

START

A Journal of Arts and Culture

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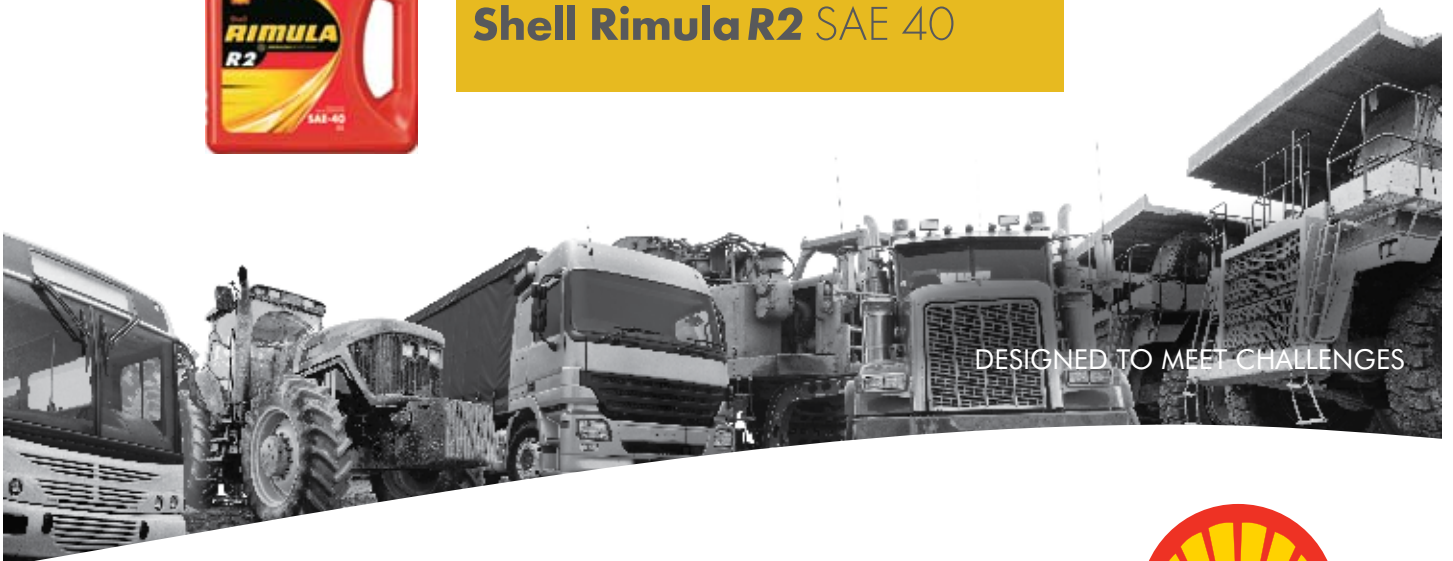
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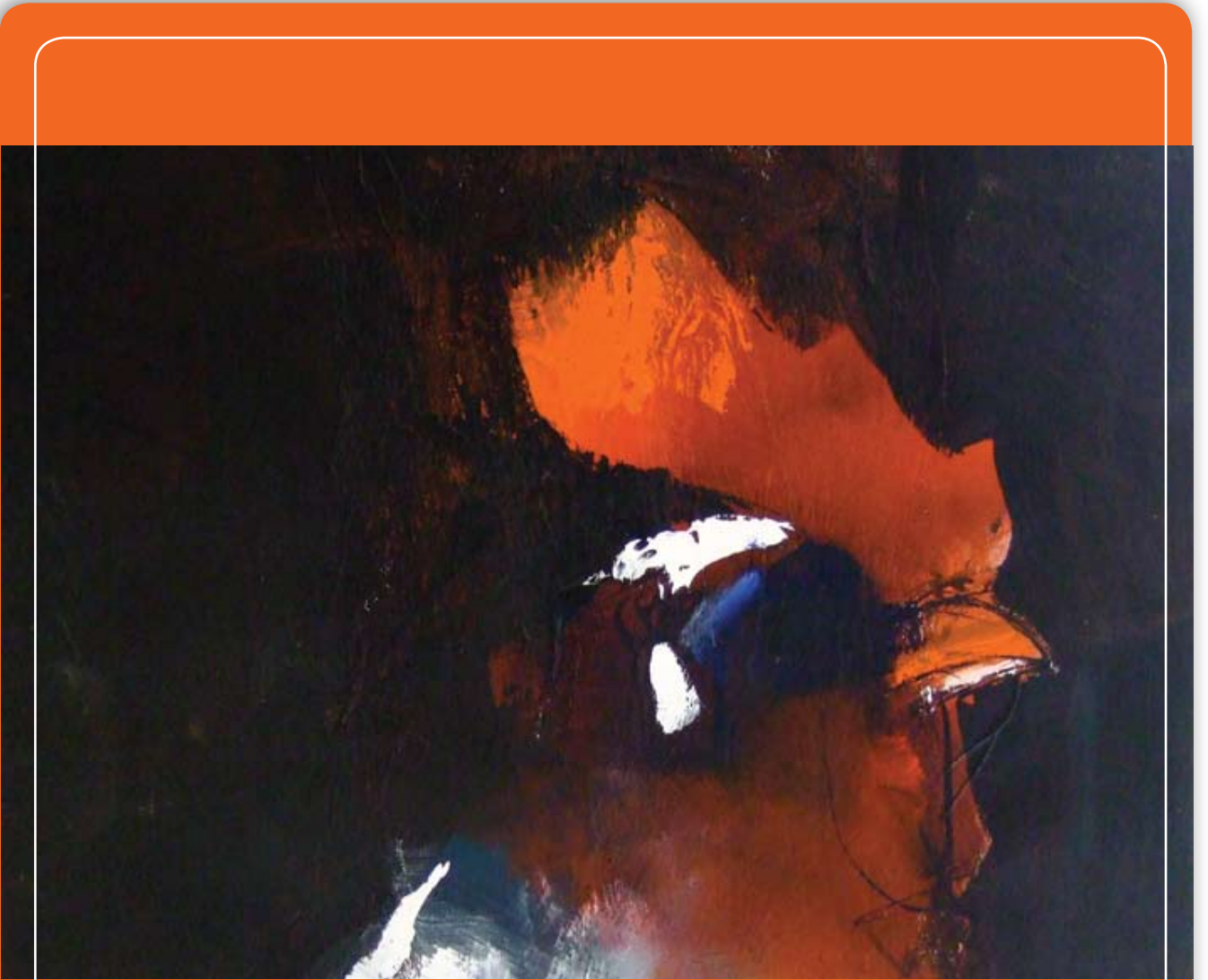


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- **Edison Mugalu**
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- **Daudi Karungi**
- **Enoch Mukiibi**
- **Henry Mzili Mujunga and others.**

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Foreword



The famous Irish writer Oscar Wilde once said: “We are all of us in the gutter but some of us are looking at the stars.” Meaning that despite the hardships and difficulties that life brings for all of us, Ugandans and Irish alike, we can take heart from the beauty around us, enjoy the wonder of small things and celebrate the richness of the art, culture and traditions that are our own.

And Uganda is a rich country! It is rich in cultural variety and creative talent, which is uniquely shaped by its people’s experiences and surroundings. My home country, Ireland, is similar in that it too possesses exceptional artistic expression and cultural depth, deeply rooted in our own history and tradition. In fact, culturally, Ireland and Uganda share many traits - a love of dance, music and song; a tradition of storytelling (in Ireland called *béaloideas*) and a commitment to ensuring that the pride and beauty of our heritage is celebrated through art in all its forms. In Ireland, as in Uganda, we celebrate all of the important moments in life - births, weddings, funerals through cultural ritual, music, song and dance. So I understand the importance of having a platform - such as START - to celebrate Uganda’s commitment to art and culture. START is unique in that it opens up the possibility not only to celebrate and document, but also to debate and discuss visual and performance arts here. This initiative is a valuable and positive contribution to this country’s cultural heritage.

I am therefore delighted to introduce to you the fourth edition of START magazine. I hope that it will be for you, as it has been for me, an enriching source of information on the latest developments in Uganda’s vibrant artistic scene.

Kevin Kelly,
Ambassador of Ireland to Uganda



Embassy of Ireland

Contents

6 Editorial

The Editors give a summary of the fourth issue of START

7 Free Expression

A Work of Fiction
Henry Mzili Mujunga in a piece of fiction based on the early life of Fabian Mpagi



9 Art Collectors

Q&A
Pamela Kertland Wright, collector, writer and owner of Emin Pasha hotel interviewed by **Daudi Karungi**



12 Lead Story

Viral Value
Henry Mzili Mujunga chats with the curator of Dutch Masters Today exhibition at the Uganda Museum and ponders how to start an 'art epidemic'

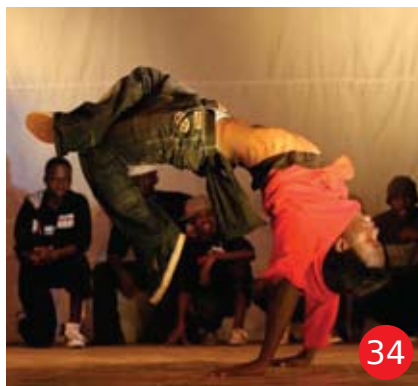


19 Critic's Pick

Henry Mzili Mujunga talks about **Rolands (Birutsya) Tibirusya**, a "live" artist whose ingenuity has brought philanthropic art to a refreshing new level in Uganda.

