

# **CHAPUNGU**

**nature, man, and myth**

**TRANSCRIPT OF  
AUDIO COMMENTARY**



# WELCOME FROM DR. PETER RAVEN

*Voice: Dr. Peter H. Raven, President*

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Welcome to the Missouri Botanical Garden and to our exhibition “Chapungu: Nature, Man, and Myth.” I’m Dr. Peter Raven, president of the Garden.

Use this cell phone commentary to learn a little more about these sculptors and their art, which come to us from the African nation of Zimbabwe.

I’ve been captivated by the beauty and interest of these Chapungu stone sculptures since I first saw them in 1989 at the world class Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden in Cape Town, South Africa.

In 2001, our Garden presented a major exhibition by Zimbabwe’s Chapungu Sculpture Park artists. Two of the sculptures from that time have become an important part of our permanent collection. They are in our azalea-rhododendron dell, near the tram shelter. The Chapungu art expresses feelings and experiences representative of life in Zimbabwe but at the same time is common to all people, no matter what your cultural heritage may be.

We’re privileged to host this new exhibition of stone sculpture, enhanced by the natural setting of our beautiful garden. We’re also delighted to host many of the artists who will be in residence here throughout the summer, giving workshops and demonstrations.

At the end of this audio commentary, listen for the prompt that allows you to tell us your thoughts. Your comments are very important to us.

Thanks for visiting and enjoy the Garden!

# INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

*Voice: Roy Guthrie, Director of Chapungu Sculpture Park*

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My name is Roy Guthrie. I'm a director of the Chapungu Sculpture Park. It is wonderful to return to the Missouri Botanical Garden, where many of our artists displayed their work for the first time in America in 2001.

Stone sculpture is the art medium that most represents the people of Zimbabwe. Many of our artists are from the Shona tribe. There are a few from the Ndebele tribe also.

Chapungu artists communicate in various forms of stone to combine contemporary art and themes with their ancient cultural heritage. With great skill and imagination, they convey the relationship between the two guiding forces of the physical world and the spiritual world.

This exhibition is grouped in three themes. Man and Nature, Man and Family, and Man and Myth.

And the first theme that you'll come to is Man and Myth. These pieces are located between the Ridgway Center there and the Climatron, along the magnolia walk. The sculptures here represent ancestral spirits, totem animals, creatures of legend, and the great Chapungu Bird as a protector and guiding spirit.

*(continued on next page)*

The second theme that you'll come to beyond the Climatron is nature itself. And here you'll find many depictions of animals which are dear to the artists, which they feel strongly about. One particularly moving piece is "Young Giraffe Playing" and it's moving because the artist is depicting a time fifty years ahead when those animals will no longer exist in Zimbabwe and he's almost warning people to protect these animals. So you'll see themes of that nature and other themes relating to the ecology and the animals struggle to survive in the situation today.

The third theme is all about family and you'll see some remarkable themes here from an aunt admonishing a young child; to the Muroora, the daughters-in-law bringing beer for a wedding for a celebration that's going to happen; through to a group of sisters meeting after a long period and discussing family affairs—a rather moving section of the exhibition.

Well, there is a sales component to the whole exhibition and that is in the Brookings Center behind the Climatron and here you'll find work by very famous artists, many of them have passes on already, really collectors' items. But also, work by unacknowledged artists and then those group of people in between who are striving to get a name for themselves and who are becoming well-known now also.

## ABOUT ZIMBABWE

*Voice: Roy Guthrie*

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Zimbabwe is a subtropical African country located in the southern central part of Africa, slightly above South Africa, below Zambia, to the west of Mozambique, and to the east of Angola. And it is a country which is subtropical, as I've said; it's on a plateau about 4,500 feet up. It has a wonderful climate with a long 7 months of winter, but beautiful weather during that time. And it is home to some of the great wonders of the world, like Victoria Falls which is acknowledged everywhere, and the Zimbabwe ruins and has been home to some of the great natural animals—the elephants, and the lions and all the great African animals. But, it is also home to one of the finest people in the world—the Shona people and the Ndebele people. And now acknowledged for its great stone sculpture, probably—I always say the politicians will disappear but the sculpture will be renowned for hundreds of years. And so, yes it is a wonderful small African country.

# THE MEANING OF CHAPUNGU

*Voice: Roy Guthrie*

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The word “Chapungu” is the Shona word for the Bateleur eagle. It’s an eagle which still exists in Africa in many of the low lying areas and we find it in Zimbabwe along the Zambezi valley and the Limpopo valley.

For the Shona people it’s a mythical bird, it’s a protecting bird, it’s a spirit bird, it’s a bird which the Shona revere and depict over and over again in their sculptures. So, its a very important omen much like the Native Americans revere the bald eagle in Africa and in Zimbabwe we revere the Bateleur eagle, the Chapungu.

# CHAPUNGU EXHIBITION

## SHIPPING, WEIGHT, AND INSTALLATION

*Voice: Roy Guthrie*

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The exhibit comes over in containers and the pieces are packed individually into large crates, wooden crates, and when they travel over the water, over the sea, they come across in containers. But once they are in the country, they're moved around from exhibition to exhibition on great big flatbeds still in their crates.

Most pieces weigh between 1,000 pounds and 8,000 pounds and in height they range between about 3 feet and 10 to 11 feet.

We install the pieces in botanical gardens on logs and we use forklifts and cranes depending on the size. If we go onto lawns we put down mats and we run the forklift onto the mats and we place them on logs. Logs are not cut down trees; they are trees which are storm damaged. We place the log and then we pin the sculpture to the log and we like logs because they are very organic and the sculpture is organic and it looks great on logs. So we normally use logs in terms of the bases and also the sculpture doesn't need polished surfaces and fancy bases to enhance it, it speaks for itself.

