



SCOPING  
THE VISUAL  
ARTS SCENE  
IN EAST  
AFRICA

Published by The British Council//

10 Spring Gardens  
London SW1A 2BN  
England

[www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)

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**Cover page:** Between Heaven and Earth photographic exhibition  
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**Page 6:** Between Heaven and Earth photographic exhibition by Nick Danziger

**Page 12:** Installation at Nafasi Arts Space, Dar Es Salaam Tanzania by Kevin  
Eric Odur 'Muda Wetu wa Kula' (Our Eating Time)

**Page 21:** Luka Picasso studio space, Nafasi Arts Space,  
Dar Es Salaam Tanzania

**Page 28:** Vivian Mugume at KLA ART 014, photograph by Alex Lyons and 32°  
East | Ugandan Arts Trust.

**Page 35:** Nafasi Arts Space, Dar Es Salaam Tanzania

**Page 39:** Helen Zeru at KLA ART 014, photograph by Alex Lyons and 32° East |  
Ugandan Arts Trust.

# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION AND KEY FINDINGS</b>	//03
<b>ETHIOPIA</b>	//05
GENERAL FINDINGS	//05
BEING AN ARTIST IN KENYA	//05
KEY PLAYERS	//07
WIDER INFRASTRUCTURE	//09
<b>KENYA</b>	//10
GENERAL FINDINGS	//10
BEING AN ARTIST IN KENYA	//10
KEY PLAYERS	//11
WIDER INFRASTRUCTURE	//15
OTHER PLAYERS	//15
RELATIONS WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD	//18
<b>TANZANIA</b>	//20
GENERAL FINDINGS	//20
BEING AN ARTIST IN TANZANIA	//20
KEY PLAYERS	//22
THE WIDER INFRASTRUCTURE	//25
<b>UGANDA</b>	//27
GENERAL FINDINGS	//27
BEING AN ARTIST IN UGANDA	//29
KEY PLAYERS	//31
OTHER PLAYERS	//33
WIDER INFRASTRUCTURE	//34
<b>ADDENDUM:</b>	//40
TWO SIGNIFICANT SOURCES OF FUNDING FOR THE VISUAL ARTS IN EAST AFRICA	//40

# INTRODUCTION AND KEY FINDINGS

This is the report of the findings of a scoping study of the visual arts sector in East Africa, commissioned by the British Council in October 2013. The study comprised preparatory desk research and interviews in London, a ten-day research visit to Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania (3rd -13th December 2013) and follow-up interviews by telephone and Skype. The key findings were as follows.

The lack of higher education in the visual arts is a continuing challenge for the East African region. There are distinct groups of artists: those who are established and working internationally and who will often have received a higher education in the visual arts abroad, and those who have had little or no opportunity for formal education or training and little exposure beyond their

immediate area. Many artists are self-taught and learn from their peers.

The lack of educational opportunities, a poor arts infrastructure that limits the provision of, and access to, museum collections and exhibition spaces for modern and contemporary art, the scarcity of arts publishing and arts criticism combine to create a climate in which artists often need to make work that sells, in order to survive. There seems to be a reluctance to critique work and limited understanding, among artists and audiences, of how to receive and engage with work.

The research identified six areas that would benefit from development and investment:

**PROFESSIONAL SKILLS:** particularly in curatorial skills, the assessment and analysis of work, critical thinking and writing.

**PRACTICAL MENTORING:** in visual arts project management, especially in planning, communication and marketing, to address the continuing prevalence of white people in the profession.

**ARTISTIC EXCHANGE AND COLLABORATION:** with the objective of stimulating, identifying and facilitating ideas and connections within and beyond the region, promoting sharing and building confidence within the sector.

**NEW WAYS OF SHOWCASING WORK:** to create different kinds of exposure for artists and their work and different kinds of experience for audiences. There are particular

opportunities to do this in art in the public realm.

**RESEARCH:** advocating, illustrating and demonstrating, to artists and curators, the role of research in the creative process and to challenge the tendency to focus solely on the execution of the work.

**AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT:** while continuing to encourage the buying of art, there is an opportunity to increase public knowledge and understanding of the range of work made by artists, lasting and ephemeral, and to promote discussion of its non-monetary value.

# ETHIOPIA

Research in Ethiopia conducted and written by Wanja Kimani of the British Council with input from Kathryn Standing

## GENERAL FINDINGS

The research was focused on Addis Ababa and was conducted within a wider study that examined visual arts, music and literature conducted by arts hub | addis ababa. Ethiopia has a rich cultural history, deeply rooted in religious art, but has remained isolated from the rest of East Africa. Interviewees in the UK reported Ethiopia to be a 'very happening place', with lots of visual arts activity, including the well respected Addis Foto Fest. As Margaret Nagawa, artist, art educator, curator, who lives and works between Uganda and Ethiopia stated 'Ethiopia is really active at this point in time. Many artists, architects, curators, art historians, and leading thinkers are especially interrogating the swiftly changing urban landscape and the accompanying social issues.

Within the country, visual artists and cultural practitioners are increasingly enjoying cultural activity, but exposure to international contemporary art practice and critical thinking remains limited. Publishing is very limited and all contributors to the research highlighted the lack of English as a major obstacle for those wanting to understand texts in English and express their ideas to non-Amharic speakers.

Local galleries frequently host exhibitions, artist talks and residencies. EUNIC partners also offer exhibitions and limited capacity building workshops.

## BEING AN ARTIST IN ETHIOPIA

For art graduates, there is little professional support in terms of sustaining a studio practice, preparing portfolios; engaging with curators and discussing art work in English.



There are a small number of curators, many of which have spent time abroad and have returned to Ethiopia. Local galleries and art centres include Asni Art Gallery, Lela Gallery, Zoma Contemporary Art Centre and the recently established Gallery DeGesa and Guramayle Art Centre provide showcasing opportunities. Artists' studios are situated within residential settings and there are a number of active collectives who combine studio and exhibition space such as Netsa Art Village and Habesha Art Studio, providing points of sale for associated artists.

Makush Art Gallery is a commercial gallery and restaurant, permanently showcasing works of over 70 artists and connected to a wide network of expats who make up a large percentage of clientele. The inaugural Addis Art Fair took place in 2014, providing an opportunity for emerging and established artists

to showcase their work to a large audience and sell work at affordable prices. Whilst pricing at Makush Art Gallery and the Addis Art Fair is somewhat fixed by the owners and organisers respectively, the annual Art of Ethiopia exhibition held at Sheraton Addis provides artists the opportunity to sell work at higher prices where the diaspora make up a large portion of the audience.

Artists share information by word of mouth and also through Facebook. However, there was a general feeling among those interviewed that access to information was limited to those with the right access to sources and their level of willingness to share knowledge.

