

# **Jewelry as “*Art that has a Life of Its Own*”, Research and Transnational African Culture at Makerere University**

By

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## **Abstract:**

This article engages the proposition that: while the Structural Adjustment Programmes (the SAPs) led to reduction in funding to higher education in Uganda, and as such negatively affected state-funded research, they simultaneously stimulated innovation through research and creativity while transforming jewelry-making at Makerere University’s Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art (MTSIFA) into an art form, a process of research and innovation and an expression of transnational African culture. We deploy a multidisciplinary theoretical framework to [re-]examine the ways in which the SAPs led to scarcities overcoming which invited instructors and students at MTSIFA to transform jewelry-making. We observe and argue that the withdrawal of government funding from higher education has been the very incentive that has motivated art instructors and students at MTSIFA to overcome conventions of instruction and art-making, national borders and insular ethnic identities while expanding the margins of contemporary Ugandan art into a *new* form of transnational culture. In the process they have transformed jewelry-making into a form of art, research and knowledge accumulation relevant to the articulation of transnational ethnic identities. The article re-engages the theme of the “universities in the marketplace. It questions the contention that the commercialisation of higher education in Uganda negatively affected the priorities of Makerere University as a research institution as academics turned to consultancies moving away from the framing of knowledge-oriented research questions.

## **Introduction:**

This article is guided by the proposition that while the Structural Adjustment Programmes (the SAPs) led to reduction in funding to higher education in Uganda and thus killed state-funded research, they simultaneously stimulated innovation through research and creativity while transforming jewelry-making into an art and a form of expression of transnational African culture. We examine a body of artworks produced in the jewelry-making studio by final year students in the period February-May 2016. We have chosen these works because their authors blurred the boundary between art and craft, and overwrote national borders to forge transnational ethnic identities if visually. We place these works into a trajectory of Uganda’s art history. In the process we analyse the link they share with popular culture, diverse scholarships, policy documents, artworks, African literature, the print and electronic medias. We deploy a multidisciplinary theoretical framework borrowing lenses from: (i) critical theory to deal with the question of agency under the SAPs; (ii) cultural studies to attend to questions of postcolonialism and decolonisation; (iii) visual culture studies to contextualise our selected artefacts into Uganda’s art history; (iv) close-reading, content analysis and cross-referencing to draw interesting interconnections between issues originating from disparate disciplines and sources. We attend to the ways in which the SAPs led to scarcities overcoming which invited instructors and students the Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art (MTSIFA hereinafter) to transform jewelry-making into a form of art, research and knowledge accumulation relevant to the articulation of transnational ethnic identities.

## The structural Adjustment Programmes in Uganda: An Opportunity for Jewelry-making as Innovation and research

The postcolonial state in Uganda has faced wars, social, political and economic hardships under the regimes of Idi Amin Dada (1971-79), Milton Obote (1981-85) and the Okello military junta (1985-86). The end of 1981-1986 civil war had been largely celebrated with the hope that life will improve. Kyeyune (2003) argues that the return to normalcy in most areas of Uganda did not resolve the many challenges that resulted from the collapse of the supply chain for education materials. This was particularly so Makerere University by 1995 when the curriculum at MTSIFA was overhauled to include jewelry-making.

To make matters worse, the Bretton Institutes—that is: the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (the IMF)—designed and enforced the structural Adjustment Programmes (the SAPs) on Uganda through Extended Structural Adjustment Facility. These were conditional lending strategies designed by the two institutions and enforced mainly by the IMF with the view of ensuring structural reforms in the economies of the affected countries including Uganda. Many tactics were used including ‘ego messaging’. For example accolades like the “beacon of hope” for Ugandans were deployed to lure President Museveni of Uganda (Gayira, 2016). The trick worked. By the mid-1990s Museveni, an admirer and student of the socialist practices in neighbouring Tanzania, had surpassed many developing countries in implementing the harsh neoliberal SAPs. Generally however, aid was used as an inducement for reform. It helped the successful implementation of the SAPs.

The IMF, World Bank and their supporters argue that the SAPs stimulated economic growth. They [re]produced economic freedom (Boockmann & Dreher, 2003); they led to stability and accountability as governments stayed out of business and concentrated on macro-economic stability, security and infrastructural development. In the process the public service became leaner and efficient. Some even postulated that the SAPs did not increase poverty. This is because although the economic expansions under structural adjustment did not benefit the poor “at the same time economic contractions hurt the poor less” (Easterly, 2003). In other words poverty levels did not increase in the affected economies.