22 Product Design

Seek to be Worth Knowing
Michiel van Oosterhout on the branding of a telecom



25 Notes from Abroad

Life Imitates Art
Andrea Stultiens on what Photography says — and what it doesn't

27 Technique

How to Sell Your Art
Vivian Craddock Williams (an economist) in a talk given to students at the Makerere University Margaret Trowel School of Industrial and Fine Art

29 Profile

Learning a New Language
George Kyeyune reviews **Dr. Nabulime's** recent exhibition.

34 Altruism

Dance On
Tebandeke Samuel Lutaaya on the history and growth of contemporary dance in Uganda

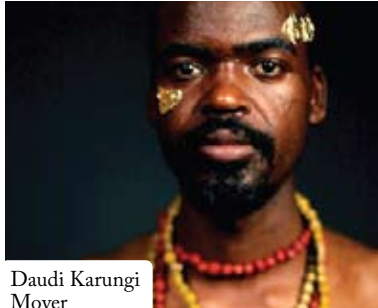
38 Poetic Justice

A Great Mind
A poem by Naava

38 Where to Find Art

A list of places to visit next time you're looking for art in Kampala.

Editorial



Daudi Karungi
Mover



Henry Mzili Mujunga
Dreamer



Rachel Scheier
Thinker

Welcome back to START, Uganda's first and only journal of arts and culture. Your words of praise and encouragement continue to inspire us to make START even better. In this issue, we have made even more adjustments and improvements to the content and format of the magazine. Starting next issue, in fact, we will include a reader feedback page. So email your comments now!

The last quarter of the year was an exciting one for the Ugandan art world. It saw the arrival of the Dutch Masters Today exhibition at the Uganda Museum, which was unique not just because it enabled three prominent Ugandan artists—our own Daudi Karungi and Henry Mzili Mujunga among them—to exhibit alongside Dutch masters, but because our national museum actually hosted a modern art exhibition. Mzili talks to its curator, Ugandan expatriate David Oduki, and gets his ideas on one of our central preoccupations—how to get Africans to buy African art. In the performing arts arena, Tebandeke Samuel Lutaaya reflects on the history and development of modern dance in Uganda. We go beyond the purview of fine art to look at the aesthetics of branding with Michiel van Oosterhout's piece comparing the marketing tactics of Uganda's ever-growing stable of telecom companies. Finally, Dutch photographer Andrea Stultiens weighs in from the Netherlands in Notes from Abroad, we provide a primer for pricing artwork—and more.

A special word of thanks to the Irish Embassy, which made this issue of START possible. Our stable of supporters continues to grow and we are more confident than ever that the arts in Uganda are thriving. Keep the dream alive!

The Editors

Contributors

George Kyeyune, Henry Mzili Mujunga, Daudi Karungi, Tebandeke Samuel Lutaaya, Naava, Vivian Craddock Williams, Andrea Stultiens, Michiel van Oosterhout, David Oduki

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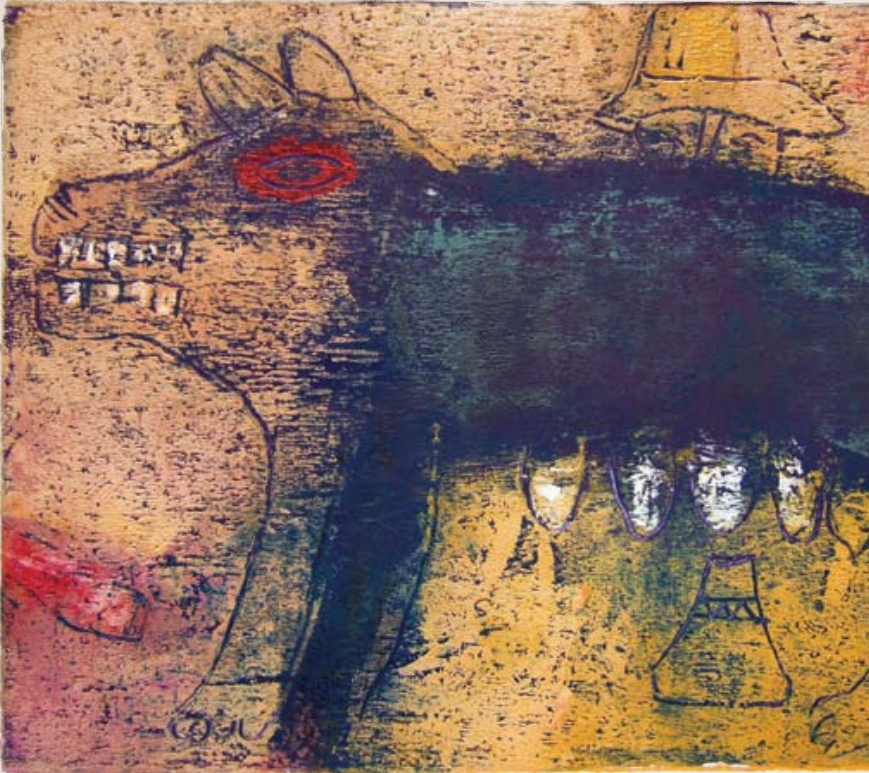
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COVER PICTURE:
Red Cow by Peter Diem
Courtesy of the Royal African Art Collection

A Work of Fiction

By Henry Mzili Mujunga



Milking your dogs, Monoprint, Henry Mzili Mujunga, 2009

Young Fabian once asked his mother, “What are colors made of?” His mother replied that they are fixed in our eyes by God. Little did she know the truth of her words and the impact they would have on her lad’s life.

He grew up to become a creative force that no one could ignore. In the course of his life, he befriended the birds of the air and the creatures of the sea. None could resist the charms of this handsome stud. He even made friends with the milkman from across the grassy stretch.

They say that through this stretch once flowed a mighty red river and that none dared cross it without offering a tithe to the sorrowful red one. In fact, back

in the day, many brave terrorists from south of the great lake tried to cross this devil’s corridor in pursuit of Evil-Fat-Daddy, but instead lost all their memory and all their programs in its red waters. Evil-Fat-Daddy escaped into the dry dunes to the North and later dried up due to lack of orange juice. Legend has it that out of the 27 terrorists, only the milkman made it across the slithering red slime.

Now it was not an easy thing to befriend the milkman. He was known to boast about his own cold demeanor and lack of friends. He was always too seriously occupied milking his dogs to have time to chit-chat with the idle painters and jesters that prowled his neighborhood. In fact, his main

Back in the day, many brave terrorists from south of the great lake tried to cross this devil’s corridor in pursuit of Evil-Fat-Daddy, but instead lost all their memory and all their programs in its red waters. Evil-Fat-Daddy escaped into the dry dunes to the North and later dried up due to lack of orange juice. Legend has it that out of the 27 terrorists, only the milkman made it across the slithering red slime.

concern was how to put more thorny branches into his fence to keep them out.

The jesters were an overwhelming lot that relied on their tongues to wreak havoc among the sitters and runners. They would often prod the milkman with itchy questions such as, “When are you gestating the dogs?” or “When are you paying your first jug of milk to the ruler from the seven hills?” And so on. Such were the annoying questions that these senseless and unkind jesters asked the poor milkman! It was rumored that they were led



Be Happy, Monoprint, Henry Mzili Mujunga, 2009

A despised and unsightly lot, the painters were usually covered in ochre pigment from head to toe. No one dared engage them in a sensible discussion; they were full of dreams and empty words. Fabian was different. He had one great advantage: his toothy grin flashing against the red of his tongue.

by the owl keeper, a ruthless and dark fellow who had never tasted a jug of milk in his entire life.

Nonetheless, Fabian managed to break the taboo. He was from among the painters. A despised and unsightly lot, the painters were usually covered in ochre pigment from head to toe. No one dared engage them in a sensible discussion; they were

full of dreams and empty words. Fabian was different. He had one great advantage: his toothy grin flashing against the red of his tongue. Unlike the other painters, he always ensured that the ochre did not get anywhere near his mouth. This preserved the white of his teeth and red of his tongue.

It is said that the milkman had a weakness for white and red contrasts. Legend has it that his forbears were mentored by a big-haired old druid from one of the fishing communities of the North who shared a similar weakness. In addition, Fabian regularly marinated his tongue in a jug of white spirits. This washed off any lingering stains of ochre that might have accidentally slipped passed his watchful eye.

But befriending the milkman was never Fabian's intention. The big-haired druid had built two dwellings which proved too lonely for an old man with just two sons. He wanted some of the sitters and runners to visit more often. So he used the painters to make a very colorful but dark wall-hanging on the southern wall of the smaller dwelling. Fabian was one of the painters invited to the public viewing of this very important spectacle many years later. He was looking forward to the event.

It happened that at the time the wall-hanging was constructed, the milkman was employed in the druid's kitchen. Although very youthful at the time, he was already gaining popularity for his curds. But his real interest lay elsewhere. He was always curious about the old druid's doings. When the druid commissioned his wall-hanging, he had the painters use a lot of blue, red and black

pigments. The milkman found this to be erroneous as these colors made the place too dark! Much as he loved red, it had to be in contrast with white to become pleasant! So he vowed to change the wall-hanging to a lighter and more palatable color some day. He did not have any particular hue in mind though.

On the day of the public viewing, Fabian, feeling thirsty, went into the kitchen to ask for a glass of milk. Upon entering, he was perturbed by the presence of a balding old man sitting with four of his relatives at the kitchen table discussing how to change the colors of the wall-hanging. This already, before its inauguration, he thought! Nonetheless, he shone his wide red and white grin in their direction, which sent the old man into a spasm of excitement. He called Fabian over and asked him what had brought him into the dwelling. Fabian politely answered that he was a humble painter who had been invited to the viewing. Upon hearing this, the balding man got even more excited. His entire body was now shaking with uncontrolled spasms of laughter. His wrinkled, beady eyes were wet with milk from his previous meal.

