

START

A Critical Art Journal

Issue No. 001 | October - December 2007





Foreword

Dear art lovers and art lovers to be,

I am very pleased to have been asked by the Kampala Arts Trust, representing Ugandan artists, to introduce the first edition of the Journal St.ART.

As German Ambassador to Uganda it is a privilege for me to promote cultural exchange between Uganda and Germany. I am delighted to see the Ugandan art scene so pluralistic and active. I discovered impressive Ugandan paintings and sculptures, music and dance performances in different styles, traditional as well as modern. It seems that Ugandans can draw on unlimited artistic sources. This makes cultural exchange very easy, because in Germany, too, art scene is very alive.

Art lives from being seen and admired. This seems to be the biggest challenge that the Ugandan painters and sculptors have to face. Too few Ugandans get a chance to see the works and performances of artists and hence do not get an emotional and intellectual access to them.

The Ugandan painters and sculptors have developed innovating ideas to change this situation. In May 2007, backed by the Ugandan German Cultural Society (UGCS), they organized a street festival in Kamwokya. There, not only they presented a huge variety of artistic activities, but visitors were invited to take an active part and create pieces of art together with artists. You can learn more on this festival in this issue of "St. ART".

I welcome the courage of the editors of "START" to start this magazine for art lovers. I do hope and I wish that it will get many readers. Ugandan art merits to get more attention.

Reinhard Buchholz
German Ambassador to Uganda



Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany
Kampala

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What should the role of today's artists be in their communities? How can African artists help to make their cities more beautiful? Why don't Ugandans like Ugandan art? Until now, the questions that linger in the corners of Kampala's disparate art scene were for debate in makeshift studios or over beers in favorite watering holes. With this new publication—the first ever art and culture criticism and opinion journal in Uganda—we aim to provide a forum of ideas for the dynamic contemporary art scene in Kampala and beyond.

In this first issue, founders Daudi Karungi and Henry Mzili Mujunga talk about the success of the recent "pothole art" produced during La Ba "street art" festival in Kampala and the role of public art as a way to promote the visual arts in African cities and make art more accessible to local residents. We talk with Maria Naita, perhaps Kampala's premier sculptress; Mzili reflects on the identity politics of being an artist in Africa today and Dean George Kyeyunegives us the history of Makerere's Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art—one of the most venerable art

schools on the continent. We also pay a visit to the Mona Studio in Kamwokya, where local artists are pioneering a new kind of inner city art studio.

We at StART believe that the creative efforts of Ugandans—be they painters, musicians or dancers—play a key role in our country's past and future. We aim to provide a community of ideas for these artists. We welcome your input and contributions. Enjoy!

The Editors

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* Cover picture: Acrylic on canvas, Peacemaker by Daudi

Free expression

An African Artist Ponders his Place in the "Western" Tradition

By Henry Mzili Mujunga

The enslavement of the African has persisted despite his desire for the liberties of capitalism. The oppressor and his kindred have continued to spread their greedy tentacles to squelch any outcroppings of resistance.

We cannot breathe the fresh air of liberty because the clever chameleon changes its shade.

One would be quick to assume that art is the last frontier of resistance to this form of suppression and dominance. Art, after all, is what really defines a people's existence. When I behold my brothers (I have no sisters in this struggle) and myself producing meaningless pieces of decoration for the oppressor and his disguised agents, I cannot help but confirm, albeit fearfully, that the African artist has provided the ever-changing chameleon yet another hue in its many-colored coat.

As an ardent agent of meaningless labour, I have continued to explore the gist of creativity without actually creating under the guise of abstract expressionism.

(A monkey can do little else but ape.) Every time I have thought



^ African jewellery



^ African architecture: Grass-thatched hut

All the strings I try to tie between art practice in the West and my Kiganda experience are loosened by the fact that art, as we practice it today, is irrelevant and redundant to my people.

