

# MODERN IDENTITY IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY

## MODERN

The term “modern” seems often reserved for so-called developed, industrialized countries of the Western World. This notion is most likely based on a form of thinking that, to put it mildly, could be termed as “traditional.”

The term stems from the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century; “The Modern Break Through” was used as a title for the revolutionary developments within European arts and culture in literature, painting, music, and visual arts in general.

Meanwhile, the rest of the world, with the exception of North America, was considered “primitive”. “Primitive” people lived in Africa, Asia, and Oceania and had cultures that resembled those of Europe from many years ago, cultures that had long since vanished.

When British colonizers, lead by Cecil Rhodes, entered the land north of South Africa at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they stumbled upon a large city constructed of large granite stones. In this city, they found a number of beautiful and very tall bird sculptures made out of soapstone. Archaeologists soon “proved” that this sophisticated structure and its amazing pieces of stone sculptures were the creation of Westerners who had previously inhabited the land. It was believed that the sculptures could not possibly be the products of primitive people.

We now know – and have known for many years – that they were wrong, of course. “Great Zimbabwe” – the big house of stone – was indeed a creation of a highly organized kingdom of the early centuries of what in Europe is called the medieval times. This goes for the great building constructions as well as the sculptures themselves.

Primitive? Not at all.

A society different from Europe and the “civilized” world? Certainly, but its cultural and societal qualities might have been acknowledged were it not for the true reasons behind colonization of these

countries: the search for mineral riches and the exploitation of these riches by “modern” methods. These methods included deceiving a king into forfeiting ownership of lands in a culture where ownership of land was meaningless: all land belonged to communities which were ruled by a chief and the right to land was distributed to families based on their needs. The story of how Cecil Rhodes “bought “ the land from King Lobengula for a shockingly low sum of money bares witness to this.

So, already then, the people of that region had a very modern identity, only it was not the “type of modern identity” fitting the interests of Rhodes and his colonial back-ups in the United Kingdom.

## **IDENTITY**

What constitutes the identity of a people?

Clearly, history and traditions are vital elements of a people’s identity. But it is also of vital importance that this identity is constantly developed through, at minimum, learning about the society’s political and cultural history as well as the contemporary developments in both.

With this exhibition, we wish to show you a modern identity through arts, stone sculptures from Zimbabwe, so that you with your own modern eyes will be able to recognize an amazing example of art, which is universal in its language, humanistic and friendly in its approach, and speaks clearly with a proud voice from artists, who wants to represent their beloved country, Zimbabwe, to the world.

The modern identity of a people is not created through world-class art alone.

Of equal importance are the questions of education and health care.

A few facts may be illuminating here:

During the 100 years of British colonial rule, 200 secondary schools were established in the colony called Rhodesia.

After independence was won in 1980 and the modern Republic of Zimbabwe was declared, A period of sustained social and economic development followed. During the first 8 years after independence, 200 secondary schools were built and established EACH year. The new independent government knew wisely that education is the key

to develop a country and its people. Simultaneously health care institutions such as local clinics and hospitals in the rural areas were established in order to conquer the threat of people dying all too young.

Today, all this pays off abundantly. The people of Zimbabwe can read and write and are educated, and thus able to take an active part in their country's development, which will lead Zimbabwe to a prosperous future without killing each other but by believing in humanistic values and the concept of national healing, which is a very substantial part of the life of every Zimbabwean citizen today

All this is reflected in the exhibition you may experience here, stone sculptures created by highly talented artists, working in the stones from their country, stones, which were created by nature millions of years ago, but which are today being used by master sculptors to bring messages through art to all of us in the rest of the world, telling us that Africa is Modern, has something to tell us all, has humour, sincerity, warmth, and thoughts about a future for all mankind.

We are pleased to introduce you to the Master Sculptors of Zimbabwe so that you can not only acknowledge but also feel in your heart the Modern Identity of one of the peoples of Sub Saharan Africa in all their cultural and humanistic wealth.

With this exhibition we want to touch your hearts and minds in acknowledging that the country of Zimbabwe wants to reach out to the world in many ways, and the way we contribute to this is through the magnificent modern stone sculpture, which is unique for the country, but also universal in its language, reaching out to all of us at all levels.

## **MODERN IDENTITY**

Zimbabwean stone sculpture art, when it is the work of the most talented master artists, is a true modern identity creator for the people of Zimbabwe, with its unique combination of African traditions and its modern expression, we feel the pride of the artists while their art tells a story of times gone by and of a future full of promises. This is especially true if we acknowledge that nowadays, modern art is for people everywhere and not just for those living in certain areas of our world.