

Why don't you carve other animals

In her debut short story collection, *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals*, Yvonne Vera (1964 - 2005) recognised the potential of the literary text to function as an important means of appropriating, inverting and challenging dominant means of representation and colonial ideologies. The representational strategies and ideologies that Vera was questioning were, however, not limited to those of colonialism. She was concerned with subverting the hierarchies that have become institutionalised in the art world, taking a position to celebrate and elevate everyday experiences and forms.

We take particular lead from the title short story, 'Why Don't You Carve Other Animals'. A story that plays out a conversation between a painter and a sculptor; a conversation that reveals the complexity of representation, personal confliction in creation and the importance of discourse, exchange and companionship. It is also a story about the complicated relationship between the creative process and the demands of commercial art.

Throughout her short writing career Vera developed radically imaginative metaphors that pushed boundaries and questioned taboos, especially against women. In her six-year tenure as the first black woman in independent Zimbabwe to be appointed director of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, her curatorial practice was pivotal in expanding the lexicon in visual art in the country and gave overlooked subjects a new symbolic force. The work was tactile and textural, deeply personal, and profoundly relevant. Vera's devotion to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second city, also opens up questions about place and space, urban identities in Africa and the politics of speaking from the margins. Her legacy expands a network of elements related to identity and history, inspiring an opportunity to contemplate the past in the present moment. Her curatorial practice was community oriented and changed what a gallery can be by inviting the public to participate as authors and collaborators. She wanted their "personal histories somehow made legitimate" in an institution that had historically denied them a sense of belonging. Vera conceived exhibitions as interwoven spaces and tools that dealt with local and social histories. Beyond this effervescence Vera's mission was to bring a new public culture into being and grow the audience of art and circle of potential buyers.

With Yvonne Vera's thought and practice as its foundation, 1-54 FORUM will draw on the literary and the visual, and the dynamism in the intersection of these practices to understand and make visible black realities and imaginaries. It will include artist talks, film screenings, keynote lectures and panel discussions with international curators, artists, writers and art professionals.

Black Chalk & Co. - Nontsikelelo Mutiti and Tinashe Mushakavanhu
1-54 FORUM PROGRAMME CURATORS