Critiques disagree. They highlight the human cost of the SAPs—see for example Noam Chomsky (1999). Arguments that the SAPs had a negative impact on Ugandans still attract press attention.<sup>1</sup> They have shaped visual art. For example, Fred Kato Mutebi did his print titled *World Bank* in the mid-1990s to critique the alienation and economic marginalisation imposed by the SAPs on Ugandans (Kakande, 2008). Later, in 1999, Bbira did his *Untitled* (The Sale of Uganda Commercial Bank) to question the hurried, and generally suspicious, sale of public banks under the SAPs (Fig. 1). For him the transactions were a scam which did not result into value for money.

Most importantly, since the government of Uganda reduced public spending on the delivery of essential goods and services, critiques contend that the SAPs therefore worsened the conditions of the poor in Uganda. Most specifically for this discussion, government reduced funding for higher education leading to scarcities that affected the delivery of research and education which are key areas at Makerere University. In response the research culture was killed as academicians turned to a “consultancy culture” that had pervaded Makerere University by the turn of the last century (Mamdani, 2005). The way we understand it, by consultancy culture is meant a model of research driven by commercial interests and

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<sup>1</sup> For example on 27 May 2016 *The Observer* reported that “structural adjustment programmes which left many citizens unemployed”—see (Gayira, 2016)

not a particular research agenda premised on the desire to contribute to—and share—knowledge.



Fig. 1 Bbira, *Untitled (The Sale of the Uganda Commercial Bank)*, oil on board, 2000.

In this article we do not reproduce any of the two lines of arguments. We contend that these arguments—among others—are not entirely sustainable. Firstly, most criticism is premised on the assumption that the economy of Uganda is formal hence increases in taxes under the SAPs led to increased tax revenue while it hurt a large population which shouldered an increased tax burden and reduced disposable incomes. But few people in Uganda (mainly civil servants) actually constitute the formal sector and pay taxes. The greater percentage of the population constitutes the informal economy which is largely informal; it remains either nontaxable or taxable but untaxed/undertaxed. For instance, by 2015 about 43% of the economy was informal and hence not taxable (National Planning Authority, 2015). It follows therefore that such a significant sector would not have been affected by the increased taxes under the SAPs.

Secondly the reduction in bureaucracy through retrenchments did not necessarily translate into reduced government expenditure. The president runs a bloated public service with technocrats and presidential advisors. He creates districts now numbering 112 and expected to increase soon. He still gives huge sums of tax payers' money directly to the population (Sørensen, 2000) through direct patronage (Médard & Golaz, 2013) and electioneering (Helle & Rakner, 2013). This is not saving; a lot of the money spent is raised through supplementary budgets which increase, rather than reduce, the debt burden.

Thirdly, most critiques seem to base their criticism (and arguments) on the working proposition that government subsidies benefit the majority of the population in Uganda. As such the reduction in such subsidies necessarily affects many people who have no alternative means of survival. We do not subscribe to this line of argument. We observe that the population of Uganda does not entirely rely on government goods, services and subventions. Alternatives include extended family networks through which many marginalised Ugandans are supported by relatives. The most notable among these are the so-called *nkuba kyeyo*. This category of Uganda's working class has come about as a result of many unemployed, young Ugandans—the so-called *nkuba kyeyo*—migrating to find alternative employment (the so-called greener pastures). These earn and send money from outside which they inject into Uganda. They contributed 3.3% of the country's Gross Domestic Product because they sent

home USD1,075,000,000.00 (The World Bank, 2016). Such remittances cater for, among other things, the needs of their extended families. This point was recently emphasised in the *Kabbo ka Muwala Exhibition* (2016) hosted at the Institute of Heritage Research and Conservation at Makerere University. It must however be emphasised that—as it is seen in Brown Sugar’s music video *Nkuba Kyeyo*—these Ugandans face many hardships including racial discrimination, enslavement, cultural shock, human trafficking, exploitation and death.