In between spasms, he noticed the ochre on Fabian's body and turning to his relatives, the milkman bellowed, "You men, don't you think we have got the answer to our riddle? Let us change the wall-hanging to yellow!" He turned to Fabian and, patting him gently on the small of his back, thanked him and sent him off with a glass of warm milk, but not before inviting him to call again. And that is how Fabian became a regular visitor to the dwellings even long after the drying up of the druid and the disappearance of his wall-hanging.

Art Collectors

A Q&A with **Pamela Kertland Wright**, collector, writer and owner of Emin Pasha hotel as well as several other safari lodges in Uganda. Interviewed by **Daudi Karungi**.



Pamela Kertland Wright

I think there is incredible talent here in Uganda. But sometimes it needs to be taken out of Uganda to be fully appreciated. When people visit our house in the UK and see the art we have there, they are amazed. We have been buying pieces for people overseas, who seem to appreciate the work more than many people here.

How did you begin collecting art? What do you love about it? Did you have a lot of money?

The first piece of art I ever bought was in a little gallery in London, over 20 years ago. It was a tiny etching of a water garden and I was so proud of myself at the time. I had no money - it was totally impulsive. I was in my early twenties, working in London and feeling lonely and homesick for Canada. This little piece made me feel peaceful, and that was that. I probably would not buy it today—it's kind of dull—but I still have it and love it because it was my first piece. In Uganda, it was my husband who bought me my first piece. He's very good at that. He's been buying art for me since we were first married.

How does a busy professional become a leading Ugandan art collector?

Am I a leading art collector? Much of our business is about aesthetics—so art is an integral part of what we do. I feel very lucky that I can sit down with artists, talk to them, learn about their process and this is all part of a day's work.

Which artists do you own?

Personally, I own pieces by David Kigozi, Taga, Kizito, Jude Kateete, Paolo Akiiki, Mary Naita, Edson Mugalu, Geoffrey Mukasa, Ronex, Consodyne Buzabo, Paul Ssendagire, George Kyeyune... and I've just bought my first Daudi Karungi.

What are your plans for your collection? Do you intend to loan it out to museums, keep it in your house, sell it (if so, when and where?)

It has never occurred to me to loan to a museum. It also hasn't really occurred to me to sell any of our pieces. I'll have to think about that. I feel very attached to each and every piece.

Are you an artist yourself? If not, when and where did you acquire an interest and expertise in art?

No, I'm not an artist. I have no technical ability whatsoever... which is so frustrating because I am very visual and can conceive something in my mind that I'd like to see, but cannot produce it. I'm a writer, and I have a deep respect for artists who can bring something from conception to a finished product. I've worked with Paul Ssendagire on some woodblocks, and did some prototypes myself out of wax. They were terrible, but they were enough for him to work from, for him to understand my vision. I



Pamela's Living area with paintings by Taga, Mugalu.

think I'm a bit jealous of artists and their ability and talent. I grew up with a family who appreciates art, and I married a man who is deeply interested in art (and very talented himself), so my interest was inevitable.

What do you look for when you buy a painting (or other work)?

For me it's simple. It's a gut reaction. I just bought another Mugalu - I had to have it as soon as I saw it. My father is an avid art collector, he has built a significant collection over the years, but doesn't necessarily love all the pieces he buys, nor does he hesitate to sell his pieces. I haven't reached that stage yet because I adore each and every piece we have.

What do you look for in an artist? Who is your favourite artist and why?

I am in a Mugalu phase at the moment, I love the way he handles light. I love the way that George Kyeyune handles the female form - I didn't realize when we first bought his work that he was a sculptor. Now it makes sense! For me, part of the appeal is the artist themselves - I really like the person as well as the creation.

What is the most you've ever paid for a work of art?

Hmm. I think it would be fair to say maybe as high as two thousand dollars. But not more than that.

Lay people often say that they find art obscure and not particularly relevant to their lives. Do you think people should experience art? Why? Is art important to society?

For me, for us, art is so much a part of life. It is so much more than an adornment. There is a message in many pieces, and even if you aren't necessarily interested in the message, the fact that the artist interpreted his feelings in that specific way is so relevant. It can be a means of communication, of expression, a recording of our times. Art can be such a dichotomy—sometimes the most prosaic things are the most striking. People must experience art because it opens them up to a way of feeling.

When did you collect art the most and why? Are you collecting any of the young artists now? Who?

I seem to be in a flurry of collecting these past couple of years. I think maybe I've become greedy! I

don't currently have any of the young artists in my collection, but I am quietly watching RO, curious to see what he does next.

What kind of art moves you and why?

That is a difficult question to answer. We have the most sublime sculpture by Mary Naita; it is both strong and serene, I could look at it for hours. The fluid lines, the way she is able to make metal look soft and pliable, or wood look like polished bronze. Nobody can walk by it without reaching out to stroke it, and I love that tactile aspect of sculpture. I'm fascinated with the process that Ronex is developing in his metal casting. With paintings, especially oils, I am very attracted to how an artist works with light. I love the human form, and paintings

that represent a slice of life. Real life, but beautifully rendered.

Assess the state of the arts in Uganda today. Is fine art thriving here? What should be done to bolster a "culture of art" in Africa?

I think there is incredible talent here in Uganda. But sometimes it needs to be taken out of Uganda to be fully appreciated. When people visit our house in the UK and see the art we have there, they are amazed. We have been buying pieces for people overseas, who seem to appreciate the work more than many people here. Everything is vibrant and alive and original. And fresh. It has been very interesting for me to see how Ugandan artists have honed their talent over the years, tweaking their styles,

committing themselves to new directions. I'm amazed with their ability to adapt the materials they use if they're lacking traditional "art supplies".

We need to develop a stronger appreciation of artists and their art, or as you say, a "culture of art". It needs to be respected more, introduced earlier, and valued.

What do you think is the value of your entire art collection?

Oh my God, I have no idea. Emotionally, it's priceless. If our house caught fire, we would let it burn while we dashed in and out to rescue the Naita, the Tagas, the Kigozis... •



Kitchen area with paintings by David Kigozi, Pamela's home.

Viral Value

Henry Mzili Mujunga chats with the curator of the Dutch Masters Today exhibition at the Uganda Museum and ponders how to start an “art epidemic”.



Night watch, Acrylic on canvas, Wyne

The Dutch masters are here. Who's excited?

Is it **Rembrandt** or **Van Gogh**? Are **Corneille Van Beverloo**, **Karel Appel** and **Peter Deim** really present in Uganda? If you are not a student of art or an art enthusiast, you haven't a clue about what I am talking. If you are rather

counting the days until your next paycheck, or perhaps hustling a few extra shillings from a secondhand car sale, then surely you have no time for this mumbo jumbo. I know a lot of refined people who feel they have a need for art who yet possess not even a basic knowledge of who's who in the art world. For starters, do you know

your local painters?

You know of course of **Jose Chameleon** (who doesn't?) but what about **Paulo Akiiki** and **Daudi Karungi**? Surely you must have heard of **Henry Mzili Mujunga**! The Ugandan art world is riddled with a lot of blank spots and gray areas created by a blatant omission by our

Bundling art with poverty alleviation schemes and other social issues undermines its importance as an issue in its own right and makes arguments in favor of it sectarian. After all, art is universal and should appeal to all levels of society.

media, who seemingly forget that their role is to inform and educate society and set new trends in awareness.

Their argument has always been that very few people have the time or inclination to read about art exhibitions. So they restrict this important facet of society to a few incoherent lines in the newspapers or a few pat sound bytes on TV.

Do the names **Damien Hirst** and **Tracey Emin** ring any bells? (both members of the so-called Young British Artists group, the former was famed for turning preserved animal carcasses into invaluable collector's works; the latter incorporated used condoms and bloodstained underwear into one of her most famous pieces.) Those who write about art in Uganda are not necessarily the most informed on the subject. No wonder their lack of enthusiasm has apparently paralyzed their editors as well. Anyhow, back to my original subject. Some Dutch masters are showing their art in Uganda for the first time, thanks to Royal African Foundation, an outfit based in the Netherlands that provides a platform for cultural exchange between

Africa and Europe. The exhibition comprises over 50 works from the Royal African collection, mainly paintings and lithographs, by contemporary Dutch artists. This is a good thing. After all, such shows often draw significant media attention and help local artists blossom. For instance, Ugandan painters Daudi Karungi, Paulo Akiiki and Henry Mzili Mujunga get to exhibit their work right alongside such famous art world names as Karel Appel, Guillaume Corneille and Peter Diem! Wow! Did you know that until his death in 2006, Karel Appel was considered the most important Dutch master alive? His work commands prices in millions of dollars. Now have I got your attention? Indeed, there is a lot of money in art, but how does Uganda exploit this niche?

Most African countries do not invest in the arts and culture, and yet many of their economies thrive on tourism. Many Westerners visit Africa to sample its diverse cultural and artistic expressions



Night watch, Oil on canvas, Rembrandt

(music, dance and visual art). Uganda, however, has developed an elaborate **cultural policy** (2005). Article 7.5 of this document clearly identifies the need to enhance the quantity and quality of artwork and crafts made here in order to grow the industry. The **Social Development Sector's strategic Investment Plan (SDIP)** vows furthermore to seek domestic and international markets for art and crafts. But the main challenge to such good intentions is that, while it is widely acknowledged that the arts tend not to be in a prominent place on the political agenda in Africa, (Inge Ruigrok), and that there is inadequate appreciation of culture and its development role within society, the government has made the blunder of shrouding the subject in social concerns such as "gender" and "poverty". Bundling art with poverty alleviation schemes and other social issues undermines its importance as an issue in its own right and makes arguments in favor of it sectarian. After

How do we then encourage people to spend their hard earned shillings on art in poverty-stricken Africa?

all, art is universal and should appeal to all levels of society. Everyone ought to know that it's the rich that sustain the art industry! Like it or not, there is a need for the moneyed class's direct involvement in its promotion.