## KEY PLAYERS

Local galleries play big role in providing exhibition opportunities. Spaces such as **Netsa Art Village** (directed by Mihret Kebede) **Asni Art**



**Gallery** (owned by Konjit Seyoum) and **Guramaye Art Centre** (owned by Mifta Zeleke) provide a space to experiment with new ways of working and offer opportunities for exhibitions and residencies. **Zoma Contemporary Art Centre** (designed and built by artist Elias Sime and directed by Meskerem Assegued) also hosts artist in residence programmes both in Addis Ababa and Harla.

In its third year, the **Addis Foto Fest**, directed by Aida Muluneh, attracts international participants and audiences and provides workshop opportunities as well as a critical platform to discuss image production and consumption.

The annual **Art of Ethiopia** exhibition, which takes place at Sheraton Addis attracts a large audience comprising of high-level politicians, expats, locals and the diaspora. In 2014, the first **Addis Art Fair** took place, which

provided art work by emerging and established artists at affordable prices.

Cultural institutions including **Alliance Ethio-Francaise, Goethe Institut** and the **Italian Cultural Institute** provide opportunities to exhibit, film screenings and symposiums as well as limited capacity building workshops. The **British Council** is increasing activity around capacity building as well as wider infrastructural issues. The **Russian Cultural Centre** has collaborated with the **Ethiopian Visual Artists Association** to present monthly talks for visual artists and other art forms.

In collaboration with **arts hub | addis ababa, Circle Art Agency** in Nairobi has been a key player in supporting Ethiopian artists enter the East African art market through exhibitions and the Modern and Contemporary Art Auction.

Tibebeselassie Tigabu, journalist and assistant editor of **The Reporter**, a weekly English newspaper, is a long-standing supporter of the arts and writes an arts column as well as contributing exhibition reviews on international platforms.

## WIDER INFRASTRUCTURE

The **Addis Ababa University Alle School of Fine Arts and Design** was founded in 1958 and provides training in traditional art forms such as painting and sculpture whilst also hosting Fab Lab, a digital fabrication laboratory. A new MA in Film is in the pipeline. Smaller institutions such as **Entoto TVET College** provide diplomas in art and design. There are also a number of 'feeder' schools which provide preparation for higher art education as well as specialist mediums such as film making.

**Modern Art Museum/Gebre Kristos Desta Center** holds a collection of

work by the late Gebre Kristos Desta, which are on permanent display alongside temporary exhibitions. The **National Museum of Ethiopia** houses anthropological displays as well as modern art from their permanent collection. Within the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, the **Ethnological Museum** displays photographic displays and hosts public symposiums.

# KENYA

## GENERAL FINDINGS

The research focused on Nairobi, and the striking finding here was the apparent lack of cohesion and communication between the different parties. The fact that I was a first-time visitor to Nairobi, the brevity of the visit and the size of the city made it more challenging to join up the dots, to pinpoint where the zeitgeist is, to know who talks to whom and what fuels artistic energies there.

The contributors to the research in Nairobi described the infrastructure as weak. Sources of funding for the visual arts are scarce, there is limited art education and little art publishing. One consequence of this is the lack of a critical dimension to much of the work being produced, and there are few arenas for cultural debate. The paucity of art education is seen to be one of the key challenges for Kenya.

‘There are few opportunities for artists to teach, which, in addition to earning a living, provides artists with the opportunity to learn to articulate their practice; in so doing they strengthen their work, the reputation of the institution and the wider sector as a whole.’ Sam Hopkins, Artist/ Curator.

*‘There is a great urgency to build an arts infrastructure.’*

Franziska Lukas, Cultural Programme Officer, Goethe-Institut, Nairobi.

## BEING AN ARTIST IN KENYA

The main source of income for artists is the sale of their work. Many are skilled in the art of ‘selling’ and many work to commission, with some undertaking large-scale, sculptural pieces or murals for the public realm. (The expansion of shopping malls is providing lucrative opportunities in this field.) However, with reliance on an art audience/

market that is mainly uneducated in viewing and understanding contemporary visual arts, there is a reluctance to deviate from what is known and saleable.

There is a growing interest in practice that combines and crosses over between art forms and different media. New trends are being set by organisations such as **The Nest**, dissolving the boundaries between different media, bringing music into the contemporary visual arts, raising the standards of debate and promoting critical thinking. The increasing attention being paid to contemporary African writing and the development of platforms such as the journal **Kwani?** are also cited as important for the visual arts.

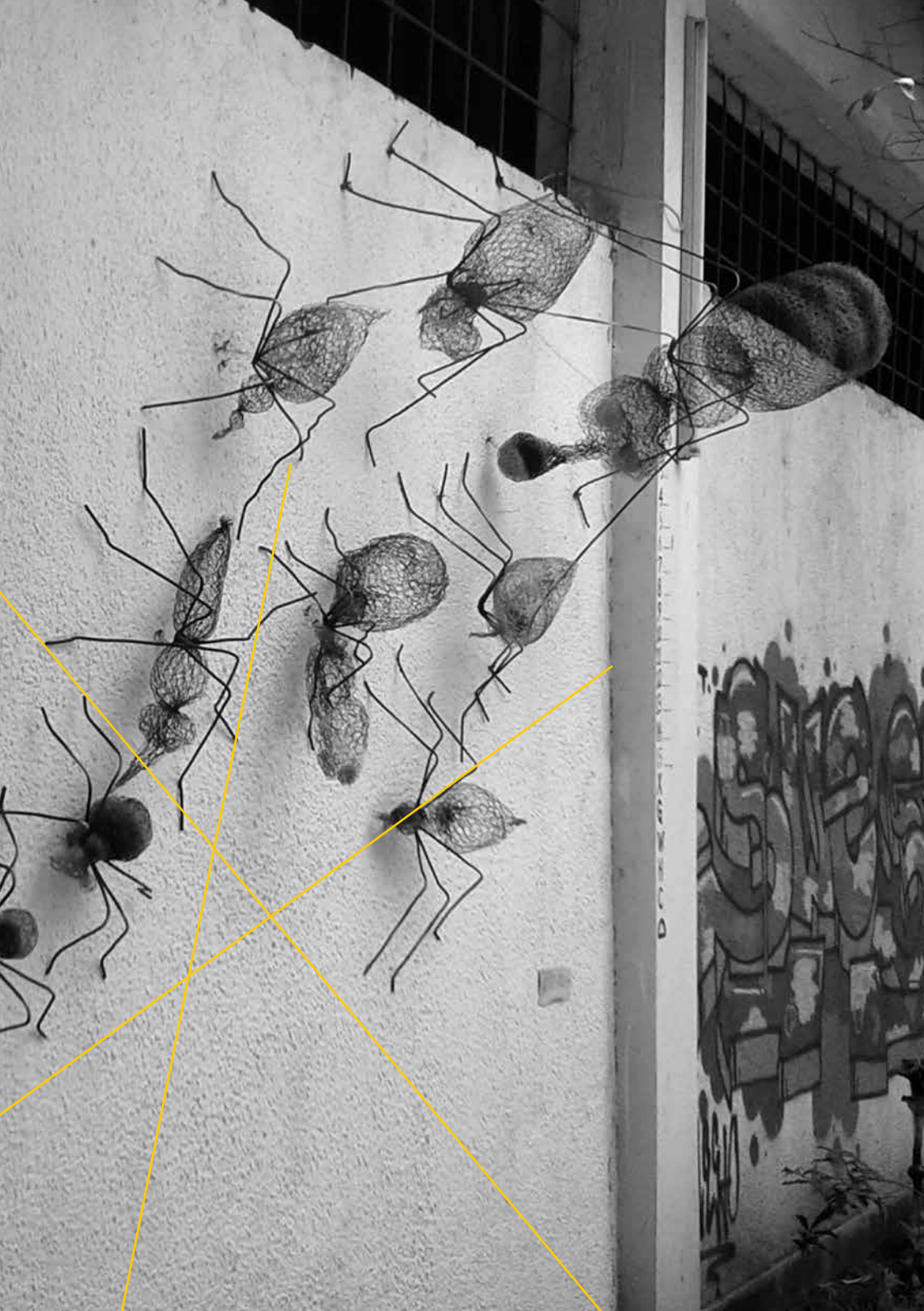
Digital technology is not hugely evident in the visual arts in Kenya yet, but there is a growing community of film and video makers. **African Digital Art** is an

