

Gonçalo Mabunda's Beautiful Sculpture from Decommissioned Weapons

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Post by [Fab 5 Freddy](#)

This post is in honor of National Gun Violence Awareness Month, and the capacity for art to provide a platform for discussion about difficult issues affecting our world. It is also about one artist who is able to re-imagine, re-purpose and transform objects of violence and war into beautiful and thought-provoking works of art.

One of Picasso's most famous sculptures made in 1942 is called "[Bull's Head](#)". This clever and simply constructed piece, a favorite of mine, is comprised of a bicycle seat attached to some handlebars and was recently on view here in NYC at MoMA's [Picasso Sculpture](#) exhibition. The first time I saw it (man-years ago), I chuckled to myself at Picasso's playful inventiveness and imagining the eureka moment when the idea hit him to snatch the seat and handle bars off his bike.



Picasso led us all into a world of modern art-making when he learned more about African art and the powerful ways the faces on African masks were created with simple forms. Two simple slits or almond shapes can create eyes, and another below can

make a mouth—shapes that only our powerful human brains would recognize as such. The obsession of the previous centuries of European art-making focused on accurate reproductions of the human form in every anatomic detail began to shift significantly when Picasso painted his then-controversial painting, “[Les Femmes d’Alger \(O. J. No. 1149\)](#),” in 1907. This pivotal work incorporates images of African masks as heads for two of the nude figures, as well as simplified angular representations for all of the featured figures—leading to Picasso’s cubist period. Art has not been the same since.



Mozambican sculptor, Gonçalo Mabunda is making sculpture from discarded weapons that I’m sure Picasso would appreciate. His work uses AK-47’s, land mines, bombs, rocket launchers, and other remains from many years of war in his country, which thankfully has been at peace for nearly 25 years.

Since 1995, the Christian Council Of Mozambique has collected weapons and guns left over from years of conflict and exchanged them for tools and building materials. More than 800,000 implements of war have been found and destroyed. Mabunda has tapped into a small portion of these before they have been melted down or junked at sea, and turns these objects into powerful reminders of what once was in Mozambique. He recycles them into works of art that remind you simultaneously of the horror of war, as well as the inventiveness of his artistic mind. His works display where his people have been and will hopefully never return. (Related articles: CNN’s [Artist creates objects of beauty from instruments of death](#) and Dezeen’s [When I Get Green by Gonçalo Mabunda at Jack Bell Gallery](#))

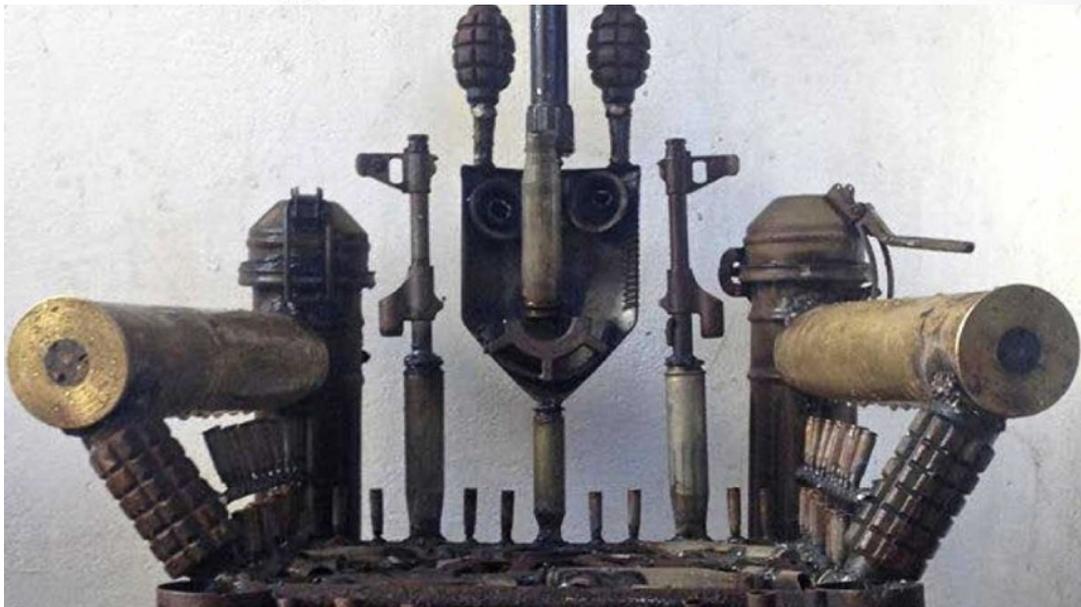
Mabunda's most renowned works he calls his "thrones." These are chairs made from various parts of weapons that I'm sure would make you think deeply if you were to take a seat in one. Imagine the thoughts racing through your mind as you take a load off your feet while wondering, *have any or how many lives were affected by the very parts you are resting on?* Provocative to say the least.

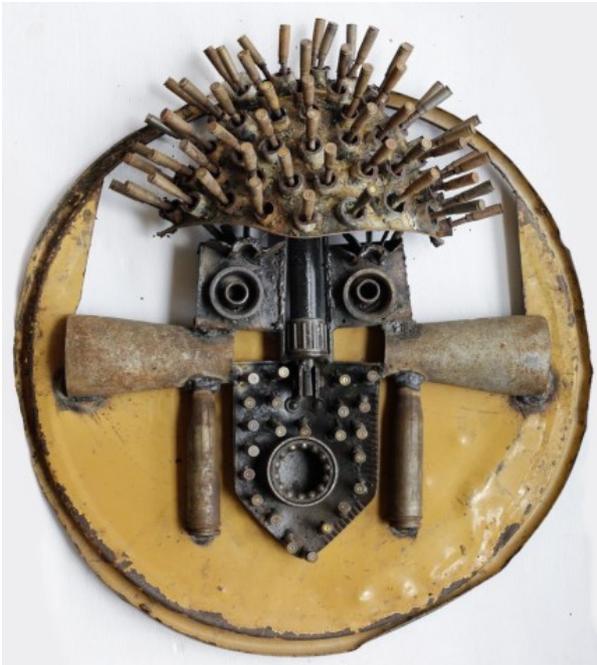


One of Mabunda's thrones has been graciously gifted to The Africa Center. Currently in storage, the Center looks forward to inspiring others to interact with this piece, and to think long and hard about what it represents for our history, our present and our future—like I'm sure Picasso also would if he were still around.

While Mabunda makes beautiful work from these decommissioned objects of war, issues currently surfacing with the transportation of Mabunda's work by collectors in the U.S. and abroad continue to remind us of the source materials for these amazing works. Recently, an American collector's Mabunda throne was seized at the Philadelphia International Airport when being shipped into the U.S. The ATF (US Department of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) told the collector if he wanted to keep the work he would have to apply for a firearms import permit. After filing, he was told he would have to destroy parts and fully dismantle the work to bring it into the United States. The collector, who's looking into a lawsuit against the ATF told a local Philly site: "This is a piece of art, a cultural object. Unless I was MacGyver, I don't know how I'd be able to reconstitute all those different pieces and make it into a working weapon." Controversies such as this highlight the power of art to spark discussion, and make us reflect on just how relevant Mabunda's works are, especially during June's Gun Violence Awareness Month. (Related article: [Hyperallergic's US Customs Officials Confiscate Sculpture Made of Weapons](#))

More of Mabunda's works can be seen below:





http://www.theafricacenter.org/goncalo_mabunda/