

ARTPEACE AND FRIENDS

THE RICH GET RICHER WHILE THE POOR GET POORER is certainly true in Zimbabwe. This article focuses on the life and living conditions of one artist who has been my main link with the group over many years. Mike Masedza gives an insight into his background and current struggle to survive. There must be thousands more like him in Zimbabwe and worse in other parts of the world. Despite a promising start after Independence, Zimbabwe's standard of living and human rights record during and since the Mugabe era has steadily deteriorated.

MIKE'S STORY: I was born on the 14th of October 1967 in Rusape in eastern Zimbabwe. I grew up in a rural area herding cattle and goats, making my own toys by moulding animals and birds. I carved wood with traditional tools and made yokes etc. Soon after sitting my 'O' level exams, I left school when I was seventeen. I wanted to attend a music school but failed to get the fees. That's when I was introduced to the late great master Joseph Ndandarika by my uncle who was his friend. I was apprenticed to Joseph for five years and was lucky to rub shoulders with many famous first-generation artists as they so respected his talent'. (Ndandarika exhibited extensively both nationally and internationally, having works in important collections worldwide).



I am the sixth born in a family of six boys and two girls. Six children are now late including parents. I am left with my sister who is now married and lives far



away. My late brothers and sisters all left their children totalling fifteen in my custody - some now have their own kids. I have four children, two boys and two girls. I have six grandchildren - my extended family amounts to twenty-five. My late wife Grace died on the 11th of September 2001. I will never forget that day as it's when Bin Laden attacked the USA. She was only twenty-five when she died of a heart problem. Miss her so much!

LIVING CONDITIONS: I used to rent two rooms with my second wife (35) and teenage son (13) but am now reduced to one. Electricity is normally off from 6am to 8pm. Sometimes I do piece jobs in construction and dig wells. I spread harvest cobs on top of the roof - then pack into bags



so that they can fit in my one room. Sometimes I sell surplus cobs depending on the harvest but this season I cannot sell because the harvest is low. Church friends occasionally give us food. We do not have running water and



draw water from a well in the yard (above). I fill a bucket to flush the outside toilet (above right). My wife travels to clean someone's home earning 10\$ for a forty-hour week. She sleeps there weekdays as she cannot afford the daily 2\$ bus fare. At least it helps put some food on the table.



LEFT: Mike's wife Emma, preparing a meal in their kitchen – once an abandoned chicken run with son Maita ('Thank You').

MIKE'S DREAM: He has always lived in cramped rented conditions and dearly wants his own home. In better times when we organised large exhibitions at various URC churches in the UK, he managed to scrape some money together to buy a 'stand' – a plot of land to build a modest home. With the help of a bricklayer friend, he is in the process of building walls for one room

(right) but ideally needs two rooms before he can move in with his family. However, this room needs about 400 more bricks to complete plus window frame and glass, door, roofing sheets and timber. However, he has only 5\$ in his pocket! His current rent is 40\$ a month often in arrears, so he is continually fighting a losing battle especially when the estimate to finish the house is around 1000\$ (£820.) He is tired of living in wretched conditions. Mike's strong Christian faith is the glue that holds Artpeace together. Despite his own plight he has given so much of himself to others whilst helping many young aspiring artists outside the group.



If anyone sympathises with Mike's situation and feels able to help, please let me know. He is now fifty-five years old and average life expectancy for men in Zimbabwe is sixty-two. *Mike deserves a helping hand to lift the family's morale and ease their hardship by radically improving their living conditions. There is no state aid in Zimbabwe.*

THE SOUTHWARK CATHEDRAL SHOP is well stocked with Artpeace work at present but sadly footfall is light. I have lots of small pieces in my shed for sale so should anyone be looking for a unique present, I am sure I could oblige! Lots of talented artists – friends of Artpeace are adding their own style of work in stunning stones. From left: 'The Thinker' by Godwin Nasho, 'Elephant' in lepidolite by Friday Chingwaru and 'Dancing Couple' by Tawanda Mhandu. **Johnston Simpson**