I had a lengthy discussion about building the value of Ugandan art with **David Oduki**, co-founder of the Royal African foundation and the curator of the **Dutch Masters Today** exhibition at the **Uganda Museum**, which I have been alluding to previously. Oduki, who resides in Holland, was full of words of wisdom. He expressed great concern for the art and artists of Uganda (having trained as an artist himself). His view is that in order to have an impact on society, such shows have to be coordinated into a frenzy of simultaneous activities that address the unvoiced needs of the people. With the government's involvement, such a mass awareness campaign could create the desired impact on a wider cross section of the Ugandan society. He also noted that artists need to carefully study their customers and their buying patterns by keeping proper, detailed records of sales.

Oduki believes that Africa has lots of talent but that it is taken for granted by Africans themselves. Art has traditionally been considered an ordinary trade—rather than a higher calling—and

individual effort has not been valued. "When it comes to arts like music, we in Africa tend to think that anyone can do it!" he said. "This mentality has to change in order to allow specialization to take effect. It is through the competitiveness of specialization that improvement in quality and quantity will be achieved."

He cited the Iraqw tribe in Tanzania, which sends its girls away to weave a leather and bead skirt as a rite of passage into adulthood. These skirts have today become sought after collectors' items, but the people who create them continue to wallow in poverty. What a relief that famous Ghanaian coffin designers have at least learned to sign their work!

"In today's marketplace, when one builds a name for a product, its price grows," added Oduki. So there is a serious need for branding. But who will do it for us? At one point in my career I thought of employing the services of a marketing firm to sell my art, as if it were a commodity like any other. In art, as in music, of course, we need promoters to sell. But one needs money to fund such activities.

If one is to make it in the art business, there is at the very least a need to understand why people buy art. Most do so, like it or not, to decorate their spaces. Still, there is a small minority that buys art as an investment. I submit that these are the most important buyers, as they are willing to pay a lot of money for the work in anticipation of an even bigger resale value down the line. They

are always on the lookout for the artist whose work commands—or with someday command—high prices.

Oduki contends that to become big and important as an artist, one need throw one's name about and join some significant local or international art organizations or movements. The advantage of being involved with such groups is that when one member makes it big, the rest of the artists are heaved up as well—or at least that's the idea.

Promoting an "art epidemic" in Africa

There is a lot of talk about "viral" marketing since the turn of the millennium. Think about the Ebola virus. How does it spread? An epidemic is spread when someone has contact with another who is infected, and so on, as off it goes, spreading exponentially. You don't have to want the disease to catch it! This is the main principle behind Oduki's Royal African Foundation. Create a constant reminder about art and what a great moneymaker it is and you'll get even the street vendors



Red Cow, Oil on canvas, Peter Diem

and *boda-boda* cyclists interested!

To create a good return on an artwork investment, viable auction houses must be present. India has invested heavily in art auctioning in recent years, to the point that it now has the attention of big players like **Sotheby's** and **Christie's**, which are showing interest in its young talent: **Atul Dodiya**, **Anju Dodiya**, **Subodh Gupta**, **Jitish Kallat** and **Hema Upadhyay**, among others. But Oduki argues that auctions (and auction houses) came into the art world only after serious collecting had been entrenched. How do we then encourage people to spend their hard earned shillings on art in poverty-stricken Africa? This is Oduki's main preoccupation. He argues there is need to use the media to create what he calls "a collecting mystique". He points to 16th Century Europe as an example:

In 1585, as the main Dutch port city Antwerp was taken over by Spaniards. Its Jewish population fled—with all its wealth—to Amsterdam. At the time, the Roman Catholic Church was the biggest patron of the arts. But Jews quickly became major investors and patrons because they needed small, tangible objects of value in which to hide their wealth, items that could be easily and quickly moved during war, points out Oduki.

He and the Ugandan president seem to agree on one thing, which is the need for moneyed foreigners! This point of view is echoes Professor Ali Mazrui's perspective that foreigners are good

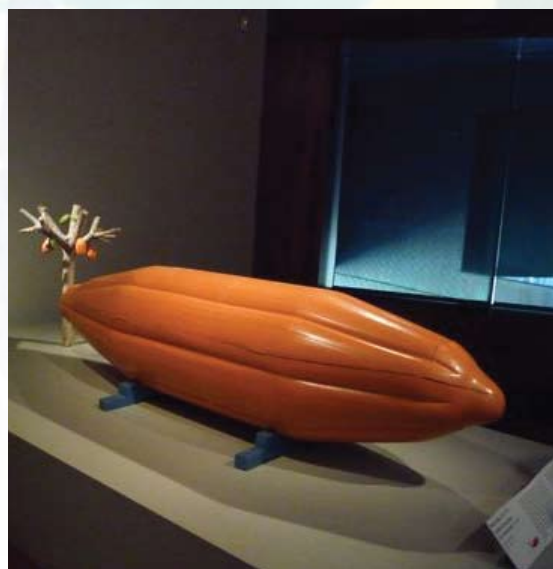
agents of development because they often "look for a high common ground to do business rather than engaging in petty discourse."

So one of the keys to spreading an "art epidemic" in Africa is foreign investment. This would help create a vibrant middle class with disposable income. In Uganda, foreign corporations that have set up shop here, such as **MTN** (over U.S. \$180 million invested) and **Shell Uganda**, to mention but a few, have created hundreds of jobs paying hefty remuneration packages. Hence the appearance of young executives looking for "good art pieces" to hang on their walls!

People need not take the hunt for good art very far from their workplaces, though. Establishing reputable galleries in easily accessible places can go along way in spreading the art epidemic. Museums are also key for this purpose because they are all inclusive. People may visit them for other reasons but end up interacting with the art works on display.

The media also plays a big role in creating a "collecting mystique". But rather than elitist and patronizing, as the "arts" pages of the mainstream press often are, the press should be able to translate art into a language that is understood by average people. Writers tend to use dry, academic language when describing art, and this leaves their audience confused, not to mention sleepy!

In attempting to create enthusiasm for art in Africa, one should be wary of the



A Ghanaian coffin design based on a cocoa pod

lack of follow-up that has foiled the success of many an African art show. Apart from the Dakar Art Biennale and the East African Art Biennale, very few African art shows occur regularly. This is one of the problems that concerns Oduki most. While attempting to make the Royal African collection the largest European art collection in Africa, he is hounded by questions of sustainability. Unlike some art collectors, Oduki does not have millions. It is his love for art and Africa that rather have provided him with daily sustenance. His dream is have a museum to permanently house the Royal African collection.

How Oduki came about the collection is a story in itself. He made attempts to buy from artists directly, but that proved expensive. So he decided to take a novel approach. He sent emails to all his correspondents seeking the artists' emails, then he wrote to them asking them to donate work for an exhibition in Africa. Oduki was amazed by the overwhelming cooperation

He wrote to artists asking them to donate work for an exhibition in Africa. Oduki was amazed by the overwhelming cooperation from the European artists, most who had never been invited to show artwork on the African continent.

from the European artists, most who had never been invited to show artwork on the African continent.

Oduki has some creative ideas on how to keep his scheme going. Royal African (the organization that manages his collection) intends to rent the artworks out through an exclusive club to which people can subscribe for a fee. Money raised this way would enable the collection to tour Africa in pursuit of Oduki's dream of an art epidemic. It could also be used to purchase more work.

Government and cooperate involvement

All the armies of the world bow before Rome. Individual effort alone cannot create the desired impact if the governments of the day here in Africa remain reluctant to invest in the arts. Holland's foreign ministry collects art that can then be accessed by its embassies abroad to hang in their premises. The Ugandan government should borrow a leaf.

Furthermore, the Uganda Museum should initiate a national collection. African governments need to understand the latent value that is stored in works of art. And then there are the banks! Yes, the custodians of value must get involved in the art epidemic.

Take **Standard Bank, South Africa**, for instance. For decades it has been collecting and showing art at the bank's own gallery in Johannesburg. In 2006, Standard paid to bring a **Pablo Picasso** exhibition in Africa. The amount of excitement and education this single act brought to this

continent was immeasurable. For the first time there was consensus about the startling influence of African masks on Mr. Picasso's cubistic exploits. The **Demoiselles d'Avignon**, though it did not make it into the show because it is apparently too valuable to travel, is probably the best example of this influence. This particular show attracted comments from French President **Jaques Chirac** and **Thabo Mbeki**, the former South African president, which underlined the dialogue on this subject that is now taking place between Africa and the West.

The value of art

It seems that Africa still has a lot to learn from the West when it comes to valuing art. In Europe and America, governments have long collected priceless works. "**The Night Watch**", Rembrandt's 1642 masterpiece that now belongs to the people of Holland and "**Washington Crossing the Delaware**" (Emanuel Leutze, 1851) in America are good examples of art that is so valuable that if it was stolen, nations could go to war! But how does a work gain such profound value? Of course, the artist's skill and reputation counts for something. But in my view, the people who collect the art create the most important impression of its value; firstly, by how much money they spend to possess it; and secondly, by how much media and public interest they generate for it.