online collective, but the founding artists and those participating in the programmes work mainly outside East Africa.

## KEY PLAYERS

Organisations that are key players in the contemporary visual arts in Kenya are the **Goethe-Institut**, **Circle Art Agency** and **Kuona Trust**.

The visual arts activity of the **Goethe-Institut** is held in high regard and said to be well ahead of everyone else in Kenya, from its programme content, project management, marketing and publicity, to its presentation and delivery. It works with artists and partners across Africa, bringing different disciplines and places together and working collaboratively with artists to realise projects. Its impact is attributed partly to the type of people it recruits, often choosing academics to run the programme, rather than



administrators or project managers and over time this has raised the level of discourse.

**Circle Art Agency** was founded in early 2013 by Danda Jarolimek, Fiona Fox and Arvind Vohora, as a non-profit organisation, working with private and corporate collectors and a wide group of artists across East Africa. As the first independent art agency in the region to support and promote the contemporary visual arts, it is having a significant effect within the sector, both in Kenya and beyond. A successful art auction in 2013 raised the profile of East African art considerably.

Circle's work covers consultancy, exhibitions and auctions. Its focus is on professionalising the art scene, providing a consultancy service to artists, art institutions, building the market for East African artists' work and exposing artists to an international market. Its aim is to

create a strong and sustainable local and international art market for East African artists and to provide guidance and act as a mentor for artists, buyers and audiences in general. Developing a local audience (in terms of numbers and education) is also key to the development of a sector in which, to date, the audience has consisted mainly of expats and tourists.

Circle does not have a collection of art, but brings different art pieces from a wide selection of artists to a viewing room, as and when there are clients and it tailors the work to their needs and tastes. Circle is rigorously selective, concentrating on quality not quantity. It held its first auction in November 2013; a very successful event that was reported widely.

Circle is developing the staging of 'pop up' exhibitions as a deliberate change from the traditional concept of an exhibition lasting several

weeks and making it, instead, a four-day 'happening'. Adapting unusual venues and appealing to a wider audience than usual, these exhibitions have high standards of curatorial selection and presentation, underpinned by years of expert knowledge and experience of the visual arts, both within the region and beyond. Circle is also embarking on the commissioning of art projects within the public realm, acting as consultants for various developments, malls and business parks financed by Actis (a private equity firm that invests in building in East Africa) as well as privately funded corporations and developments.

Circle Art Agency is also the administrator of The African Arts Trust (TAAT).

**Kuona Trust** started life at the National Museum of Kenya in 1995, with a mission to support the

professional development of visual artists. It has been an important player and continues to have a high profile in Kenya's arts scene as well as in the international Triangle Network. A not-for profit visual arts organisation, it promotes and supports artists, nurturing local talent and skills. Its relocation, in 2008, from The GoDown Arts Centre to a leafy, residential suburb of Nairobi, has helped it to re-establish its independent identity.

It is programme-orientated and structured around the provision of visual arts. This includes studio spaces, regular exhibitions, artists' talks and presentations, training and mentoring programmes, international exchange, library resource, community outreach and events. There is a big focus on fundraising, marketing and encouraging the local population to see and buy work. The studios are used by a mix of self-taught

and professionally trained artists and there is an exchange residency programme in which UK artists regularly participate. However, the consensus seems to be that the work produced is of variable quality and sometimes lacks sufficient criticality and that it would be good to see stronger curation.

## WIDER INFRASTRUCTURE

There is a need for more audience development – in the sense of education. Local audiences and the expats and tourists who make up a significant audience/market for the visual arts in Kenya would all benefit from a broader, deeper understanding of the contemporary visual arts. **Circle Art Agency** has been addressing this need as part of its work.

Art publishing is virtually non-existent. The Kenyan publishing industry focuses on school textbooks

and NGO-sponsored publications. There is very little in the way of art catalogues and publications looking at different intellectual perspectives. Local publishers have to make a profit and these narrow fields hold little interest for them. The best intellectual input from Kenya therefore remains unpublished and even the most notable Kenyan artists have no publications to show.

## OTHER PLAYERS IN THE KENYAN VISUAL ARTS SCENE

There are few galleries of note and Nairobi currently has no eminent gallery showing new, emerging work or one that participates in international public platforms.

The **One Off Contemporary Art Gallery** is a long-established selling gallery, run by gallery director and art dealer Carol Lees and provides a good background and overview of the Nairobi arts scene. The gallery



showcases works by East Africa's most established names, but little experimental, contemporary work. It works actively to promote these artists internationally and has cultivated a loyal audience, selling mainly to embassies and ex-pats.

**The Rahimtulla Museum of Modern Art** (known as RaMoMa) was established in 2001 by Carol Lees and artist Mary Collis, with support from the Ford Foundation and the Rahimtulla Trust. It developed a reputation as one of Kenya's leading exhibition spaces for contemporary visual arts but closed in 2010. Work is currently under way on a new **Museum for Contemporary Art**, to be housed in a building associated with the Rahimtulla Trust. The project is being spearheaded by Italian curator Samantha Ripa di Meana, who has a gallery in Brussels. It is an exciting project the success of which will depend on its ability to direct and contextualise programmes and to

develop and educate audiences for the contemporary visual arts.

**PAWA 254** and the work of its founder Boniface Mwangi, the award-winning Kenyan photo-journalist, has been important and influential, especially in the development of a social enterprise for youth in which creative professionals (photographers, graphic artists, journalists, poets, musicians) are collaborating to foster social change.