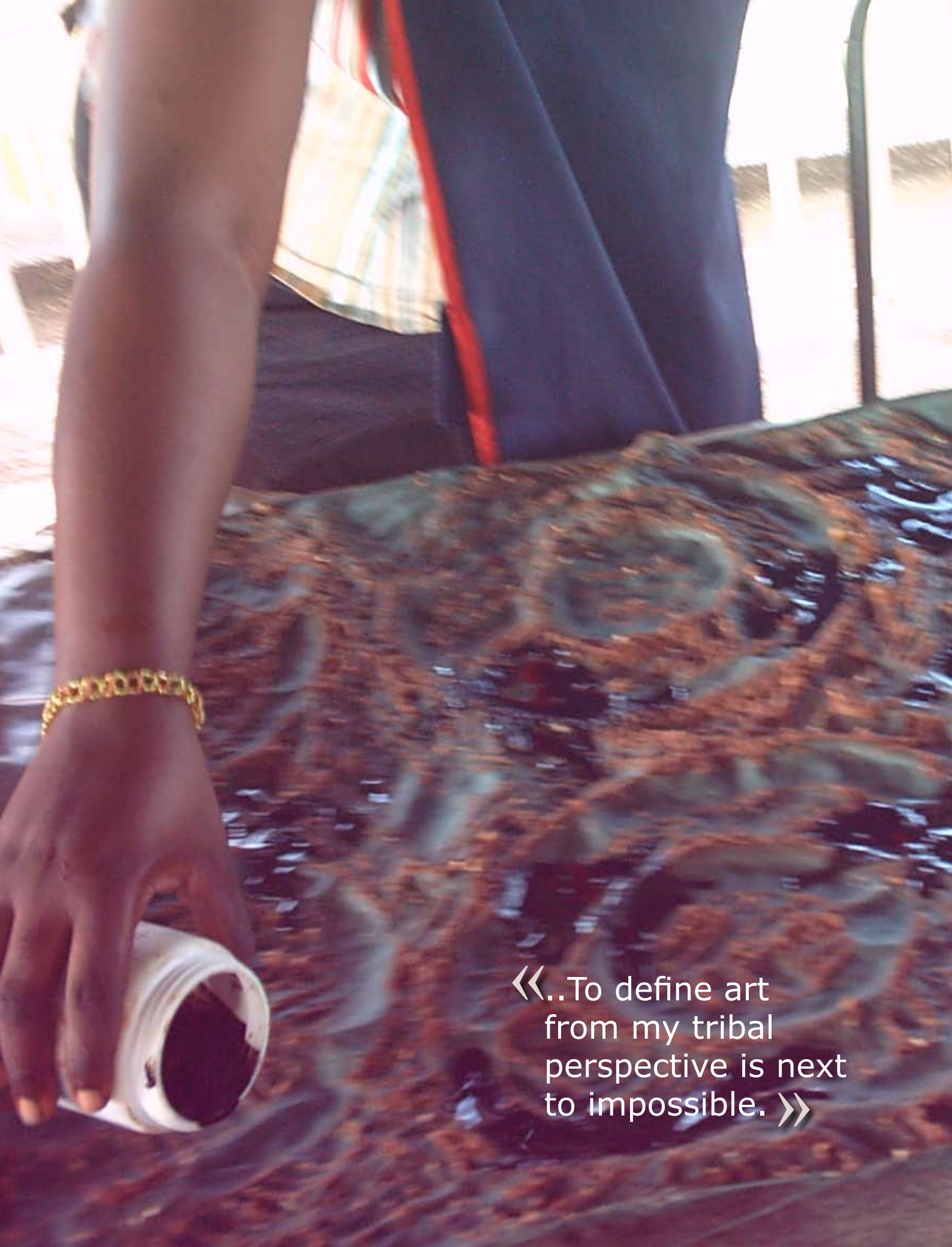
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about a new way of doing art, I have ended up evoking the spirit of a European artist from the past!

The dilemma is too deep to plug. To define art from my tribal perspective is next to impossible. I have not come across a verb in my language that accurately describes my profession. All the strings I try to tie between art practice in the West and my Kiganda experience are loosened by the fact that art, as we practice it today, is irrelevant and redundant to my people.

The oppressor has evolved modern art through all its fundament

facets single handedly without acknowledging the contribution from Africa and Oceania.

I know of an artist from Mozambique popularly known as the Picasso of Africa. Oh yes! I also know a young man from South Africa (originally from Kenya) who has carved himself a niche as the van Gogh of Africa! How I wish someone would start calling me names too! Maybe then I would get to show in the popular galleries and museums in Europe and America. ■



«..To define art
from my tribal
perspective is next
to impossible. »

Pothole Perspectives

By Rachel Scheier

Henry Mzili Mujunga, one of the current crop of acclaimed young artists who has emerged out of Kampala recently, was driving through town one day in his Toyota Carib when he literally stumbled into inspiration.

Like every other motorist in the Ugandan capital, Mzili is intimately acquainted with one particularly yawning crater out of the dozens that regularly plague him on his route to work each day. That morning, he winced at the sound as the walls of his pothole—suddenly somehow sharper and more crumbly than the day before—scraped against the bowels of his vehicle. He cursed himself for allowing his artistic reverie to distract him from watching the road. And then it hit him.

“I had been searching for a personal statement that could catch the attention of the public,” Mzili said recently. “Potholes command such attention in Kampala that whoever you are, whatever you’re driving, your eyes are always a few meters ahead.”