The situation in Africa is obviously somewhat different. We seem to be obsessed with the exotic



Iraqi Skirt

here in Uganda. When the late musician **Philly Lutaya** (1951-1989) was doing his thing with Ruwenzori Band in the 1970's and early 80's, no one noticed. But when Lutaya went to Sweden and released "Born in Africa", the whole country was suddenly on fire for his music. Perhaps Ugandan art has to first appear in a European gallery or museum to be truly valued here at home! Perhaps we assume that our friends in the West have the expert's opinion. But I also know that if a Ugandan artist were to sell his work for tens of thousands (let alone millions) of dollars, it would arouse public interest. It is all about the "Benjamins" after all!

By bringing the Dutch masters to Kampala, Oduki has raised some important, if controversial, issues about quality. In his opinion, most Ugandan art is simply not acceptable by Western standards (although luckily enough there are some local artists' paintings in the show, so the last word is yours). His advice to Ugandan artists is that they keep two sets of work: one for quick sale to earn bread and upkeep, and another to satisfy the needs of themselves and the serious collectors.

In his view, people in Africa have generally been consuming substandard products because they simply don't know what good ones are. He argues that people who collect art (or any other collectors' item, for that matter) are looking for a return on their investment. "A good art work should have a one hundred year guarantee!" he said. He offered an ad slogan for **Patek Philippe watches** that says: "You never actually

own a Patek Philippe; you merely take care of it for the next generation!"

Perhaps then, as we contemplate building value for contemporary African art, we ought to seriously consider the possibility that we are only building a firm foundation for those who follow after we are long gone.



Passing the Torch

David Oduki on the future of the arts in Africa

By the second week of the *Dutch Masters Today* show, things started getting exciting at the museum. Schoolchildren started pouring in in droves. Artist Henry Mzili Mujunga led a children's workshop. I took a keen interest in watching what the kids did and in watching Henry introduce them to a new movement in European art called "toyism". The kids, working in teams, were asked to pick one of any of the four toyist works on display and reproduce it in their own way. The outcomes surprised and excited me. After three hours of drawing and painting, the finished works were as different from the toyist works as night to day.

Based on this workshop alone, I can confidently state that African kids are as innovative as kids in the "developed world" (though I would like to repeat the same workshop in rural settings with rural kids to state this as a law). Some of the art works produced in this workshop could be framed and sold for thousands of dollars on the open market!

But I wondered: If these kids are brilliant, what happens when they become adults? Will they still have it in them to innovate or will the education system stifle their creativity along the way? Two key factors may have influenced the successful outcome of the workshop: First, colorful works from the Dutch Masters Today exhibition surrounded the kids. Second, the teacher gave the children guidelines and then got out of the way to let the kids innovate—essentially, he left them alone.

Innovation can be revolutionary (Johannes Gutenberg's printing press in 1440 which led to the Reformation and the Industrial Revolution in Europe is an example) or evolutionary (getting ideas from other cultures and environments and using them for the first time in your own, as Pablo Picasso did). Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)*, painted in 1907, cemented his name as the father of modern art in Europe and the world. Much as the style shows glimpses of the start of cubism in this work, it was the use of African masks on two of the women subjects in the painting that added to the attractive power of the painting in Europe. It would

not have had the same effect on African society.

For African kids to continue being innovative until they are grownups, their environment has to change drastically:

- They will need more museums of contemporary African Art.
- Their disposable income will need to go up.
- Their teachers must be educated on how to allow innovation to thrive in the classroom and be more flexible in accommodating talent in the school curriculum by allowing their students to express their individuality and creativity.
- The government must get involved directly in promoting art by building its own collections through direct purchase of artwork and museum support. This will create a new patronage for their works so that they can make a good livelihood from their work when they go into art business.
- Local corporations should build their own art collections, thus creating more local patronage.
- They will hope that locals with disposable income will, by then, have started to see art as an investment and not just as decoration.
- Teachers should be able to equip students with business skills so that they can justify why someone should buy

their work with their hard earned money, rather than a car or a second house. They should be ready to talk business with local buyers rather than confusing them with artistic jargon.

- They will need art resellers in form of local auction houses who will help the public see a pattern in price trends and let them know when to buy and when to sell. This will also create a new form of valuable mobile wealth, which is good for the economy.
- A proper archiving system should be put in place for artworks to be properly registered, adding to their value and the pockets of the artists.
- Copyright laws should be strengthened and enforced vigorously
- It should be instilled that for art to be taken seriously as an investment, durability of the work is key. If Gregory Maloba's

Independence Monument is still standing in beautiful shape since 1962, why are some of the sculptures made more recently already looking much older?

- African artists must know who they are: They must be aware that they need to tap into their largest market, fellow Africans, and forget making artworks targeting only bazungu.
- Government must enact laws that make it harder to export artworks from a select group of artists above 60 years who have sold a single artwork above a certain price (i.e. national treasures). With such a possibility, young artists will keep doing innovative art with the assurance that their futures will be rosy •

— **David Oduki** is co-founder of the Royal African Foundation. Reach him at davidodduki@royalafrican.org or www.royalafrican.org



Proud kids showing off their painting from a workshop with Mzili, Uganda Museum

Critic's Pick

Henry Mzili Mujunga talks about **Rolands (Birutsya) Tibirusya**, a “live” artist whose ingenuity has brought philanthropic art to a refreshing new level in Uganda.



L-R, HE Pierre Nkurunziza, HE Y. K. Museveni and Roland Birutsya

Instead of complaining about it, he has frankly embraced the wave of celebrity that has engulfed the art world.

Birutsya seems deliberately to retain a naïve approach to content and technique in his work. While he keeps his subject matter ambiguously suggestive of the occasion being commemorated, he employs thin glazes and retains baby tints of red and yellow, creating what I would otherwise describe as bad art. But this drawback is always countered by the weight of the signature(s) his paintings bear: H.E Pierre Nkurunziza, president of Burundi signed one, as well as none other than our own H.E. Yoweri Museveni.

In a world where the importance of a thing is gauged as much—or more—by the status of its maker as its subject matter, Birutsya has pushed the goal posts even farther. Instead of complaining about it, he has frankly embraced the wave of celebrity that has engulfed the art world. The artist can gain what he lacks in clout by letting others, more “important” than him, sign his work. Talk of value addition! Brilliant! •

--Henry Mzili Mujunga

When a young and heretofore unknown painter brings together two heads of state to sign his artwork, the reward ought to be instant recognition. He ought to become important by association. Rolands (Birutsya) Tibirusya, a “live” artist whose ingenuity has brought philanthropic art to a refreshing new level in Uganda, fits this profile and is getting the goodies.

It's not so much the content of Birutsya's paintings that makes them special, but the way he makes them—on stage before a live audience and usually for charity functions. The philanthropic nature of his projects points towards the relevancy of art as a source of income rather than simply as a vessel for meaning.



Roland Birutsya and Dr. Tumusiime Mutebire, Governor Bank of Uganda signing painting



Uganda Prime Minister, Prof. Apollo Nsubambi signing one of Birutsya's paintings

... A MOMENT OF SILENCE

TO THE FALLEN UGANDAN ARTIST
GEOFFREY ERNEST KATANTAZI MUKASA
1954 — 2009

... REST IN PEACE.

Seek to be Worth KNOWING



Michiel van Oosterhout on the branding of a telecom.

China's most famous teacher and philosopher, Confucius, was once quoted as saying: "Worry not that no one knows of you; seek to be worth knowing." Twenty-five hundred years after he said it that phrase is still quoted

all the time, especially in commercial circles. It was probably the first branding statement ever coined.

While researching how major telecommunication companies in Kampala brand

themselves, Confucius' words kept buzzing in my ears. How do the big five: Warid, MTN, Orange, Uganda Telecom and Zain "seek to be worth knowing?"

Before embarking on my journey to service and customer care centers, I decided that my intuition should be my guide and not my cynical brain. So I tried to empty my mind of any possible prejudicial love or hate I might happen to feel personally for any of these companies. Forgive and forget, so they say. I would give the benefit of the doubt to my suitors.

Of course, I had set out some criteria by which to judge the shops. I decided that I should be pleased, for example, with any creative or technical solutions that were



The Orange shop in Wandegeya



applied. I would evaluate how a customer might interact in the brand environment and how aesthetically appealing each name's concept was.

Starting at the Lugogo shopping mall, I entered the Uganda Telecom shop. I must say that I've always had a soft spot for sky blue. It reminds me of lying on my back as a kid and imagining swimming in a soothing sea. Whenever I see UTL's signature blue on billboards, posters or television, I feel serene. Interior-wise, however, there was very little refinement at UTL. Just very practical, from chair to desk. Not much in the way of small details or any sign of a delicate touch. But perhaps this is deliberate. "Proudly Ugandan, so buy Ugandan," is UTL's vision. And thinking of Confucius' line, I thought, maybe my blue friends are right to put more emphasis on worth rather than fanciness.

Continuing on down Jinja Road towards the Bazungu graveyard, I passed underneath Warid's massive, impressive billboard that spans the highway to Seeta and beyond. I like its storyline: the guy

who communicates to his sweetheart through a wrapped thousand shilling note. It's humble, not using a 20,000 or 50,000 note instead.

The Zain shop in Oasis Mall, near the new Nakumat, took me by surprise. I expected a mixture of meticulous, practical and stylish—let's say a "muzungu" rectangularity in all shops. Instead, I got Asian cum African circularity in the interior. It reminded me of the Nakasero and Old Kampala style architecture of the colonial period: Lots of rounded forms, as in the lines of a female body or the free flow of a wave.

