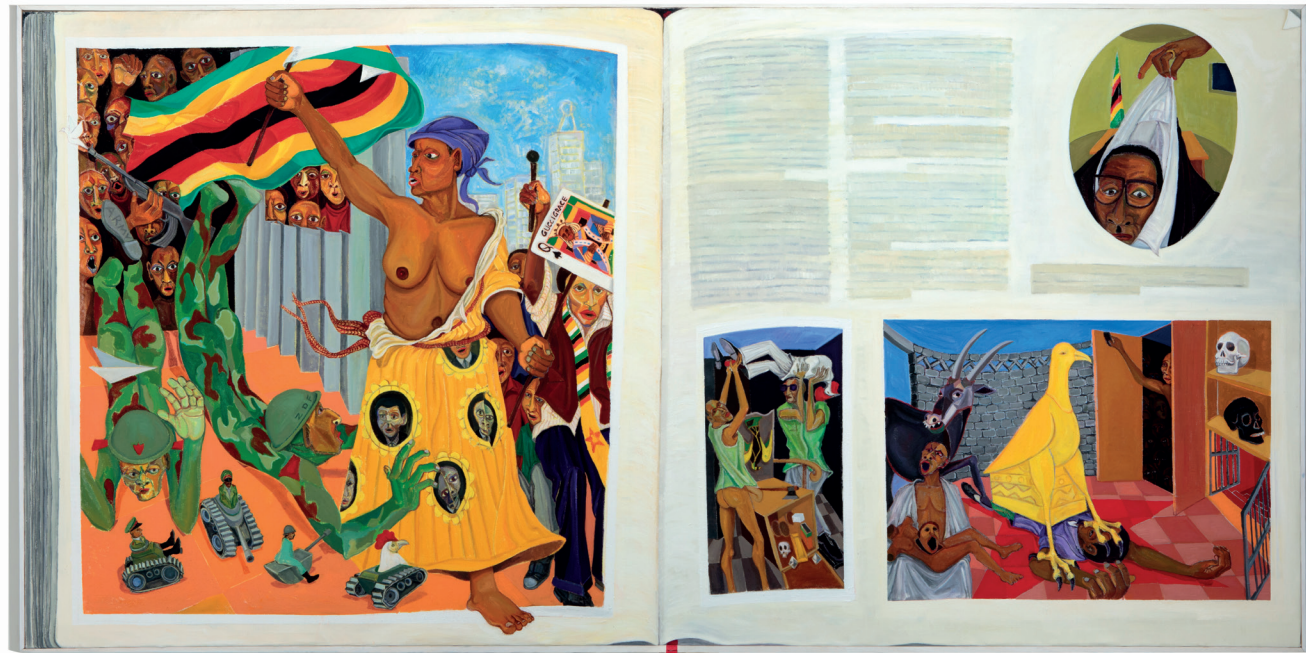
FACING PAGE: *Portrait*, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 140 x 120cm. **THIS PAGE:** *Monopoly*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 120 x 140cm. All images courtesy of the artist & Barnard.

Richard Mudariki's paintings are painters' paintings – full of in-house painterly jokes that play with *trompe l'oeil* and illusionism, break the constraints of the frame with three-dimensional additions and are replete with references to other paintings.

Graphically bright colour, swift application and illustrational style belie their serious critique on the state of the world, but reference a kinship to the post World War I German *Neue Sachlichkeit* painters Otto Dix and George Grosz and a growing family of contemporary African satirical commentators. Mudariki's Zimbabwean compatriot Kufa Makwavarara, South African Ayanda Mabulu, Kenyan Joseph Bertiers, and a plethora of painters from the DRC such as Joseph Kinkonda, Sapin Makengele and Chéri Samba provide biting critique on the excesses and corruption

of politicians both locally and globally and serve to provide an alternative to the propaganda of state-held media.

Like Samba, Mudariki often includes himself in his work and in this body of work the artist's studio is a central *leitmotif*. Mudariki notes that "the studio is a unique space where the artist and his subject can get intimate where new ideas and images are born" – it embodies a private space of reflection where the artist is often in direct conversation with his subjects.



THIS PAGE: *History Book*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 305 x 153cm. **FACING PAGE:** *Red Studio I*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 120 x 140cm. All images courtesy of the artist & Barnard.

Being present in the studio with his 'sitter', be it Mugabe or Obama, gives the artist room to claim his imaginings and invent a range of scenarios. Surrounded by canvases arranged like stage flats, he projects everyday objects and events into the larger theatre of world politics while through allusion to the canon of art he references the historical field. The deft appropriations from painting and printmaking range from Manet's *Olympia* to Hokusai's woodblock print *The Wave*. *Red Studio I* and *Red Studio II* loosely allude to Matisse paintings, already packed with references to other paintings, but here amalgamated with Velasquez's *Las Meninas*, with Mudariki as Velasquez and Obama as King.

History Book takes a leaf, quite directly, out of a history of art book. Over three metres wide the painting monumentalises an open illustrated book and co-opts Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* to a new Zimbabwean uprising. A bare breasted, dark skinned Liberty waving the Zimbabwean flag leads the people past corrugated iron shacks while the military sprawl in disarray at her feet. On the

opposing page – a throne spills a skull, coffin and black diamonds, while *jongwe*, the cockerel of the liberation movement, of Zanu-PF, is held aloft and the golden Zimbabwe bird crushes a figure underfoot.

At first glance Mudariki's paintings are simply delineated, but in the detail, it becomes evident that the play of meaning is many layered. Ostensibly largely critical of Mugabe's regime *History Book* engages deeper historical strata. An antelope, rendered in Picassoesque abstraction is, in effect, victim of another looting, albeit an artistic one, and here it returns home to the Great Zimbabwe Ruins. In *Monopoly* the board game, co-opted as a literal play on 'white monopoly capital', presents the white industrialist's top hat as shadowed by a pith helmet signalling the colonial origin of European wealth.

Mudariki's critique thus expands beyond the continent to the global stage. In *Turbulent Water* the sea of blue within the painting's frame is filled with newspaper paper boats headlined with news of the crises produced by Brexit and Trump. The edge of the

painting has a real tap attached to it from which water appears to pour into a bucket in a queue of paintings of such containers – an image familiar to Cape Town's drought-aware audience.

In other work social media provides the screen for comment. *On WhatsApp* the image of what's on the braai reveals our brains are cooking, while *On Facebook* the 'press play' arrow waits to upset a house of cards. While these show a witty and contemporary relevance it is *Portrait*, a simple, almost monochromatic rendering of a meticulously dressed Robert Mugabe in pinstriped suit and brogues that holds the philosophical arena of this exhibition. Mugabe, hidden behind the artist's drawing board, is rendered incompletely on a crumpled piece of paper. Possibly a failed version retrieved from the waste paper basket the image reminds us of the challenges the artist faces in representing what is before him.

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