## THE STONES IN THE EXHIBITION

*Voice: Roy Guthrie*

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All of the stone comes from Zimbabwe. When we first started the sculpture movement 50 years ago we couldn't find stone. But today, there is stone found all over the country and stones of great beauty and different strengths and different hardnesses. So it ranges from the springstone, which is very hard serpentine, to the opal stone, which is a softer green serpentine, through to granites and dolomites and marbles and limestones and then some very unique stones like verdite, which is probably the rarest of the 3 great green stones; jade, malachite and verdite. Verdite is only found in 2 deposits in the world and the highest quality verdite comes from Zimbabwe.

So, the artists have used all of these different stones. The best artists prefer the hardest stones and so they don't work in the soft soap stones and soft serpentines, but use only the harder stones. But we are rich in stone; we have beautiful stones throughout the country.

# CHAPUNGU NIGHTS AND ARTIST WORKSHOPS

*Voice: Ann Walker*

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I'm Anne Walker, the Garden's Chapungu Exhibition Outreach Liaison. Join us for Chapungu Nights every Thursday evening now through September. Spend a summer evening in the Garden seeing the sculptures from 5:00 to 9:00 p.m. You can take a self-guided walking tour, watch the artists at work on Linnean Plaza, and enjoy cocktails and entertainment on Spoehrer Plaza. Dine outside on the patio of the Sassafras Café where some special African recipes will be on the menu. The Fountain Grill will serve hotdogs and hamburgers. Admission to Chapungu Nights is \$10.00 or \$5.00 for Garden members—food and drinks cost extra.

You might like to create your own original sculpture at one of our artist workshops this summer. No experience is required and artists and residents from the Chapungu Sculpture Park will guide you during informal 5 day classes, held Tuesday through Saturday, under a tent on Linnean Plaza. The workshop costs \$500, however membership does have its privileges—Garden members receive a discount. The fee includes a stone from Zimbabwe, a set of tools that you may keep, and personal instructions by a Shona artist.

For more details about Chapungu Nights and Artists Workshops visit our website at [www.mobot.org](http://www.mobot.org).

## ARTIST: GEDEON NYANHONGO IN HIS OWN WORDS

*Voice: Gedeon Nyanhongo, Chapungu Artist*

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I am Gedeon Nyanhongo. I come from a family of well-known Zimbabwean sculptors, including my sister Agnes and my father Claude. When I first started sculpting, I went with one of Zimbabwe's most critically acclaimed artists, Joseph Ndandarika, for three years. His guidance and influence gave me the confidence to follow my own path as an artist. In 1994, I was chosen to participate in the Chapungu artist resident program for a year. My work portrays the ever changing aspects of my culture. My work must mark the stages of my life. It also records the important stages of life around me.

I use the hardest, most durable stones so that people will be able to understand these things in the years to come. My art is inspired by human relationships, especially those among families. My subjects are full of spirit. My sculptures speak tenderly of parenthood, protection, innocence and human love. They also represent traditional Shona themes of spiritual guidance and direction, as in "Chapungu Protecting Family."

## ARTIST: COLLEN NYANHONGO IN HIS OWN WORDS

*Voice: Collen Nyanhongo, Chapungu Artist*

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I am Collen Nyanhongo. I come from a well known family of internationally recognized Zimbabwean sculptors.

Sculpture has always been part of my life. From when I was very young, I would sculpt for fun with my father Claude and my brothers and sisters. I sculpted with them after school in my free time. My father is my main inspiration to become a sculptor. I began studying how to sculpt under him, my brother Gideon and my sister Agnes. I sculpted with them on the weekends while I attended college. During that time, art collectors would come to our house or the galleries and purchase my sculptures.

When I completed college, I looked for a job as a salesperson at Chapungu Sculpture Park. Instead the director, Mr. Roy Guthrie, encouraged me to pursue my talents as an artist.

As I am working on a piece, I want to combine what the stone has in it with my artistic creativity and through the process the sculpture evolves.

The main subjects of my work are of the Shona spirits, nature, birds, animals and figures sculpted in an abstract form.

I choose to work with springstone, leopard stone, and lepidolite. From my sculptures, I want to help people to understand the culture of our ancestors, the day-to-day life of people and the interaction between man and nature.

**ARTIST: ROYAL KATIYO** IN HIS OWN WORDS

*Voice: Royal Katiyo, Chapungu Artist*

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to be recorded.

**ARTIST: NICOLAS KADSUNGURA** IN HIS OWN WORDS

*Voice: Nicolas Kadsungura, Chapungu Artist*

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to be recorded.

**ARTIST: EDDIE MASAYA** IN HIS OWN WORDS

*Voice: Eddie Masaya, Chapungu Artist*

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to be recorded.

# ARTIST: ARTHUR FATA IN HIS OWN WORDS

*Voice: Arthur Fata, Chapungu Artist*

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to be recorded.

# PLEASE LEAVE US YOUR FEEDBACK

*Voice: Dr. Peter H. Raven*

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Thank you for visiting. We hope that you have enjoyed the Garden and the beautiful Chapungu exhibition.

Your feedback will help guide us as we strive to improve ways to connect to YOU the visitor.

When you're ready, press 5-0-0, and then the pound key, to record comments about your experience, make suggestions for improvement, or leave questions about something you heard.

When you've finished recording, simply press the pound key to save your message. We'll be listening to it with interest.

Thanks very much for leaving your comments. We appreciate your visit!