On I went, passing many telecom ads on my way. If not standing, they were moving by me printed on cars or t-shirts. It made me think of a quote by the American filmmaker Joseph Levine: "You can fool all the people all the time if the advertising is right and the budget is big enough." Levine was well known for his massive advertising campaigns to promote films. I'm not sure Confucius would agree with him, however.

Warid finally brought me the rectangularity I was expecting. Their shop on Jinja Road is the most spacious of all the shops of the big five. This is a space where one can breathe freely and not feel squeezed. Spacey retro-modern looking chairs in various pastel colors were plentifully positioned in groups of five. No endless queues of people here; the one who waits is eventually catered for in his chair. The bold Warid logo, on a dark

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The Zain store at Nakumatt

blue background wall, hangs majestically behind a six-meter-long counter with silver plating. This is indeed a shop worthy of an oil sheik.

But the Orange shop in Wandegeya, as well as the one on Kampala Road, thoroughly stylish, will probably get first prize for interior design (would you expect less from a France-based outfit?) There is, as with Warid, something *gründlich* about their presentation. The French mother company and all its affiliates worldwide present themselves in the same fashion: very basic, medium-size shops with lots of natural light that goes well with the orange. Their style is much subtler than that of MTN or Zain. There is an openness about the design. There are

modish transparent tables and chairs. When talking with an Orange representative, the customer feels a pleasant closeness thanks to the design. Amid the efficiency, the orange boxes add a hint of playfulness to the whole atmosphere. And in the streets, in the bus stops and the abri's, the orange box gives the vague impression that there is some unknown present in there. Still, would an orange circle instead of a box not have pleased Confucius more?

Finally, because I was tired of walking, I hired a *boda* to drop me at the MTN shop opposite the main post office. MTN knows how to play the sentiment card, in happy and sad times. Their ads are smart. (“If you have bad luck, MTN is there to solve it.”) Their Kampala Road branch is their “World Championship 2010 South Africa

flagship” shop. The music is loud, and it’s hard not to tap your feet. All reminds us of this exciting upcoming event while we patiently wait to be helped. Even though the queues are long in the MTN shops and there are hardly any chairs, it remains comfortably the giant of the telecom five. In this branch it becomes clear just how popular MTN is, and why. This South African behemoth has combined Levine’s and Confucius’ visions in their strategy. You see it in the design of their shops’ interiors: humble, and at the same time, not. In this way, MTN has succeeded in becoming part of the flesh and bone of Ugandan society. It is more than a brand. It ranks in the Ugandan psyche up there alongside brands like Champion or Premier League •

--Michiel van Oosterhout is a filmmaker and freelance writer living in Kampala.



The MTN shop on Kampala Road

LIFE Imitates ART



Andrea Stultiens on what a photograph says—and what it doesn't.

This article contains about one thousand words. The same number a picture, as the saying goes, is supposed to be worth. Sometimes clichés are true (that's why they're clichés, after all.) But not this one, and here's why. An image is worth exactly the number of words a viewer is willing to spill on it, from none at all to many thousands. It all depends, of course, on his or her relationship with it. There is often a lot of talk about "rules of composition" in photography classes. When I teach photography, however, the first thing I tell my students is that there is no such thing as a good photograph, and that bad photographs do not exist. Usually this message quite disorients them. Why, then, are they taking a photography class, they wonder? The answer is they are there to learn how to

improve their photographic skills.

Still images that were made by, or with the help of, a camera are everywhere. We all see them on billboards trying to sell us something. They're in magazines trying to make us believe something, in newspapers (presumably) trying to inform us about something. Some of us view them in galleries and museums. Most of us have snapshots of loved ones and memorable moments in our lives on our walls and in albums. There are many forms of photography, and what is a good picture to someone can be terrible to another.

Modern photography was invented around 1830 by several men simultaneously, all of them European. Apparently the world, or at least part of it, was

ready for this new medium. During roughly the same era, European men were also "discovering" Africa. The invention of the new medium enabled these explorers to document the "new" continent in pictures; they could show people at home what they had seen. This simplified version of a part of history offers a hint to what proved to be one of photography's most powerful properties. It produced knowledge! And as we know, knowledge is power. How that power is used, is, of course, another issue altogether. The subject of a photograph always runs the risk of being turned into an object.

While painting or drawing, an artist creates an image in two dimensions. His or her handwriting is literally in the work. The photographer, on the other hand, transforms



Kaddu Wasswa, veteran photographer

an actual piece of reality, a piece of the world that at some point truly existed in front of the lens, into an image. And then there is the photograph itself. Whether rendered on paper or in pixels on a screen, here starts another part of the work. Sometimes this work is taken over by a picture or photo editor, or by a curator. In short, the photograph needs a context to become meaningful. It also needs this context to be “good” or “bad”.

The relation between a photograph and reality makes what the photograph is and how it should be judged confusing. A photo of a beautiful girl is often mistaken for a beautiful photo. My mission as a teacher and a photographer is to make people think about what they see when they look at a photograph. At the same time, I want to give people the opportunity to see what other parts of the world look like. The person can then reflect on his or her world in relation to what he or she is seeing. Ideally, a photograph also tells a

story in relation to other photographs and sometimes texts.

Having said that, I have always been suspicious of photographers who travel the world, pointing and shooting, thinking that they can actually convey a true sense of the places they visit. For a long time I only worked in my own culture, which, I reasoned, I was qualified to fully understand. After visiting a friend who lives in Uganda, I decided, against my usual beliefs, to make work here.

The project started out of the way I was confronted with prejudices, my own as well as those of people I met here. Initially I worked with children in both Uganda and the Netherlands, who were asked to photograph what was important in their lives, to show to their counterparts in the other country. I was aware of the fact that I could never *really* capture the everyday lives of the people here. I hoped though that through working with the children I could learn something about them, and at the same time give the children the chance to learn something about themselves and their counterparts in another culture. Their photographs were combined with photographs made by me during school trips as well as some from museums representing the national history of both countries.

At the moment, I am working with Kaddu Wasswa and his grandson, Arthur C. Kisitu. Wasswa is an AIDS activist who led an extraordinary life and documented it extensively. Using his archive, Wasswa, Kisitu and myself will

attempt a biography mainly consisting of photographs. Some of the photos will come directly from Wasswa’s archive, others are photos documents in the archive and finally others will be taken by me to show the present state of places that play a role in Wasswa’s life. All the work is again to be documented by Arthur, making my role in the project transparent. We hope this project will not only honour its subject but also tell part of Uganda’s history from the perspective of one of its own citizens. Unfortunately, this is rare. Thanks to years of oversimplified portrayals of poverty, war and hunger by the mass media, these things are the only things many people around the world associate with Africa. My hope is that Ugandan photographers will start to depict their world themselves, and by doing so will replace the one-sided western view on the country that still prevails. The goal is for Ugandans to take control of their own present in the future .

--Andrea Stultiens is a photographer and collector who lives and works in the Netherlands. She teaches at the Minerva School of Fine Art and Design in Groningen, the Netherlands. www.andreastultiens.nl



How to Price Your **ARTWORK**

The following is an excerpt from “Economics for Artists”, a talk by an economist with students at the Makerere University Margaret Trowel School of Industrial and Fine Art.



Gallery managers—as professionals at the heart of the art market—will know best at what price your artwork should be offered for sale.

If you make a habit of visiting commercial art galleries, you will get a feel for the prices of various kinds of art. More useful still, you will see from the little red stars appended to the frame or caption of sold works, which kinds of artwork are selling—the artists’ style and signature, their command of technique, their particular significance, their price. These are vital market clues for your own production.

Gallery exhibitions are the main exposure points at which the supply side of art meets demand. This is the marketplace where sellers meet buyers. The price set by a gallery for a work is where the perceived aesthetic value of an artwork is translated into actual market value.

A sale transfers from you, the seller, to the buyer a capital investment asset

A potential buyer admiring a painting at an art exhibition



I promise you the path for artists everywhere is strewn with hazards and slender opportunities only grasped by sweat, hard work, and quite often, tears.

as the global (and local) recession reduces the local economy by up to 26%. “Affordable” is a relative term, and it must be relative to market incomes, not to your need for cash! The criteria you use for pricing depends mainly on the estimate advised by a trusted and experienced gallery manager, and on the buying power of the market.

If you are hungry and need money for a meal, you may have to sell a painting worth millions for the price of a meal. Such is the common exigency of budding young artists. From our discussions and the lessons you have had from MTSIFA lecturers, you now have a good idea of the market segments for art in Uganda, and of the way you should tackle that market!

I wish you good luck, but I promise you the path for artists everywhere is strewn with hazards and slender opportunities only grasped by sweat, hard work, and quite often, tears.

— **Vivian Craddock Williams**
Associate Economics Director
International Development
Consultants

A red sticker indicating a booked artwork

that may—if you work as you should—appreciate in value over time. The work ideally may be put on the market again in the future at an even higher price. Never mind! That appreciation in financial value means you have arrived as an artist.

If you know your own value as an unrecognized genius, you can price your artwork in millions. There just may be a millionaire who will buy at that price, and think he has a bargain! But if you are more realistic

and want to meet the needs of an ordinary prospective customer, you are more likely to sell if you pitch your prices down to an affordable level, or even offer your work as ONCO (= ‘Or Nearest Cash Offer’).

