

VAN DOREN
WAXTER

HYPERALLERGIC

In Swirling Canvases, Gareth Nyandoro Expresses the Rhythms of Labor

Teeming with energy, Nyandoro's works express a disquieting otherworldliness, suspended at the fragile cusp between reality and dreams.

by Zoë Hopkins 7/27/2021



Gareth Nyandoro, "Kubatana Fence Makers" (2021), ink on cut paper mounted on canvas, 92 x 150 inches (all images courtesy the artist and Van Doren Waxter)

Situated somewhere between painting, etching, and collage, Gareth Nyandoro's artworks buzz with a din of textures that threaten each canvas with the possibility of rupture. Gestural swathes of ink writhe in a frenetic dance with sinewy pieces of paper and the razor thin striations of Nyandoro's hallmark *kucheka-cheka* technique — a method of cross hatching formed by small incisions into the canvas, which Nyandoro then sponges over with

ink. Though discrete, these cuts enliven the canvasses with fraught urgency, leaving them vulnerable to bursting open.

Animated by observations of labor in his hometown of Harare, Nyandoro's latest show at Van Doren Waxter gallery is titled *Maworks*, after a Zimbabwean colloquialism that roughly translates to "producing for the everyday, and making what you need to survive." But despite these quotidian underpinnings, the scenes carry a disquieting otherworldliness, suspended at the fragile cusp between tangible reality and spectral dreams. The large scale scenes — collages of paper mounted on canvas — seem groundless, lacking any semblance of the cityscape one might expect in a painting based on Harare. In "Nyange 1" and "Nyange 2" (all works 2021), workers float with hushed swiftness through a landscape of swirling ink and explosive slashes, often on the verge of melting into these abstractions. In the latter canvas, the head of a worker bleeds into a dense, cloud-like swarm of paper shreddings, and in "Kubatana Fence Makers," the legs of one figure momentarily dematerialize into a flurry of etched lines.



Gareth Nyandoro, "Nyange 2" (2021), ink on cut paper mounted on canvas, 104 x 98 inches

Collectively titled *Slice*, ten 12 x 9-inch studies that are meticulously analytic yet improvisatory in feel, absorb us in the rhythms of Nyandoro's experimental methods. In these variations on the theme of Nyandoro's *kucheka-cheka* technique, horizontal incisions cut across intervals of ink that vary in saturation, density, and form. At times, the canvasses are bare except for the faint cuts and at others, they explode with thick congregations of ink. Though elegantly spare in aesthetic vocabulary, these compositions teem with energy, as if at any moment, life could spill out from behind those boldly determined cuts.



Gareth Nyandoro, "Zumbani" (2021), ink on cut paper mounted on panel, with artist's frame 48 1/2 x 48 inches

Gareth Nyandoro: MAWORKS continues at *Van Doren Waxter* (23 East 73rd Street, Upper East Side, Manhattan) through August 6.