This was early in the year, during election season, and a newly elected Mayor Nasser Sebagala had excited the press by making a lot of heady promises about fixing city roads. Also, it had been raining. “I think a truck fell into one,” Mzili recalled. There were the usual newspaper cartoons depicting



^ Children Painting: Young Atal



^ Breakdance Project performance

Uganda German Cultural Society and the Uganda Artists Alliance, the May event featured booths with works by local artists, live musicians and an auction to raise money for a proposed Uganda Museum of Modern Art, a dream of Mzili's and a handful of other local artists. And of course, there was pothole painting.



^ Guests painting potholes at the festival

Mzili, having decided that his middle-of-the-night pothole painting might arouse the attention of the police ("I have a job and a family," he said, somewhat apologetically,) settled for instead lending his theme to the event. He and several other local artists filled potholes on Bukoto Street in Kamuchya with a mixture of cement and plaster and then painted them. Not surprisingly, many had political themes.



^ Fashion show at LABA Festival.

The potholes are now the centerpiece of an exhibition at UGCS called "A Pot in the Hole." Director Roberta Wagner called the festival and the exhibition an effort "to create new places for artists to show their work and show people in Uganda that art is part of life."

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Ugandans crossing the potholes in boats.

"I realized that these...holes in the roads are actually an important symbol for people," he said. What they stand for is poverty and lack of infrastructure, for starters. But what potholes mean most of all to ordinary Ugandans is, of course, corruption; the flagrant robbery by so-called leaders of public funds meant for such basic services as keeping up the roads.

Initially, Mzili's conceived of a sort of command public art installation that explored the concept of illusion (something about Christo?). "I thought I'd come in and fill and paint over the potholes at night," he explained. "Then the next morning people would still have the feeling that they were driving into potholes, but they wouldn't be there."

Mzili was also inspired by the shapes and dimensions of the potholes themselves, some of which, he pointed out, were quite interesting. "I was trying to interpret this infrastructural hazard and turn it into something pleasing," he said. "As an artist, I always try to perceive beauty in ugliness."

Fittingly, then, what Mzili's pothole idea morphed into wasn't a vigilante art project in the end but a first of its kind in Kampala street art festival. A collaboration of the

"Potholes command such attention in Kampala that whoever you are, whatever you're driving, your eyes are always a few meters ahead."



With that she touched on the real point of the street festival—which was called “La Ba”—“To See” and the pothole project and perhaps public art in general, which is to try to interest ordinary people in art. In Uganda, that is a particular challenge: The country, like others on the continent, has produced a fleet of up-and-coming contemporary artists in recent years—many with a postmodernist

"I think we have all begun to realize that the mzungu market is really pretty small," said Daudi

The obvious problem, of course, is that most Ugandans can't afford to buy art. On the other hand, local



^ A finished pothole sculpture on exhibition at UGCS

artists complain that even among upper and middle class Ugandans, there is a lack of interest in art coming out of their homeland.

"If a Ugandan has a million shillings to spend on art, he would rather spend it on a print from Europe rather than an original work from his own country simply because it's foreign—probably something he saw in some rich country's airport or hotel," said Karungi.

But money isn't the only issue, of course. Artists like Mzili and Karungi are uncomfortable with the idea that their work is appreciated

by an audience of mostly tourists and expatriates. They are determined to find ways to make locally produced visual art more accessible. They may be making some headway. One of the May street festival's most popular items were custom painted t-shirts—bought at Owino Market and hand decorated by various artists, who incorporated familiar song lyrics, sayings and slang that went for an affordable 20,000 shillings. Nearly all of them sold.

"This evolved from an artistic statement into a social thing—we made our presence felt in the

community," said Karungi of the festival.

More such events are planned for the future. What began as one artist's idea for an edgy social art project evolved into a community party and an art education effort that was public art in the true sense of the word.

"Art may not be something known to Ugandans yet," said Mzili. "But potholes—those are very familiar to them." ^S



Sculpture isn't a Man's Job

Taga Nuwagaba talks to one of Kampala's premier sculptors Maria Naita



Many collectors like to host sculpture in their compounds and by the entrance gates. But Maria Naita's works are too precious for that. Every time I see her work, I feel like rushing it to the most sacred part of house- the bedroom.

Her combination of metal and wood helps Naita achieve remarkable effects. The metal helps create women's jewelry, and the wood represents the dynamic structure revealing womanhood. Her creations make you feel the presence of life and beauty.

The wonders of her work are the mysterious perforations she creates to form pattern. From a distance, her work looks solid, but as you get closer, you realize that the dark areas are hollow.

Meet Naita as she bares her true colours.

T: What inspires you to do art?

M: The things that inspire me are not extraordinary. I am mainly inspired by things that revolve around me. Women are my specialty. I love the woman's body and its response towards activities around it. For example, how a

woman applies make up, how she dresses up, how she walks and dances, all inspire me.

