The National Gallery of Zimbabwe

The National Gallery of Zimbabwe is an art museum in Harare dedicated to collecting, preserving, and promoting Zimbabwean visual culture. Though the collection focuses on contemporary artists from Zimbabwe, it holdings are diverse, containing African traditional and contemporary art and European old masters, a reflection of the acquisition interests of the first director.

In 1943, Sir James Gordon McDonald (1867-1942), a friend and biographer of Cecil Rhodes, gifted £30,000 to found an art gallery. In 1953 a board was established to raise funds, build the museum, and select a director. In 1956, Scotsman Frank McEwen (1907-1994) was appointed to the post. The Rhodes National Gallery was opened on July 16, 1957 in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia (renamed Harare, Zimbabwe in 1980). The institution changed its name to the National Gallery of Rhodesia in 1972, one year before McEwen’s resignation. One of McEwan’s projects was the Rhodes National Gallery Workshop School. Artists who participated in this early workshop, such as Thomas Mukarobgwa and John and Bernard Takawira, helped define Zimbabwean modern art. After Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980 the National Gallery developed the BAT Workshop, which became National Gallery School of Visual Art and Design in 2012.

References and further reading:

Curling, P. (2004) “The Early Period: the Role of the National Gallery,” in *Zimbabwe Stone Sculpture: A Retrospective, 1957-2004*, edited by Doreen Sibanda. Harare: Embassy of France with Weaver Press, 29-33.