**Miriam Syowia Kyambi and James Muriuki** are visual artists living in Nairobi and working internationally. Both describe art education in Kenya as being '*in a parlous state*'. Miriam studied at International School of Kenya (ISK) and undertook further arts education in the US. James has a design background and attended the University of Nairobi. They have participated in significant exhibitions and publications both in Kenya, (*'NotAboutKarenBlixen'*

a collaborative project that reflected on the present and future relationships between Africa and Europe) as well as exhibitions abroad, including the UK. This level of experience and exposure is unusual among artists in Kenya.

**ArtlabAfrica** is a new cultural platform focused on developing experimental art in East Africa and connecting with an international audience. **ArtLabAfrica participated in 1.54**, The African Art Fair, Somerset House, London, in October 2013. Artists included **Miriam Syowia Kyambi and James Muriuki** (see above), **Gor Soudan and Peterson Kamwathi**. Gor Soudan is a rising star on the scene, his work attracting much positive attention, while Kamwathi has an established and respected reputation, his work having been exhibited in Kenya, the UK, the USA, Holland, Austria, El Salvador and Finland.

Artist **Jimmy Ogonga** is a significant figure. His work takes him frequently to other parts of the world. In 2012 he was guest co-curator for **Addis Foto Fest 2012** (Ethiopia) and other curatorial projects include The Mombasa Billboard Project (2002, Mombasa) and Amnesia (2006-2009, Nairobi). Jimmy has co-curated artistic projects including: 'Space: Currencies in Contemporary African Art' with Thembinkosi Goniwe (2010, Johannesburg), 'GEO-graphics' - with Koyo Kouoh & David Adjaye (2010, Belgium), Incubator for a pan-African roaming biennial as part of Manifesta 8 - with Gabi Ngcobo, Center for Historical Reenactments (CHR), Johannesburg; Khadija El Bennaoui, Art Moves Africa (AMA); Mia Jankowicz, of Contemporary Image Collective (CIC). In 2001, he founded Nairobi Arts Trust/Centre of Contemporary Art, Nairobi (CCAEA), an organisation that works as a catalyst for the visual arts and the creation of significant art projects.

**Changamoto Arts Fund/GoDown Arts Centre** is an arts fund initiated through a partnership between Kenya Community Development Foundation and the GoDown Arts Centre, with funding provided by The Ford Foundation.

## RELATIONS WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD

In the view of two of Kenya's internationally active artists, artistic culture in East Africa is subject to the familiar struggle between making art and the utilitarian considerations necessary for financial survival. The infrastructure for the visual arts is weak in terms of skills, knowledge and techniques. In their view, among artists who grew up under President Moi, there is a tendency towards self-censorship. This generation of artists does not naturally lead with ideas and not much of the artistic practice in Kenya is informed by critical thinking. More opportunities

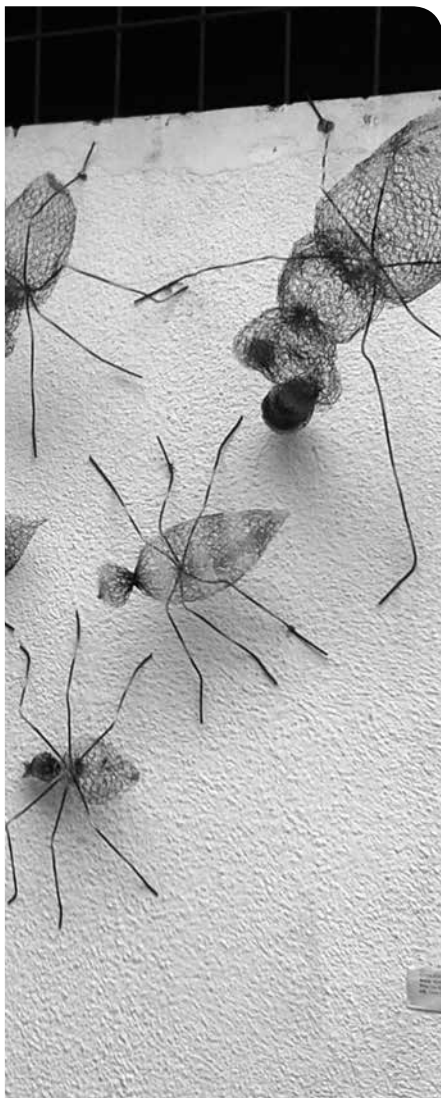
to work with independent curators would therefore be very beneficial to artists and the visual arts sector. There are few major Kenyan artists who would be recognised in an international contemporary visual arts context - maybe 20 or so. Most of these will have studied abroad at some point. There is a big gap in quality between this top tier and the rest.

Contributions from East Africa are missing in the increasingly globalised intellectual discourse and art scene. The Goethe-Institut has been trying to redress this with a series of publications called *Contact Zones NRB*, which include Artists' Monographs.

Funding for programme activities comes mainly from government, charitable and private sources outside Kenya, with some input from European programmes. Stichting DOEN/The Arts Collaboratory and

The African Arts Trust are important players. Cultural organisations including the Goethe-Institut and to a lesser degree the Alliance Française, have some funds for commissioning new work and for publications.

On the wider international scene, the issue of Kenya's first representation at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013) was the subject of great outrage and dismay in both Africa and the UK. The Kenyan government and cultural ministry officials gave the curatorial role to Italians who are unknown to the Kenyan art scene and who included equally unknown Italian and Chinese artists in the exhibition.