When I am walking on the street and I meet people, to me it is not a crowd. Every person is an independent form, and my job is to make observation of these selected models and document them in sculptural form.

As we speak now, I am making your study- the behaviour of your eyes in relation to your mouth and cheeks when you speak.

T: Sculpture is a difficult medium and in my opinion better suited for men. As a woman, why did you choose to do a man's job?

M: It is challenging. I like challenges. And it is not about challenging men but to do something solid and demystify the idea that a woman can only do menial labour. That idea is obsolete and more women should come out and handle these challenges to defeat that myth.

T: The female form should attract male artists. Why is it of interest to you as a woman?

M: As a woman, I feel I can bring out the forms better than male artists. I do not just depict a woman because I have seen one - I live and feel womanhood every day of my life.

T: Where were you born?

M: My ancestral home is in Luweero district of central Uganda in a small village of valleys called Luteete. My grand mother, Catherine Kigozi,



“... it is not about challenging men but to do something solid and demystify the idea that a woman can only do menial labour.”



a nurse by profession, was not content with the local schools. So she came to Kampala in the 1940s to work and raise money to educate her child in a better school. Her husband had a different opinion but my grand mother forced her way into the city with their only child, George Lwanga Ssengendo, who is my father. He graduated as a surveyor and settled in Kampala where we were born and raised. Mine is a small family of nine; three boys and six girls.

T: Are you single?

M: I am happily married to Mr. Charles Naita with a small family of four children so far. We live on Mutundwe hill, a suburb of Kampala and that is where I have my studio.

T: When and how did you start to do art?

M: I started way back when I was so little, I cannot say which year. Our mother never believed in imported dolls. She would make us her very own from small pieces of cloth and encouraged us to make them ourselves. As we did them, I realized that they were flat so I decided to include things like bums, tummies and even make legs more round. That got me started. My art, I think, comes from my mother.

T: Have you exhibited your work outside Uganda?

M: Yes! I have exhibited in Kenya in Gallery Watatu and RAMOMA. I have also exhibited at the Gallery Aliz in Brussels, Belgium. I have

All artworks in this article are by Maria Naita.

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Technique demonstration by
Daudi Karungi



Dark to light Technique

If the plate or block has been worked so it will receive ink in the same way each time it is applied, then there is a matrix and more than one print can be made

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Since Henry Mzili Mujunga introduced the dark to light technique in printmaking in the late 1990s, it has become popular with young artists in Kampala. It has effectively replaced the light to dark technique that was made popular by Ugandan Fulbright scholar, Fred Mutebi. Dark to light has caught on largely because it yields intriguing results after the first registration. This suits young printmakers who are in a hurry to accumulate work and make a quick buck.

Printmaking involves the relatively simple technique of transferring ink to paper from another material, usually a metal plate or a wooden block. If the plate or block has been worked so it will receive ink in the same way each time it is applied,

this is called a matrix. The matrix allows more than one print to be made.

Before the electrostatic, inkjet, and other new ways of printing were invented for use with computers, everything was printed in one of only four ways: relief, intaglio, stencil and planographic. Each involves a different kind of matrix, or ink-holding surface. In relief printing (woodcuts), the ink sits on the raised surface of a plate or block that has been carved. In intaglio (etching and engraving), the ink sits in the grooves cut into the surface. In stencil printing (silk screen), there is a hole cut in the Matrix and ink is pushed through it. In planographic printing

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(lithography), the matrix is flat, and the printing part is treated to hold ink; the other parts to repel it.

In this study, we shall stick to relief printing using a wooden matrix. Traditionally, the wooden matrix was carved in such a way that the areas that retained the light colours were cut out first. This ensured that at the end of the process; only the white outline of the subject remained.

With the dark to light technique, the process is the opposite. Below is a step by step guide through the dark to light process:

1. The artist should select materials carefully. First, choose a thick paper of a thick gauge since a lot of ink is used. A range of paper is available on the market, though handmade is best. One also needs a light pencil, marker, a piece of plywood or woodblock,

printing ink, a set of rollers (of various sizes) and lots of rags.

2. The next step is to select a subject and draw it on the matrix with the marker (you don't want your drawing to disappear after the first print) then cut out the areas you want to retain the darkest colour.
3. Mark out in pencil the outline of the matrix on the paper you intend to print on and, using an appropriate roller, roll your darkest color. This is called rolling dark. Allow the dark area to dry over night.
4. Mix ink that is lighter than the one you used in the dark area (adding yellow or white to it can help but you have to be careful not to put too much as this would create a sharp contrast with the subsequent layers of colour). Apply this ink on the matrix and register (place careful to overlap) it on the dark area on the paper.