Lower prices are by definition more likely to be affordable to the middle and lower segments of the market for art in Uganda. They must be within the range of the disposable incomes of those segments, very much under pressure



Learning
a New
Language

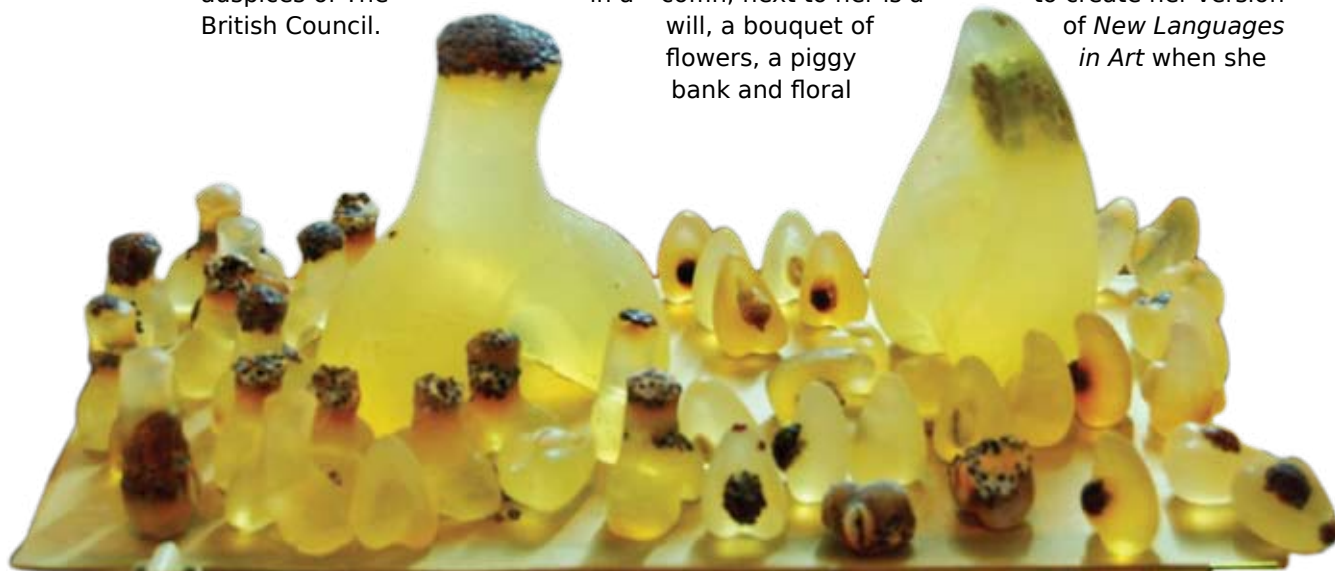
George Kyeyune reflects on how the medium affects the message in contemporary Ugandan art.

Two months ago, Dr. Lillian Nabulime exhibited some very distinct recent sculptures. The show, which took place at the Makerere Art Gallery, upset all our expectations of figurative sculptures on pedestals and framed pictures hanging on walls. The installations were largely made from throw away materials that Dr. Nabulime had re-assessed and thereby given a new identity. In both approach and character, her pieces were very unlike the carved figures for which she is well known. I have chosen to name her exhibition *New Languages in Art*, a phrase I am borrowing from Professor Roger Palmer, a British modernist artist who for six weeks in 1999 taught at the School of Industrial and Fine Arts (MTSIFA) under the auspices of The British Council.

Like our colleague, Dr. Palmer's ideas of recuperating throw away materials proved exciting. For some reason, though, they were not taken further after his departure. Instead, the school continued on safer, familiar territory. It was only three years ago that I again saw something close to what Professor Palmer had instigated when Dr. Maria Kizito carried bits of charred wood and stinking garbage to the Makerere Gallery in a scathing castigation of the mayor of Kampala for not doing enough to clean up the city. In the currently ongoing Independence Exhibition at Makerere Gallery, Muwonge Kyazze draws again on this tradition of recyclables with his piece *Independence*. It features the decapitated body of a pregnant mother in a coffin; next to her is a will, a bouquet of flowers, a piggy bank and floral

decorations laid around the coffin. This provocative piece challenges our thinking about the whole essence of independence.

What is clear about all of these works was that they were not created out of a desire to make money. Rather the creations of these two MTSIFA dons were motivated by the urge to communicate boldly regarding social concerns; a more conventional approach to painting or sculpting figures would lack the needed potency to shock or to elicit thought about these issues. It is this absence of pressure to sell and a propensity for visceral disclosure that I believe gave Dr. Nabulime the necessary composure to create her version of *New Languages in Art* when she



Soap sculpture, by Dr. Lillian Nabulime



was enrolled at New Castle University in the United Kingdom for her PhD in 2001. One should not assume that she was exposed to these concepts in art for the first time when she embarked on her PhD programme. Nabulime is, after all, a well-traveled artist who had visited galleries in Europe and participated in Triangle Art Workshops in several African countries. (These workshops are specially designed flexible working spaces that aim to foster

networking and the exchange of ideas by bringing together formally and informally trained artists from around the world to work in an environment of mutual respect.)

What Nabulime's PhD research did do, I believe, was give her the opportunity and composure to engage in a language that she was already familiar with. She knew that confining herself to carving wood would not give her work the broad access to the general public or the intellectual panache she was looking for. I argue that art made with recycled or throwaway materials has the scope to touch us and speak to us clearly because we instantly relate to the materials that are commonly used; they come from our environment, much as they are given a new identity. In one of her installations, for example, Nabulime makes casts of male and female genitals in transparent soap into which she embeds dark seeds to look like infections. We all know that soap is a cleaning agent. The metaphor presented here is that spiritual and physical cleanliness is crucial to the prevention of HIV infection. In another installation, she assembles three mirrors. The first one is massively shattered and as such distorts one's image. This shattering is reduced in the second glass, while the third one is intact. The first glass relates to denial as a serious problem in the management of HIV/AIDS. The second glass represents post-counseling sessions in which people accept their affliction and learn to live positively with it, which improves their lives. In the third glass,

Nabulime makes casts of male and female genitals in transparent soap into which she embeds dark seeds to look like infections. We all know that soap is a cleaning agent. The metaphor presented here is that spiritual and physical cleanliness is crucial to the prevention of HIV infection.



As the world shrinks further through improved communication, we cannot afford to remain an isolated Ugandan community in our artistic endeavors. Whether or not we want to become part of the international art circuit is no longer an option.

patients live a normal life and carry on their day to day activities.

These and other sculptures in the show had earlier been used to stimulate discussions about the AIDS epidemic. Given that the great majority of infections in Uganda are via sex, and yet sex in the African context remains a largely taboo subject, Nabulime believed that she could, if obliquely, talk about this intricate subject via sculpture to her respondents, who were mostly women. (Women are more prone to HIV infection than men, biologically and because they have such low bargaining power when it comes to sex.)

Nabulime has said that indeed, her respondents recognized themselves in the work and she was able to engage them in useful discussions on the subject of HIV/AIDS.

Nabulime says she faced an uphill task creating works that would appeal to her market because the tradition of the so-called plastic arts in Uganda is very weak. Even when Margaret Trowel,

the founder of the Makerere University Art School, added sculpture to her curriculum, the discipline did not develop at the same pace here as, for instance, painting. In my view, the reason for this is not so much the weak legacy of the plastic arts in East Africa but rather that sculpture itself is a slow-growing discipline. For artists who are looking for a quick income, sculpture is simply not convenient. This is an important factor behind the paucity of sculpture in Uganda today. It also goes far in explaining why Nabulime had to be extremely creative to capture the imagination of her Ugandan audience.

Still, most of this work was created to satisfy an academic programme and is not easily collectible in the Ugandan gallery setting. So can we expect Dr. Nabulime to maintain her iconoclastic working ethos? To survive creating work in this new direction, Dr. Nabulime will probably have to either seek funding from an outside source or revert to her former style in at least some of her work. It is noteworthy that Nabulime's newest pieces in the show return us to her



pre-PhD days. The realities of practicing art in Uganda could be catching up with her, at least for now.

It should be noted that the “new languages in art” that Dr. Nabulime has exposed to us with such effervescence are far more commonplace—and marketable—elsewhere in the world. In America and Europe, this approach started as far back as the early 20th Century. In 1917, Marcel Duchamp’s world famous Fountain, in which he simply named and

signed a urinal, sparked controversy regarding what might or might not be called art. (This was one of the pieces that Duchamp called “ready made” or “found art”.) As the world shrinks further through improved communication, we cannot afford to remain an isolated Ugandan community in our artistic endeavors. Whether or not we want to become part of the international art circuit is no longer an option. But as we do so we must be conscious of where we come from as well as our location

in history. Nabulime’s exhibition has challenged us to step out of our “comfort zone”, to quote Dr. Rose Kirumira, and with courage and determination, expand the horizons of our artistic experiences to new and international levels without losing our identity •

---George Kyeyune is the dean of the Margaret Trowel School of Industrial and Fine Art at Makerere University.



Receptacles, Mixed media, Dr. Lillian Nabulime



Receptacles, Detail



The Kiss, Mixed Media, Dr. Lillian Nabulime

Dance On

Tebandeke Samuel Lutaaya on the history and growth of contemporary dance in Uganda

What is contemporary dance? If I were to dissect the term into its constituent components I would come up with something along the following: *contemporary*, meaning belonging to the present time; and *dance*, a series of movements and steps, usually performed to music. Merging the two statements, then, contemporary dance is “a series of movements and steps usually performed to music that belong to the present time.” Somehow, I did not find this definition of a discipline that has been my life’s passion satisfactory, however, so I asked some local dance practitioners to help me. Alfdaniels Mabingo, a junior lecturer at Makerere University, offered this definition: contemporary dance is a genre that is not based on static rules. As a style, it gives the dancer the

freedom to express herself, be it through the movement, costumes, scenic design or other aspects of performance.