# TANZANIA

## GENERAL FINDINGS

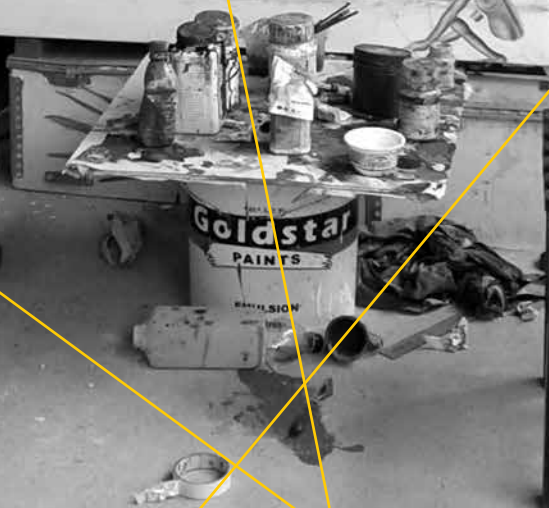
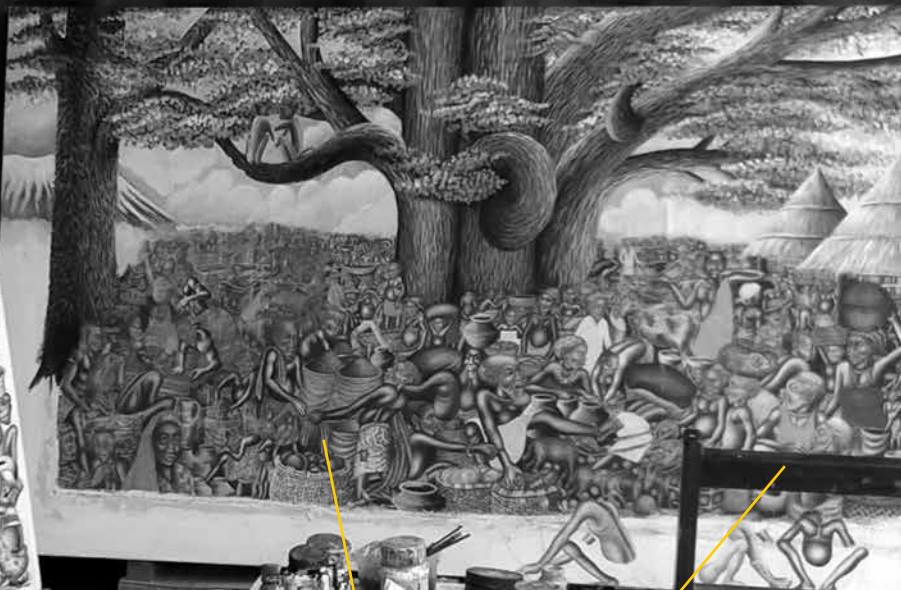
The research for this section of the report took place in Dar es Salaam. The visual arts sector in the city is much smaller than in Nairobi. Making art to sell is seen as a logical way to sustain an artistic practice and make a living. There are reported to be few artists producing good work, by international standards and the overall standards of curatorial and critical input, knowledge and skills, project management and delivery are low. The situation is summarised by **Jan Van Esch, Director, Nafasi Art Space:**

*'There is little discussion or questioning of what art's role can be in society and this aspect needs more focus and development. What is missing is the understanding and debate of what art is and what art can be. The emphasis is more on art as a creative industry. There is a*

*need to move away from seeing the artist solely as entrepreneur. Most of the artists are already small-scale businessmen and many questions need to be asked about the role of creativity and creative work. Unlike the UK or Europe, few are familiar with subsidised art and most will sell work simply to earn a living and not question the kind of art they are making.'*

It was noted there is often 'an inherent reticence to criticise or displease' and that this characteristic inhibits artistic critical debate. Also in some situations, perceived indifference to engage in the knowledge and resources that are being provided, might originate from these not being understood as vital to practice and not as important as earning money.

LUKA  
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ARTIST.



## BEING AN ARTIST IN TANZANIA

As in Kenya, the main source of income for artists is the sale of work. Working in a 'breadline context', some artists will only take part in professional development opportunities if they are paid to do so. Many of the artists at **Nafasi Art Space** work in the applied arts and there is a market for practitioners in graphic arts and illustration. NGO advertising campaigns are one useful source of commissions. Most funding of the arts comes from European sources.

Communication is a significant challenge, even with so few players, with erratic power supply and telecommunications contributing to the exasperation. Traffic jams make daily working a challenge and influence the scheduling of events, impacting on punctuality and timing.

Traditional methods and styles

are an important feature of the art market, whose main customers are expats and tourists. So there is little provocation or questioning, as part of the creative process, a situation that is compounded by the need to sell. Even work of lower quality will sell and there is an incentive for artists to copy popular themes and styles. There is a received idea that art resides in images of antelopes and elephants, natural beauty and peacefulness; figurative landscapes and 'abstracts' often fulfilling the stereotype of 'Maasai' East African art.

Despite these challenges, there is huge commitment, enthusiasm and ambition for improving the sector and a desire to embrace opportunity.

## KEY PLAYERS

**Nafasi Art Space** with **Goethe Institut** are the key players supporting the development of artistic practice.

**Alliance Française** also has a presence in Dar es Salaam and is reported to show more traditional programmes of work.

Nafasi Art Space is a young cultural arts centre set up to improve the visual arts in the country. Started in 2007 as an NGO with support from the Danish Centre for Cultural and Development (DCCD), most of its funding comes from Europe: the Embassy of Denmark, Hivos, Stichting Doen/Arts Collaboratory. The African Arts Trust (TAAT) and the British Council, Tanzania have also supported it. It is led by a dedicated Director, Jan Van Esch, supporting professional development, residencies and exchange between artists from elsewhere in East Africa and abroad. The work is shown publicly, but in Jan's view, there is a significant amount of audience development work to be done.

Situated on a large leafy plot, Nafasi

Art Space promotes contemporary visual arts and supports artistic production through the provision of space and 'entrepreneurship training' (professional development), exchange residencies and exhibitions and events. It works locally, regionally and internationally. The aim is to provide a critical, creative and learning environment to stimulate the creation of contemporary art and thinking, where both technical and theoretical skills can be developed.

Studio space, adapted from sea containers, houses 15 member artists, including painters, designers, illustrators, puppet makers, sign writers and sculptors, as well as musicians and choreographers. A committee selects Nafasi artists and the panel includes representation from organisations in Denmark and others such as Kuona Trust, Kenya. Residencies include short exchanges of three or four weeks duration, as



well as longer terms of three and six months. These promote interactions between the Nafasi collective and visiting artists from East Africa and abroad. There are good exchange relationships with other East African countries, especially Kenya (Kuona Trust) and Uganda (32° East). Artists have also visited from Russia, Denmark and South Africa.

Nafasi Art Space runs a professional development programme, with regular talks and practical sessions on writing CVs and personal artistic statements. There is also a mission to connect to the public and programmed events are designed to reflect the activities at Nafasi for visitors to participate in, purchase and experience contemporary art. The audience comprises local artists and their families, students and expats.

The **Goethe-Institut** was established in Dar es Salaam in 1962 but was

closed between 1998 and 2008. Prior to closure it was situated 'downtown' in a more central location. It is now in smaller premises in the former Polish Embassy. There is no exhibition space as such but the garage is used as a 'white cube' and can be used for exhibition workshops and film screenings. The visual arts programme includes prints, photographs, paintings, usually from established and respected artists and the work will often carry themes that connect to the other programmes, such as music.

Outreach programmes have not been successful. An international artist's residency in the local arts school had to cut down on quality standards due to extremely poor provision, standards of work and management. It was a frustrating experience, although the students profited by the programme and were inspired to try new things out.

The Goethe-Institut's wider programme of work makes good use of networks with other East African countries, especially for festivals and the performing arts. Their audience in Dar is comprised of expats, local artists, students and tourists.

## WIDER INFRASTRUCTURE

Most artists in Tanzania are self-taught, sometimes learning their skills through a family network. Provision for art education is described as 'very poor to non-existent.'

**Bagamoyo College of Art** is the only recognised art institution in the country. It has music and theatre programmes funded by the Norwegian Centre of International Cooperation, but it lacks leadership or position in the visual arts and standards are reported to be low. The **University of Dar es Salaam** has an art department that teaches

theatre, fine arts and music. There is more training available in the commercially oriented graphic arts and some practising artists have this as their background.

