

Press Release
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For immediate release

THE STARS ARE BRIGHT: NEW EXHIBITION OF YOUNG ZIMBABWEAN PAINTERS OF THE 1940s OPENS IN SHOREDITCH

Rare collection goes on show for first time in almost 70 years for a limited duration;
free admission



Barnabus Chiponza, *Tree Flowers* (1945). Photo: Debbie Sears

This month, a fascinating collection of rediscovered early works by young Zimbabwean painters will be seen by the public for the first time in almost seventy years. *The Stars are Bright: Zimbabwe through the eyes of its young painters from Cyrene (1940-1947)*, a free exhibition, opens at The Theatre Courtyard Green Rooms in Shoreditch on 15 July, one of many celebrations of London's arts world reopening this summer.

The Stars are Bright presents a collection of extraordinary paintings and drawings created by more than forty young Zimbabwean artists over a seven-year period and captures their unique perspectives on the changing world around them. It includes works by Samuel Songo, Kingsley Sambo, Timothy Dhlodhlo and others who went on to become the precursors to Zimbabwean Modern Art.

Having been preserved in the basement of the former St Michael and All Angels' Church, a six-minute walk from where they will now be displayed, the works have not been publicly exhibited together since the 1950s.

The Stars are Bright comes at a critical time to share the story of African artists and their work. It sheds much-deserved light on these young artists and this vital chapter of Zimbabwe's art history. After the exhibition, the artworks will tour Zimbabwe to be shown there for the first time since the 1940s.

Selected from a more substantial collection, the 25 large paintings and more than 50 smaller works were created while the artists were students aged 10 to 20 at Cyrene, a boys' mission school founded in 1940 near Bulawayo in colonial Zimbabwe (then known as Southern Rhodesia) by Edward "Ned" Paterson, a Scottish clergyman. Paterson, who was passionate about the visual arts, had the pupils take part in weekly art classes, making it one of the first African schools to incorporate art into the curriculum.

Inspired by the varied surrounding landscape, a country in the midst of change, and a rich practice of religion and folklore, the young men produced a unique and vast body of artwork out of their life and culture. This exhibition highlights the richness and variety of techniques, styles and themes, whilst offering an insight into key moments of Zimbabwe's life and culture during this colonial phase.

Just ten days after the lock-down on galleries has been lifted, *The Stars are Bright* joins the celebration of life returning to London. Various measures have been implemented to safeguard the health and safety of visitors, including the requirement to pre-book a time slot, a one-way route through the exhibition and reminders at the venue about social distancing. Children are welcome and will find engaging activities throughout the exhibition.

Exhibition co-curators Georgia Ward, Chiedza Mhondoro and Jessica Ihejatorh say:

"When we began organising The Stars are Bright, which takes its title from a work in the exhibition by Musa Nyahwa dated 1945, we could never have imagined just how much the world would change around us. It is a critical time to share the work of Black artists past and present. We encourage viewers to let their imagination take inspiration from the environment in which the artworks were made. The Cyrene paintings remind us that there is no single story of African Art. This exhibition is an exploration of life, the natural world, spirituality and change, all guided by Zimbabwe's bright young stars."

The Stars are Bright is produced by Idili Live and presented by The Belvedere Trust. Trustee Alex Gabriele says:

"This exhibition and collection of paintings exemplifies The Belvedere Trust's values: excellence in education and inspiration of many young artists. In these difficult times, we want to create a safe space for people to enjoy some sense of normalcy and a connection with the natural world. We hope the public will enjoy The Stars are Bright as much as we have enjoyed being a part of the project."

Further information and essential pre-booking available at TheStarsAreBright.com.

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Images available to download [here](#).

Press are invited to review the exhibition on Tuesday 14 July at a pre-booked time. For more information and to request a review slot please contact Phoebe Gardiner at London Communications Agency: pg@londoncommunications.co.uk / 07595 766831

Listings information

The Stars are Bright: Zimbabwe through the eyes of its young painters from Cyrene (1940-1947)

15 July – 30 September 2020 at The Theatre Courtyard Green Rooms, 36 Bateman's Row, Shoreditch, London EC2A 3HH

Opening hours Tue-Sun, 11am-3pm

Free admission: pre-booking essential at TheStarsAreBright.com.

Private viewings are welcome for groups of 10 or more: enquire at info@thestarsarebright.com.

Presented by The Belvedere Trust in conjunction with The Theatre Courtyard Gallery, Aberfoyle Lodge and Patrick Mavros.

@TheStarsAreBrightExhibition

Notes to Editors

Belvedere Trust

Who we are

The Belvedere Trust is a grant-making organisation that supports UK charities across a wide range of causes from preservation of art history to conservation of the environment. We are about to open an interactive educational exhibition space built on the original site of The Theatre (1576-1598), the first purpose-built theatre in London; the venue, where it is thought Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* may have first been staged, will showcase one of history's most significant literary contributors.

What we stand for

- Preservation of art history and the environment, often through education. We believe strongly in facilitating education in the broadest sense. We do this through conservation projects in museums, explicit educational programs, and environmental rehabilitation projects, preserving culture and learning to inspire future generations.
- Supporting well-run charities, of all shapes and sizes, that pursue their goals with passion, diligence, and focus. We like to build long-term relationships with organisations that demonstrate a proven track record of positive impact.

How we are involved

The Belvedere Trust is pleased to present 'The Stars are Bright', an exhibition of exceptional paintings from the Cyrene Mission of Zimbabwe. This exhibition and collection of paintings exemplifies our values: excellence in education and inspiration of many young artists. In these difficult times we want to create a safe space for people to enjoy some sense of normalcy and a connection with the natural world. We hope the public will enjoy 'The Stars are Bright' exhibition as much as we have enjoyed being a part of the project.

The Theatre Courtyard Gallery

The Theatre Courtyard Gallery is a new exhibition space located at 4-6 New Inn Broadway in Shoreditch. Classified as a Scheduled Monument by Historic England, the site incorporates the archaeological remains of London's first purpose-built permanent playhouse, 'The Theatre', which

existed from 1576 until 1598 when it was dismantled and its materials used to build the original Globe Theatre on Bankside. For the latter part of that time, William Shakespeare performed at The Theatre with his company The Lord Chamberlain's Men and some of his plays premiered there. Opening in 2020 to the public, the long-term exhibition will feature the extant inner foundation wall of The Theatre (visible through a glass vision panel), together with some objects found during the archaeological excavations by the Museum of London Archaeology and loans of Elizabethan and Shakespearean artefacts, including a First Folio of Shakespeare's work, from museums such as the V&A, the Museum of London and the National Portrait Gallery. The Theatre Courtyard Gallery, which also manages The Theatre Courtyard Green Rooms on the adjoining Bateman's Row, will offer an education and outreach programme featuring free school workshops, as well as other cultural activities.