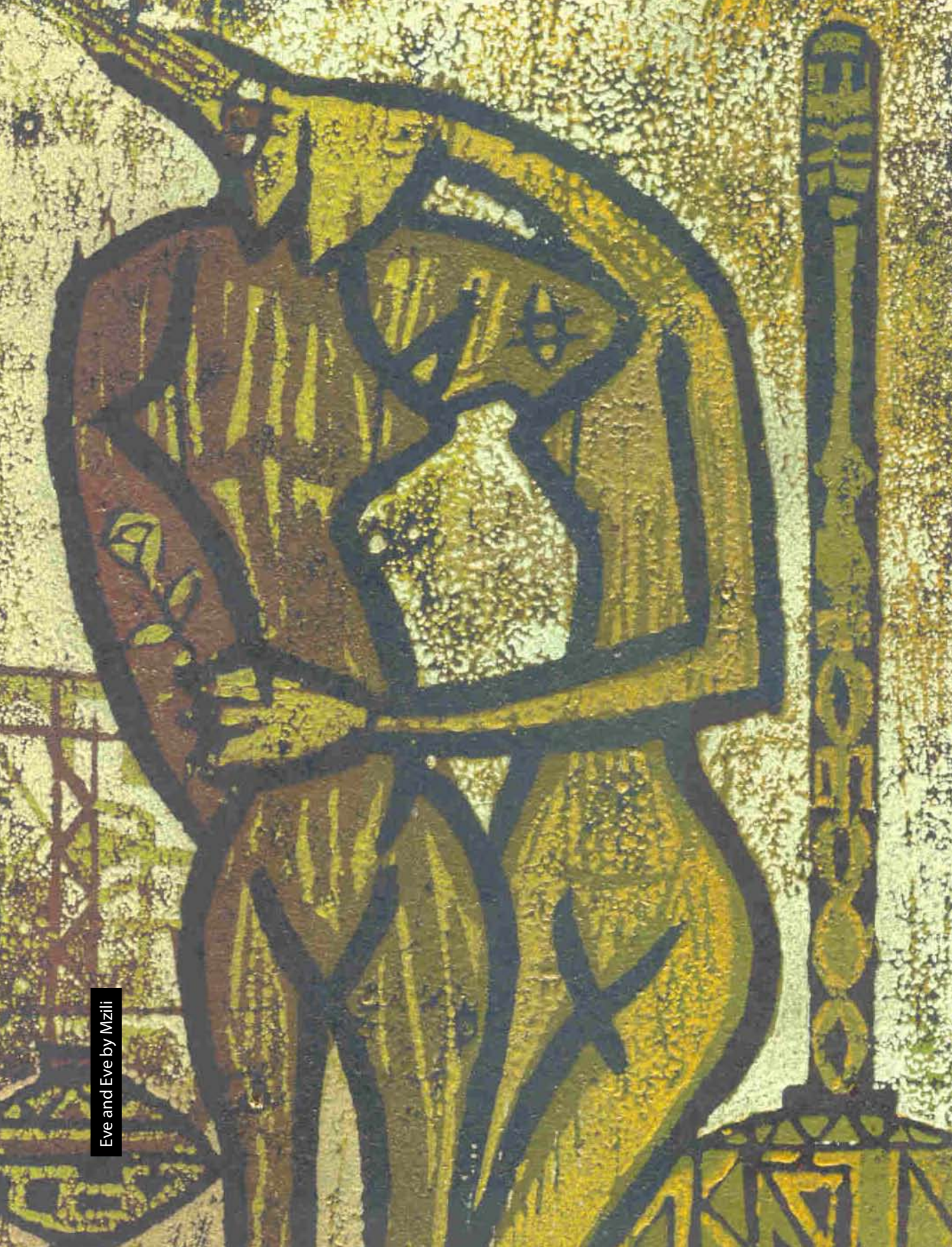
The matrix is now on top of the paper. Tap on the matrix firmly with your clenched fist then flip the paper and matrix over to have the paper on top.

5. Burnish with a baren, or piece of folded paper, to register the image onto the paper.
6. Carefully peel the paper off the matrix and let it dry.

You can cut away areas on the matrix that you want to retain the colour you have just printed and repeat the inking procedure, each time making the subsequent ink lighter.

The beauty of printmaking is the fact that you can produce as many copies of a print as you want. A collection of similar prints is called an edition--one can have an edition of 5, 10 or 100 prints. When the artist decides to destroy the matrix after printing an edition, he has produced a limited edition **S**

Eve and Eve by Mzili





The Administration block at MTSIFA.