**Bookstop Sanaa** is a visual art library and creative learning hub, within Nafasi Art Space. Founded by Co-Director Sarita Lydia Mamseri and housed within Nafasi Art Space, it is an independent organisation that provides a much needed resource of books and media, specialising in Tanzania and wider East Africa. Art education talks and workshops widen the offer that is currently available for studio artists, as well as for students from the Department of Fine and Performing Arts at the University of Dar es Salaam. Sarita Lydia Mamseri is also interested in the artist as an agent of social change through practice. She believes that by increasing the knowledge of art theory and exploring themes relevant to fellow citizens, visual media can subtly

convey and foster a soft political awareness of some of the issues Tanzanians face on a daily basis.

The main platform for exhibiting art works is **The East Africa Art Biennale**, which was hosted by Nafasi Art Space during November 2013. The Biennale is not well enough conceived or managed to attract the support of the Goethe-Institut which, as in Kenya, is an important player in promoting the contemporary visual arts here.

There is reported to be a lack of established or respected contemporary galleries in Dar es Salaam. A number of commercial spaces have closed down in recent months, often due to land redevelopment, including Mawazo Art Centre, an initiative of Rachel Kessi, an artist/choreographer based at Nafasi Art Space.

During my visit, an exhibition celebrating Tanzanian artists George Lilanga (1934-2005) was in development for 2014 at the National Museum, Dar es Salaam. A new cultural heritage centre in Arusha has been set up to preserve Dar es Salaam's historic architecture.

There are some 'artists associations'. Many artists belong to the National Art Council, a government agency for the revival, promotion and development of the arts in Tanzania (BASATA). This offers workshops on business-oriented subjects such as copyright, import regulations and tax, rather than the discussion of practice. Facebook is the predominant network for communication and support between artists.

# UGANDA

## GENERAL FINDINGS

My three days in Uganda included a two-day itinerary organised and hosted by **32° East | Ugandan Arts Trust**.

*Lonely Planet East Africa* devotes a quarter page section to Kampala Art, described as 'home to a healthy and dynamic contemporary art scene'. (No mention is made of the visual arts scene in Kenya or Tanzania). The arts infrastructure of Kampala is lively and fuelled by friendly and open practitioners. Facebook is the predominant digital social network utilised by the arts scene. It provides the only affordable access to the internet as it comes free with phone deals, otherwise it is prohibitively expensive.

Kampala has a long history of nurturing artists and although it is a city with a number of universities and an established art school, there

is still a limited art education, with little exposure to contemporary visual art practice and critical thinking. There are many self-taught artists here too, often working and receiving 'tuition' from generation to generation. As in Kenya and Tanzania, most arts funding comes from mainly European sources.

The general cultural scene is often hampered by road conditions that prevail here as elsewhere in the region, with overburdened traffic systems and congestion and many unpaved roads and pot-holes, adding to the experience of any journey. One of **Goethe Zentrum's** earlier festivals took as its theme 'pot in the hole', with reference to the numerous potholes and 'transformed them into art while involving the public'.

Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa notes the challenges around visual arts practice and artistic education in Uganda - from the restrictive



H. Ewing  
VIA

'points-based admissions system' at government universities, (which often excludes the most talented young artists from BA courses because of their comparatively poor results in more academic subjects), to the significant gaps in young artists' understanding of the rich diversity of contemporary art practice, caused by their lecturers' general lack of exposure and limited access to quality teacher training.

She observes that the state is heavily invested in promulgating its self-image through commemorative statuary in the public realm. But the rigorous critical analysis of this kind of work - and of art's role within a Ugandan public history more broadly - is severely limited. This possibly points to exciting and important opportunities for specialist contemporary art institutions, and suggests where focus might be placed in any future programmes.

## BEING AN ARTIST IN UGANDA

Artists' livelihoods and the economies of selling, against the quality of work being produced and the ongoing need for professional development present similar issues and challenges to those experienced by artists and organisations in Tanzania and Kenya. As in those countries, the main income streams for artists are through selling work, some working to private commission. With universities in town there will be a very small opportunity, for those who are educated, to teach. Again, NGOs can provide lucrative work for artists, as part of their advertising campaigns in illustration and the graphic arts.

Artists' studios are often within residential settings. Some studios may house only one artist and the space will serve as exhibition, gallery and point of sale. As elsewhere, many artists lack professional

training, adopting this way of working as 'a school', with the elders taking on a teaching role for the next generation. Some also make artifacts to sell, such as fabric bags or printed textiles.

Many of the gallery spaces are overcrowded with poor quality work making selection and differentiation difficult. Gallery directors imply there is a growing awareness that 'less is more' but there still seems lack of knowledge in the curatorial aspects of selection and display, with priority given to those works they think will be most popular and/or familiar. Galleries also take artists' work to other countries, such as Kenya, by taking temporary leases in shopping malls and similar.

An established expat scene, created partly by the NGOs, makes for a transient population and often an uninformed art audience. Along with tourists, these groups form most of the art-buying public. Encouraging

and educating a local indigenous audience is a high priority.

Educating the market, for both artists and galleries, is difficult. 32° East is aware that the need to sell work is part of the complexity. As elsewhere in East Africa, the economics of selling are often bound up with not being able to get a job that pays, artists copying each other because of a popular style and the buying habits of the arts audiences.

**Circle Art Agency, Kenya** is widely acknowledged for its role in this endeavour. Both **Bonhams African Art Now** auction and the **Circle Art Agency** auction in 2013 helped bring attention to the market, fuelling interest and prices. **The African Art Fair 1;54**, held at Somerset House, London, in October 2013, to coincide with Frieze Art Fair, heightened awareness too, although West Africa was better represented than East Africa.

## KEY PLAYERS

Key organisations including **Goethe Zentrum Kampala, 32° East | Ugandan Arts Trust, Start Journal** and **British Council**, are all making waves of change to approaches and practice within visual arts, adding significantly to the city's existing arts and cultural network.

**Goethe Zentrum** is immensely committed and positive about current and future programme developments in the visual arts sector in Kampala. Focus is being given to what can be done to further develop the work that has already been established, building on Goethe's programme, such as **LaBa!** and other arts initiatives such as those of **32° East | Ugandan Arts Trust** and **Kampala Arts Festival (KLA ART)**. Director Carolin Christgau thinks it is very necessary to continue the process of 'growing the art' and a public art programme

is a perfect tool in helping to achieve this. Goethe Zentrum is working with artists from many places abroad, especially the diaspora and would very much like the opportunity to work with Ethiopia. A programme is currently in development to link with Brazil.

**32° East | Ugandan Arts Trust** was founded in 2012 as a centre for the creation and exploration of contemporary art, providing the Ugandan art scene with resources, networks and facilities needed to raise the profile of Ugandan art to a national and international level.' **Professional development** and **regional exchange** are at the core of its programme with active programming interactions with organisations in Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia, as part of Triangle Arts Network and in addition to working relationships with the UK. Interestingly there has also been a trend in artists deciding



to **'return back to the village'** and this is reflected in some of their programme partnership development.