The form we generally (and vaguely) call contemporary dance in fact has existed for years—way before it was labelled. In Uganda, contemporary dance naturally evolved out of the confluence of our own indigenous tribal dance tradition and the newer influences of Western modern dance, a form that developed in the United States and Europe in the early 20th Century. In the West, the modern dance “movement” began when two American female dancers, Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis, rebelled against the rigid constraints of classical ballet. Modern dance emphasized creativity and self-expression rather than technical virtuosity.

Like traditional African dance, early modern dance drew on myths and legends. Later on, it became increasingly political as many dancers saw the new genre as an agent for social change.

Of course, contemporary dance per se didn’t come to Uganda until much later. Mabingo dates the actual birth of the form here to nearly three decades ago. A former director of the National Theatre, Kalundi Serumaga’s father, had a group that practised a form of contemporary dance before the form was recognised at Namasagali College, he says. How true this rings is a matter of debate, since there appears to be no documentation of such a group. Julius Lugaaya, the Artistic Director of the Danceweek Uganda Contemporary Dance Festival, says this genre of dance started



at Namasagali College under the direction of Father Damian Grimes, who is said to have made certain that the curriculum contained a great deal of emphasis on the arts. No account of the development of modern dance in Uganda is complete without the mention of this great man. He encouraged dance as a discipline, performance tool and entertainment form here, as evidenced by the numerous musical productions that were presented by the school at the National Theatre under Grimes. The school encouraged and brought together many of those with a passion for dance. It was through the interest generated by this collaboration as well as the confluence of so many different influences, that gave contemporary dance the voice it so desperately needed here in Uganda. Traditional dance as well as creative movement enjoyed renewed attention with the birth of this new form.

Between 1996 and 1997, contemporary dance developed even further as people became more aware of its immense entertainment potential. The hotels already had bands that were entertaining their patrons but that did not stop the inspired young men and women who felt they were ready to make a difference and turn the local entertainment industry on its head.

Footsteps Dance Company

Founded on 24th April 1997, this was the first proper contemporary dance group in Uganda. It had dancers who were fresh from their experiences at Namasagali College and those who had taken on further studies at Namasagali University. Started by Julius Lugaaya, Roger Masaba and Andrew Kuyahaga—the latter who now lives in California, USA—Footsteps Dance Company was the first to go regional, and subsequently international,

performing in Kenya, Tanzania, Russia, Libya and Sweden. Footsteps created *"Things Fall Apart"*, which they performed at the prestigious Zanzibar International Film Festival.

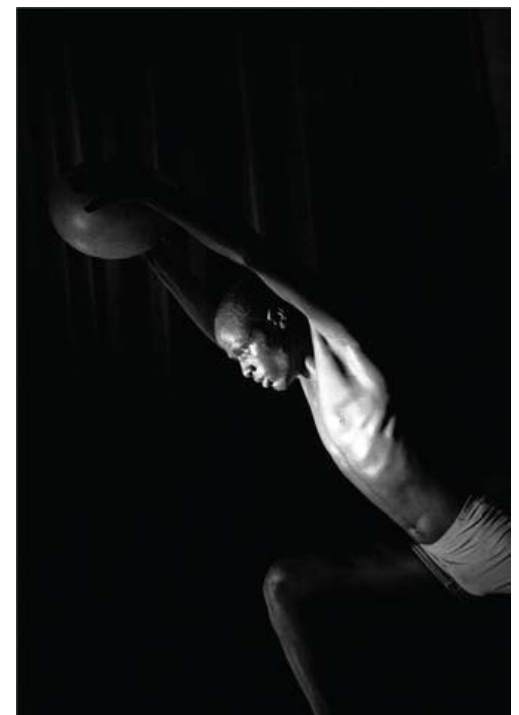
The company nurtured many local dance talents; pioneers who went on to form other companies after Footsteps went bust. Okulamba Dance Company led by Jill Pribyll, Keiga Dance Company led by Jonas Byaruhanga and Mutumizi Dance Theatre led by Isaac Mulumba all rose out of the influence of Footsteps. These companies have continued in the tradition of their mentor in managing to travel the world, performing and collaborating with other artists and institutions wherever they go.

Danceweek Festival Uganda

A vital platform of the contemporary dance scene in Uganda, Danceweek developed as a result of discussions between Julius Lugaaya and the director of a dance festival in Moscow, Russia. The idea was to create a platform for dancers here to choreograph and perform original works as well as to encourage collaboration among artists, both locally and abroad. The first festival took place in 2004. It continued to grow the following year, with three companies taking part and the Alliance Francaise supporting. By 2006, funding constraints temporarily suspended the festival. However, the spirit of contemporary dance was strong and alive by this time and subsequent years marked not only a comeback, but an increase in the number of companies that participated in the festival. Since then Danceweek has garnered quite a bit of clout. The Uganda German Cultural Society (now Goethe Zentrum Kampala) has also come on board and today facilitates the running of the festival. Danceweek has been an

inspiration to the companies and artists who have participated, and the festival's contribution to the development of Ugandan contemporary dance cannot be overestimated.

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Development of the form

Training opportunities for contemporary dancers in Uganda were limited in the beginning. There was Namasagali College and the Makerere University Dance Department. Today, the Petite

Gradually, more and more people have come to view contemporary dance as a valid art form. While the audiences in the beginning were mainly Western foreigners (who were already somewhat familiar with modern dance in their own countries), today there is increasing interest in the form among Ugandans themselves.

Ecole de Danse, run by Madame Maria Gracia, is also influential in preparing dancers for the field. The Kampala Ballet and Modern Dance School, which started in 2005, has also contributed many talents to the local dance world. Many of these dancers have gone on to train and mentor other dancers and create works that have been on the cutting edge of the local modern dance scene. A few institutions elsewhere on the continent, such as the Ecole des Sables in Senegal, have produced dancers who have also been influential: Jonas Byaruhanga of Keiga Dance Company, to name one. The Uganda National Cultural Centre at the National Theatre has literally provided dancers with a platform to perform their works, providing rehearsal and performance space as well as technical assistance during shows.

Audience reception

As with most new forms, contemporary dance here was frowned upon by those who watched the first showcases of this *avant-garde* style. But gradually, more and more people have come to view contemporary

dance as a valid art form. While the audiences in the beginning were mainly Western foreigners (who were already somewhat familiar with modern dance in their own countries), today there is increasing interest in the form among Ugandans themselves. Local private sector companies have contracted the services of contemporary dance companies, perhaps marking the realisation that the form can be a potent tool in the communication of messages.

The future

The next five years hold a great deal of promise for contemporary dance in Uganda, with greater opportunities arising as people start to appreciate the importance of the form. New companies have emerged including Stepping Stones, Beautiful Feet, Haniba Dance Company, Uganda National Contemporary Ballet (formerly Burudani Dance Company) and Utah Konvict, to mention but a few.

Of course, the inability of dancers to access resources to implement projects and launch productions of their work has been a hindrance to the development of the form here, as everywhere. To bring more people to appreciate contemporary dance, we must try better to orient audiences before performances. Mabingo, for example, argues in favour of providing audiences with narratives or written explanations to go along with our works. That many of our best dancers are now moving into the Diaspora is a sign that the future of dance here is under threat unless we can provide better resources and opportunities for dancers to work in the country and the region. Still, local contemporary dancers continue to make a commendable effort despite the challenges. *Je danse donc je suis!!!!* •



B-Boy Dance



Sam Lutaaya performing a contemporary dance routine



Contemporary Dance moves



A Great Mind

Slow to anger and eager to know more,
That mind is less restricted to growth.
Attentive to reason,
Mind and body work favorably
In turn one deserves the other.

Less damaging with uninterrupted thoughts,
Good things are put to good use.
When approached by noisy circumstances,
That mind is prepared to listen.
A great mind is neither rushed nor pushed,
It is nourished to take pride in participating; in turning
difficulty into simplicity.
It is abstract and realistic, narrow and wide all at the same
time.
Opposites adhere,
Differences tend to bring us together.
That mind will tire of the same old and crave for change.
Some call it uniqueness, to feel good about self.
It relates to the feeling the explorers must have felt turning
the unproductive, productive.
A mind that bears witness to such as this,
gets a feeling of immortality, superiority, and intellectual
versatility.

Naava
— *The author is a musician.*

Where to Find Art

Afriart Gallery
Block 57, Kenneth Dale Drive
Off Kiira Road - Kamwokya
Tel: 0414 375 455
Email: info@afriartgallery.org
Website: www.afriartgallery.org

AID Child
At the Equator on Masaka Rd.
Tel: 0772 616 861

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

Makerere University Art Gallery
Tel: 0414 531 423
Email: artgallery@sifa.mak.ca.ug

Nommo Gallery
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Email: culture@africaonline.co.ug

Tulifanya Gallery
28/30 Hannington Road
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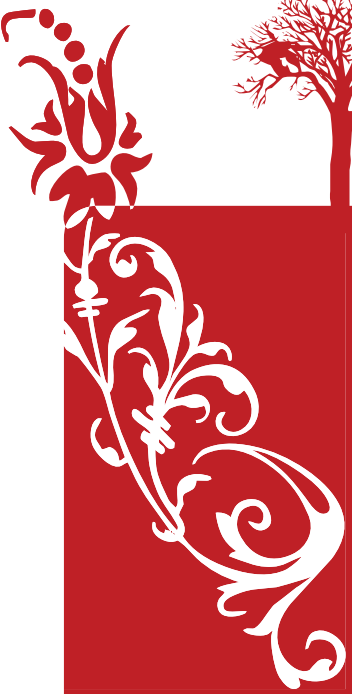


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