Margaret

Trowel

Makerere's Reknown Art School through the Years

By Kyeyune George



In 1937, British painter Margaret Trowell started informal painting classes on her veranda at Mulago. They were the humble beginnings of Makerere University's art school. By 1940, art had become part of the Makerere curriculum. The art school continued to operate as a department under the faculty of arts until 1952, when it linked with the Slide School in London, which allowed it a degree of independence. An autonomous institution, the Makerere art school offered its first diplomas in 1957. Degree courses were introduced in 1969.

For years the only place in the east and central African region where a higher education in art was offered, Makerere's art school has provided professional art training in painting, sculpture, graphic design and printmaking. These were the standard art courses until the turbulent 1970's under Idi Amin and Obote's second government in the early 1980s constrained their delivery. With imported art materials becoming scarce and expensive, the school was forced to make do with locally available substitutes. Interestingly, though, this forced reliance on local resources resulted for a closer communion between the Makerere artist and his audience. The extraordinary images expressing disgust for the leaders of the time underlined this close association.

The end of civil war in 1986 that brought President Yoweri Museveni to power found Makerere artists fully engaged in an interactive examination of local life. The school's master's programs were reinvigorated to replenish the academic staff, which had thinned drastically after two decades of political turmoil and war. This also encouraged research that expressly addressed the prevailing local and international market demands.

These developments strengthened the art school to apply for faculty status, which was granted in 1995 with three departments: sculpture and drawing, painting and art history and industrial art and design. With that the name also changed to the Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts.

The transfer was a major milestone for the school and from that time, student as well as staff numbers increased drastically. The challenges of attracting and retaining quality staff for the enlarged school became apparent. Although the school has produced just six PhDs in the last 60 years of its existence, seven members of staff are currently pursuing their PhDs at Makerere or outside the country. Newly introduced courses in such subjects as business administration, fashion design, jewelry, furniture design, stained glass and

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“The end of civil war in 1986 that brought President Yoweri Museveni to power found Makerere artists fully engaged in an interactive examination of local life.”

computer-aided design as well as the traditional mainstream courses are set to make the school grow in strength and substance. As a way of enabling students to relate their academic tasks to the labour market, they undergo industrial training in their second year. Graduates are assured of a qualification that prepares them to work in the emerging but ever changing local and international market.

The school has been internationally recognized by external examiners, as well as collaboration with outside universities. For example, the school has had a long standing link with Middlesex University in the United Kingdom. A current one year project titled “Design, Health and Community,” a partnership between the Makerere school, North Umbria University in the United Kingdom and Durban University of Technology in South Africa, involves rural crafts women who

have been given skills to improve their products as well as use them as channels of communication on HIV/AIDS.

While all these developments represent progress for the school, it faces challenges. Space has not expanded to match the increasing number of courses and students, which has put a strain on service delivery. MITSIFA also needs to commit large sums of money to replace obsolete equipment **S**

George Kyeyune is the dean of the Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts at Makerere University.

Ceramics and jewellery making (above).



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also exhibited in Bulawayo and Harare in Zimbabwe.

T: Congratulation Naita! How relevant is your art to Uganda?

M: Uganda is one country many people in the world have never heard of. The few that have, only mention Amin and recently HIV-AIDS. What an ugly representation of this country! Uganda is such a beautiful country that does not deserve that. It needs more positive images to give it the façade it deserves.

My work and that of other artists should do this job of changing Uganda's image abroad.

You see, art unlike many other professions, speaks all languages in

the world. It is an excellent medium of expression. If the Ugandan government gave a bit of attention to art and used it properly, politicians and leaders would find it easy to tell the world how beautiful this country is instead of labouring with longwinded political speeches.

If visits abroad were crowned with art exhibitions, art would have an impact on tourism which is becoming a big income earner for Uganda.

Many people have a negative attitude towards art. This is ignorance and it hurts to see that government is not using us effectively. We are the sleeping giants!

About the relevance of art in Uganda, I will simply tell you that art is one of the ways in which a society's culture can be documented. Our history, our heritage and our day

to day life can be immortalized through art for posterity. Visitors who have no clue about Uganda can also benefit from it.

All countries have treasured their culture and heritage in an art package. Uganda needs to do the same- in fact we are very late. We are in fact lucky to have gorillas and a country with awesome beauty. Short of that, we would not have a lot to show visitors.

T: What problems do you find in your career?