Consistency, regularity and permanence both within the organisation and wider relationship building, have been imperative in gaining respect and trust within the visual arts community, which is often the biggest challenge. The focus has been on establishing funding and creating a structure for the organization. Building 'for the duration', rather than a three-year cycle, which is the frequent working pattern of a transient expat culture.

*'It is a reminder that underlines the fact that funding logistics are long term, while being aware we are working in a context, that unfortunately in so many ways, is short-term'.*

Rocca Gutteridge, Co-Director, 32° East |  
Ugandan Arts Trust.

An important part of the development of the organisation has been 32° East's sensitive negotiation of the arts scene, including commercial galleries and independent artists' studios and one that involves an open approach with all of the neighbouring players, 'having an intelligent focus, listening to and working with what is happening naturally here'. Rocca Gutteridge, Co-Director, 32° East | Ugandan Arts Trust.

Significant support and encouragement has been given to visual arts initiatives by **British Council**, in particular by Hugh Mofatt and Patricia Okewolangwe, who have communicated a shared belief and understanding. **32°East** is also home to the **Disability Arts Project Uganda, (DAPU)**, whose Director is Fred Batale. Founded in February 2013, DAPU has ten members, 32° East is used as meeting place and base in which handcrafted artifacts are made to sell as an income-generating activity.

**Start Journal**, the Kampala-based online journal is a widely respected publication that works closely with artists and cultural organisations in the city and beyond. Start Journal is currently collaborating with **32° East | Ugandan Arts Trust**, on a British Council-funded residency. Start Journal is recognised as a starting platform for critical writing in Uganda. The website publishes monthly editions filled with special analysis, documentation, art critiques, artist interviews and other stories about the arts and cultural scene in Kampala and beyond. The online platform allows for a much wider audience and engagement and provides a forum and meeting place for different views on the current art scene. There are regular contributors as well as those from invited authors, who include artists, art promoters and other art professionals with a special interest for original East African arts and culture. All contributors are

paid a small fee and submissions are welcomed from overseas. Start Journal has a close working relationship with **32° East** and is initiating a collaborative 'artist/writer in residence project,' funded by British Council.

## OTHER PLAYERS IN THE UGANDAN ARTS SCENE

**Weaverbird** is a community arts centre; located six kilometres outside Masaka in Ndegeya, it has recently acquired an office base in Kampala as well. Initiated by artist Collin Sekajugo, Weaverbird has community activism at the core of its programme and aims to engage both artists and local residents in creativity. Traditionally a trading town, Masaka was broken by war during the 1970s and part of Weaverbird's aim is to return in part some of the area's legacy of culture, reconnecting people with their roots and reintroducing craft

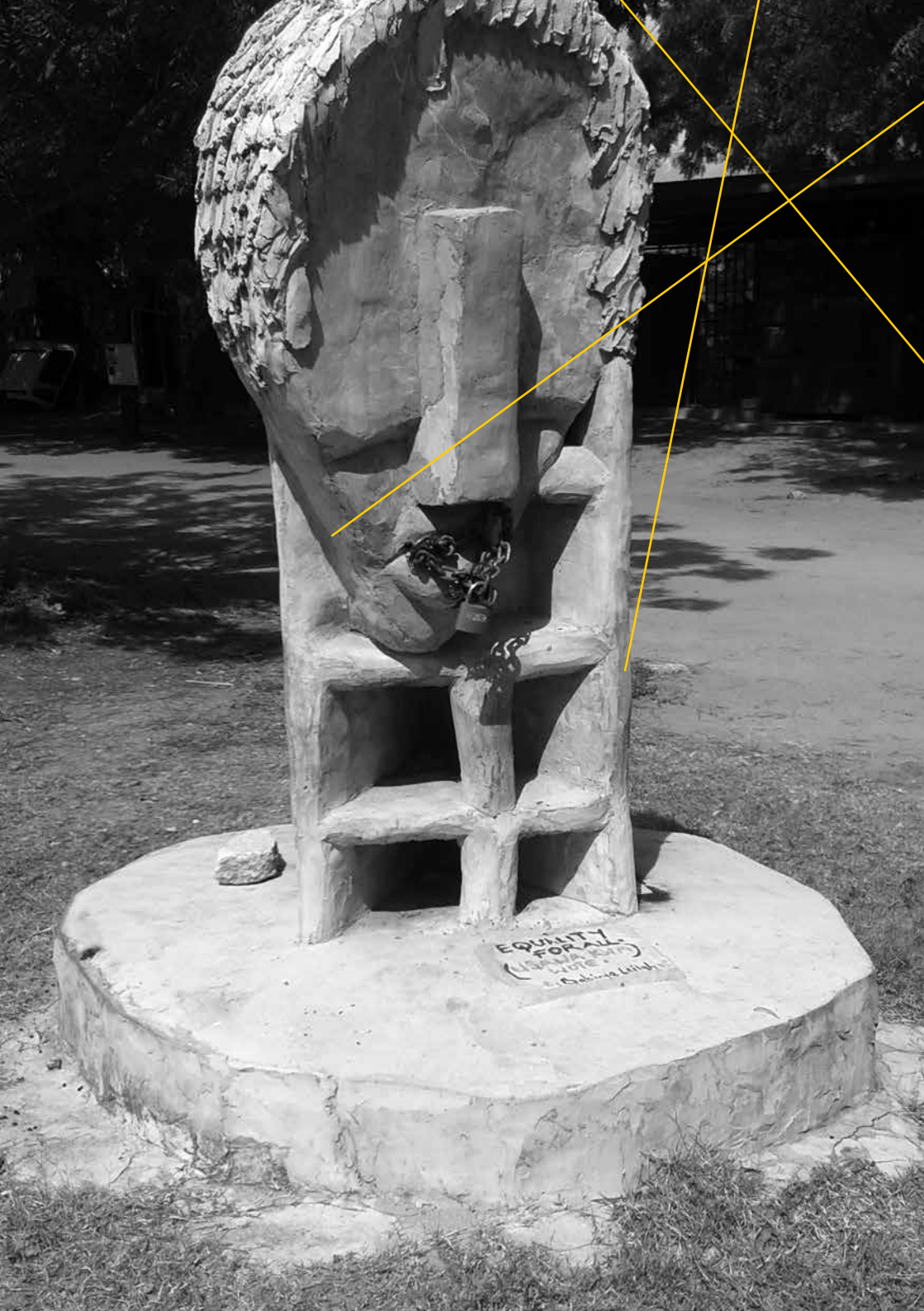
skills through workshops and *Jamaa Sanaa*, a public art programme, where work is made in relation to the village and can speak directly to the community in some way.

