



The Tormented Professor

curated by Nicola Mercer and including the artwork of Jessica Lucas, Tim Wells and Kristina Tsoulis-Reay. May 7 / 17 2002

My first encounter with the Professor was at a small art market, Mbare Musika, on the outskirts of Harare. That was over three years ago, but it is only now that I have begun to understand who he is. We had a conversation about a reindeer's skull whose antlers had been mysteriously metalised. He mentioned that he would like to purchase the piece for his collection. He told me that he had been gathering such objects for sometime and believed the skull could complete his project. Fascinated by his enthusiasm, I asked him if he would consider showing me his work...I arrived at his door, the next day, with visions of some kind of natural museum. Instead I found myself amidst an eclectic display of almost banal art objects. The deer's skull had been placed between a drawing of a 1940s detective and an oil painting of a young girl. (I thought he was mad). The Professor sensed my unease and endeavoured to explain, but I dismissed his thoughts for the ramblings of an eccentric, retired academic.

I didn't think of the Professor again until a few months ago. I was reading 'The Collector' by John Fowles and came across this excerpt: "I hate scientists," she said. "I hate people who collect things and give them names and then forget all about them. That's what people are always doing in art."

I thought about the Professor, locked up in his office surrounded by his strange objects. It was then that I realised why the Professor's collection was so unique. He did not attempt to classify or name his objects. He simply appreciated something in each disparate work, something he, himself, did not understand but was willing to accept...something lost.

Nikki Mercer (Curator)