M: Being a wife, mother and artist working at home is a very challenging situation. My husband needs attention; the kids need to play with me. Pregnancy, cooking and running the home make creating time for art hard. Some times I get torn apart! **S**

ART OASIS

Wonderful things are happening at Mona Studio

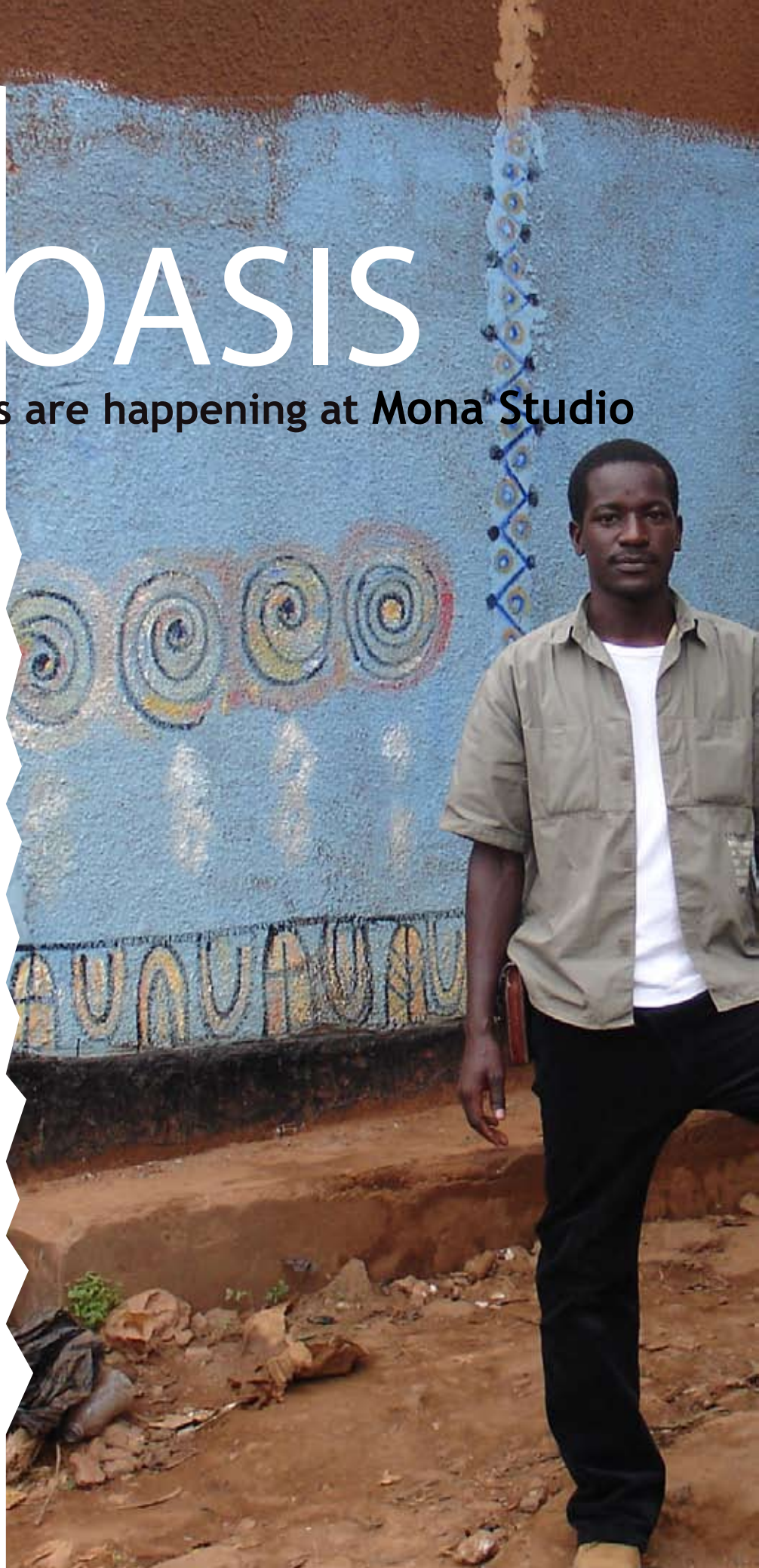
It is market day in the Kampala suburb of Kamwokya and as I make my way through the cul de sac towards Mona studio, I make out American rapper Tupac Shakur blaring from an Indian-made sound system. The mammoth crowd milling a few meters away seems oblivious to the creative activities going on in the iron sheet enclosure.

Anwar Nakibinge, one of the young artists working at this colourful and industrious studio, greets me with a smile. He has just been taking his afternoon siesta and still has the crease marks from the pillow engraved on his cheek.

Mona Studio has now been open for over a year and its fame has spread across expatriate Kampala. Its artists are prolific: Stacks of paintings of different sizes fill the storeroom. A visitor to the studio is struck by the bright paintings on the walls of the nearby quarters. Edison Mugalu, the other Mona artist, tells me that the land lady asked him to extend his art beyond the boundaries of his canvases.