Weaverbird facilitates arts residencies, workshops, art camps and festivals for professional artists, with many artists participating from the region, including artists based at Kuona Trust, Kenya and from overseas. Situated in a rural location, Weaverbird has a sculpture garden with plenty of space for three-dimensional work and experimentation. The social element is an important part of the mix with discourse and discussion, especially with events such as the art camps, being good vehicles to facilitate this. Weaverbird is also devising a programme of artistic, cultural tours that explore Uganda from different perspectives that aim to give a wider sense of context and country.

**Ugandan Visual Art and Design Association (UVADA)** is a long-standing organisation and comprises a wide diversity of artists. It has a national executive committee of nine members and operates as an artists' lobbying body to promote and protect artists' rights.

## WIDER INFRASTRUCTURE

**The Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts** was founded in 1937 by Margaret Trowell (who had trained at the Slade School of Fine Art), when the country was still under British colonial rule. Now part of **Makerere University**, it is the oldest higher art education institution in East Africa and continues to have a commanding influence on artistic production, throughout the region. However, the syllabus is static and not much changed since the 1960s and with regard to critiquing contemporary art practice, especially in the public



EQUITY FOR ALL  
(1990-1991)  
by [Name]  
at [Location]

realm, staff seemed reluctant to comment.

**The Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art** at Makerere University (MTSIFA) retains a link with the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London. Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa, a UK artist of Ugandan origin, is currently working between London, Berlin and Kampala. She is an Honorary Research Associate of the Slade School, where she has been tasked with supporting the school in internationalising its curriculum. As part of this work she helped facilitate an exchange residency for Dr Kizito Maria Kasule, who was recently appointed Dean of MTSIFA, in the winter of 2013.

Together with a small group of colleagues from MTSIFA and Kyambogo University, Dr Kizito founded a small new art school near Kampala in 2008. **The Nagenda**

**International Academy of Art and Design (NIAAD)** is successfully enlisting artists and arts educators who are aware of the challenges facing art education in Uganda and who wish to make a change. In January 2015 NIAAD staff, in collaboration with researchers from the Institute of Art Education at the Zurich University of the Arts, will begin a fundamental overhaul of its curricula and its staff development programme as part of a research project entitled 'Decolonizing Art Education'.

The **Makerere Art Gallery**, (now the **Institute of Heritage, Conservation and Restoration, IHCR**) was built in 1968. Located within **The Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts** it houses a unique collection of permanent artworks that document the growth of visual art in the region from the early twentieth century. The exhibitions programme presents contemporary

work and there is interest in developing future exhibitions and related programmes that focus on photography and lens-based media, alongside an ongoing relationship with **The Uganda Press Photo Award**. An accompanying talks and lecture programme links with the work of **Goethe Zentrum, Start Journal** and **32° East/Ugandan Arts Trust**, amongst others.

The **National Museum of Uganda (NMU)** is the oldest museum in East Africa. It is the ‘parent museum’ and has responsibility for other museums, sites and monuments across the country. It is keen to have exposure to ‘other better places’ and to working collaboratively with other cultural partners. **32° East** are currently developing a project with **NMU** and **Deveron Arts**, Scotland.

Other schools, although not with any significant reputation are **Iso Nfumba University School of Commercial Arts**, a private university

in Entebbe, and **Ndejje University, St Lawrence University** also have departments of art and design.

**The Hub, Kampala** forms an essential part of the growing community of Kampala arts spaces. A commercial venture, it provides flexible, co-working spaces for local small businesses and freelance individuals and with a very popular café, it is a central meeting place. The Hub doubles as an events space and has a regular (and dynamic) programme of film screenings, there is also ‘Wazo Talking Arts Meetings’ (Swahili for the sharing of ideas) conceived by David Kaiza, Ugandan writer and journalist, who lives in Uganda and Kenya. The Hub also produces *Arts 256*, a free monthly guide to ‘for Arts, Culture and Entertainment in Kampala and beyond’.

**The Kampala Contemporary Art Festival (KLA ART)**: programmed as part of the Independence celebrations Uganda@50 **KLA ART**

**2012** was a significant event and is now developing as a 'biennial visual arts festival'. Eight Kampala-based organisations collaborated to host the 2012 festival - 32 °East | Ugandan Arts Trust, AfriArt Gallery, AKA Gallery, Uganda Museum, Nommo Gallery, Makerere Art Gallery/ IHCR, Goethe Zentrum Kampala and Alliance Française. For the 2014 edition, - 32 °East | Ugandan Arts Trust will take on the role of main organiser and curatorial lead. *KLA ART* was conceived as a platform to showcase new and emerging ideas and works by contemporary Ugandan artists and key to the biennial project is a strong engagement with a Kampala public. Given a sub title of 12 Boxes Moving, twelve shipping containers were placed at strategic sites around the city to explore new and innovative ways of creating and presenting contemporary art to the public. Twelve artists were selected through an open call but the process was

one of nurturing at every level and developing ideas through a series of workshops. *KLA ART 014* took place in October 2014.

**LaBa! Annual Arts Festival** is a Goethe Zentrum initiative, which has taken place since 2006. It is a two-day, multi-disciplinary event, including the visual arts, that engages with the city and audiences. The festival is conceived to involve communities with the arts, supporting the artistic production and creative industries of Kampala.

**Bayimba Cultural Foundation** is the creator of the **Bayimba International Arts Festival**. The festival is a high-profile, annual event of performing and visual arts, with music as the focus and with platforms that travel to other parts of the country. Bayimba also offer training and workshops for creative development.

**Commercial galleries** and studios include AKA Gallery, Umoja Art Gallery, Afriart Gallery, Paulo Akiki Studio, Art Punch Studios and Karibu Studios.





# ADDENDUM

## TWO SIGNIFICANT FUNDING SOURCES FOR THE VISUAL ARTS IN EAST AFRICA

Arts Collaboratory is a major programme of funding for the support of visual artist-led initiatives in Africa, co-initiated in 2007 by Stichting **DOEN** ([www.doen.nl](http://www.doen.nl)) and **Hivos**, ([www.hivos.org](http://www.hivos.org)) two Dutch foundations as a financial support structure and programme of exchange for art. The programme stimulates exchange between the initiatives in Africa, (Asia and Latin America too) and visual arts organisations in the Netherlands. It provides financial support, facilitates knowledge sharing, and promotes networking and artistic exchange.

The African Arts Trust (TAAT) ([www.theafricanartstrust.org](http://www.theafricanartstrust.org)) is a charitable trust set up by UK collector and philanthropist, Robert Devereux in April 2011, following the successful fundraising auction

of his private collection of post-war British art. Devereaux recognises that there is a wealth of artistic talent being stifled by the lack of resources available locally to full time artists. TAAT supports a wide range of projects with an emphasis on grass roots organisations that support professional practising artists trying to make a livelihood in the visual arts. The Trust is administered by Circle Art Agency. Its total expenditure in 2012/13 was around £80k, an amount that had considerable impact on organisations in need of funding.