Some of the work done on the iron sheet enclosure is experimental and bold; the palette is graphic and

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↳ Mona Artist: Anwar Nakibinge Sadat



^ Mona Artist: Mugalu Edison

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figurative. Mona Studio thrives on texture and effect. Colour plays a harmonizing role rather than a defining one. The artists seem to be obsessed with the female figure and bright, patterned clothes. The faces are stylized and recall the art on ancient Greek pottery. The long thin noses, thin lips and wide eyes seem more Caucasian than Bantu. One wonders if Mugalu is not subconsciously thinking of his clients, who happen to be mostly white, as he makes his quick impasto paintings.

Anwar's work, on the other hand, is a mass of treads and retreads as the artist scratches into the thick layers of silk vinyl and acrylic paint. A typical Anwar picture has a dark layer, in which he incises the outlines of geometric figures and biomorphs. When this dries, he rolls a lighter layer of primary hues on top of it. He finishes with a final layer of tertiary grays and tints of white. The finished work

"everyone is oblivious to the artistic treasures on the other side of the market shops."

looks compartmentalized yet harmonized.

Mugalu, on the other hand, has a fiery approach. His work is dominated by hot primary hues. An expressionist of sorts, Mugalu seems to be obsessed with silhouetted fishermen in small canoes seen from the rear view. One senses the evident influence of European modernists like Paul Klee as well as the blurred style of George Kyeyune at Makerere University.

The market is almost closing as I make my way out of Mona Studio. As I walk through the human quagmire, I cannot help but think of the Senegalese critic Iba Ndiave Diadji's reference to a dialogue

of the deaf when referring to the relationship between the African artist and his indifferent host community. Indeed, everyone is oblivious to the artistic treasures on the other side of the market shops.

But then one must remember the extensive work Mugalu has done to raise HIV-AIDS awareness through public murals. Or his work at Ngoma International Workshop in Nakaseke, in central Uganda. There, he taught children to use local materials to make art. Such projects that consciously incorporate the community contrast starkly with the typical Kampala artist's tendency to make superficial incursions into his host community for documentary purposes. I hope that eventually the Kamwokya marketers and the rest of the Mona artists' neighbors will embrace them and prevail upon them to help beautify their environment. Artists ought to be appreciated for their creative energy and ability to transform their societies aesthetically **S**

POETIC JUSTICE

18-08-1999

What we believe in
We believe in the father and not the mother
In life everlasting after killing it.
Mzili

Chasing the wind
How can I ever be strong when I am made of flesh?
Firm when I am of wind?
I run in the face of danger,
I turn my face in another's hour of need.
I am so full of shame for life is but a game
A game we all keep ourselves busy with
while death keeps the score.
Like all players, none is ever ready at the final whistle.
While away the hours for that is the gist of labour.
But we all labour in vain.
Behold, nothing stands in the end but a void- emptiness.
So true this; the easy man ends up eating the best dinners.
The less the struggle, the less the pain.
Who said pain is gain?
Pain is pain, and all so vain.
Nothing is achieved but drain.
Rest and you shall taste true rest!

Mzili 1999

Where to find ART

Afriart Gallery

Peacock building
UMA showground, Lugogo
Tel: 041 375 455,
071 2 455 555
daudi@afriartgallery.com
www.afriartgallery.com

Design Agenda

JIC Building,
Parliament Avenue
Tel: 0772 718 158
designagenda@hotmail.com

Aidchild Galleries

At the Equator on Masaka
Rd
Tel: 0772 616 861

Kwetu Afrika

Lubowa Off Entebbe Rd,
Tel: 041 200 690,
0772 419 061
kwetu@infocom.co.ug

Makerere University Art Gallery

Tel: 041 531 423
artgallery@sifa.mak.ca.ug

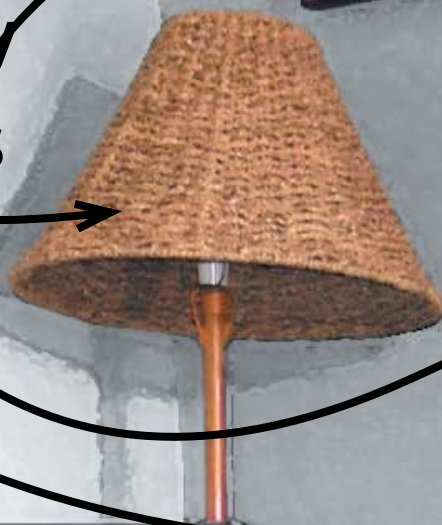
Nommo Gallery

4 Victoria Avenue, Nakasero
Tel: 041 234 475
Email: culture@africaonline.
co.ug

Tulifanya Art Gallery

28/30 Hannington Road
Tel: 041 254 183

Contemporary Living Accessories



Peacock Building, UMA Showgrounds, Lugogo
Tel: +256 712 455 555, +256 414 375 455
www.afriartgallery.com