There are also benefits resulting from the twin issues of bribery and corruption which are often ignored in official circles. Ugandans still pay bribes to circumvent official bureaucracies including the payment of taxes (Jagger & Shively, 2015); some public servants craft ways of bypassing the SAP-oriented system to extract bribes (Svensson, 2002). Either way, these strategies were not predicted by the IMF and World Bank. They are largely unaccounted for although they shape the environment in which the structural reforms are implemented. With respect to corruption, it is alleged in policy documents that “[c]orruption impacts the poorest sections of society disproportionately, and generally benefits those already in positions of power and authority (National Planning Authority, 2015, p. 41). As such the SAPs insist on improved efficiency and accountability. The Ugandan government has bought this idea. Today, “improving the efficiency and accountability of the public institutions” have become “essential for national building” (Ministry of Finance, 2016, p. 22). However this argument has been rejected for lack of evidence. Journalist Andrew Mwenda has been at the forefront of questioning its empirical (rather than moral) basis. Speaking on Capital Radio on 13 August 2016 Keith Muhakanizi, the Secretary to the Treasury, agreed with Mwenda’s position that there is no empirical evidence to confirm that corruption distorts the economy.

In addition, both supporters and critiques of the SAPs do not pay attention to the agency of the people and how such agency shapes and transforms the negative effects of the SAPs into opportunities<sup>2</sup>. Asserting this agency allows us to see how the challenges imposed by the austerity have been culturally productive in the following ways:

For starters, the SAPs engendered interesting opportunities producing new players in the formal and informal cultural sectors. For example, in the wake of the collapse of state-funded cultural brokers—the Uganda Museum, the Nommo Gallery, etc—new players like Afriart Gallery driven by profit and passion have opened exhibition spaces for artists to showcase their works. This development was made possible by individuals advancing private interests.

Then two, civic action gained momentum. Individuals formed lobby groups. Alex Baine did a painting *Women’s emancipation in Uganda* (1989) asserting that women benefitted. They formed a vibrant women’s movement which gave voice to women as they accessed the public space and broke the shackles of domesticity (Tumusiime, 2012) visualised in the foreground of Baine’s painting.

Thirdly, the structural reforms seem to have opened opportunities in the informal sector. For instance interesting craft villages have emerged around the National Theatre and downtown at Buganda Road among others<sup>3</sup>. They are important alternative cultural brokers.

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<sup>2</sup> For instance as a result of the SAPs the country has a disorganised urban infrastructure. However this lack of order has opened opportunities for unemployed youths who sell pots in the road reserves. See (Kakande, 2015)

<sup>3</sup> Other examples are disorganised and even illegal but no doubt interesting. For example the traffic jams resulting from Uganda’s uncontrolled growth—especially in the urban sector—has been the very opportunity that unemployed youths have used to make concrete flower containers that they sell to motorists stuck in the traffic jams. They operate illegal kiosks in road reserves; they actively participate in politics supporting elites

Further still, the reforms opened opportunities for formal art education and practice. For instance writing in *The Observer* of 15 July 2016 Moses Serugo recalled that through the SAPs Uganda liberalised her economy during the 1990s. This development generated lucrative opportunities in the arts and entertainment industry for educational institutions like Namasagali College a privately-funded educational institution in Eastern Uganda<sup>4</sup>.

We argue that public educational institutions like Makerere University have also benefited albeit differently. In his wood-cut print, titled *Infinite Walk* (1989), Gracie Masembe makes reference to this fact. He created a visual allegory in which people frantically and energetically march across a crowded space to the left through to the top of a building that is identifiably the Makerere University administration block. Some cross a space marked by a pull-up banner inscribed with “EYES B.A.” His choice of font and font size is strategic. It allows the banner to define a point at which some people proceed in the direction of the B.SC, before the number reduces to a few who wave MA and an even much smaller number proceeds to wave DR.

Diplomas were offered at Makerere University by 1989 when Masembe did his print—popular on the list were a Diploma in Music Dance and Drama and a Postgraduate Diploma in Education. Largely however, Makerere University—together with its affiliates—was the sole degree awarding institution in Uganda at the time. Masembe seems to make reference to the degrees that were highly respected awards at the time—the B.A., B.SC., MA and Doctorates. Graduation ceremonies would be attended by the head of state who was also the chancellor; they were broadcast on Radio Uganda and Uganda Television the only two national broadcasters at the time. Naturally few students would proceed to attain graduate degrees, the MAs. The numbers would reduce further at the Doctorate levels. Masembe give visual expression to this historical fact.



Fig. 2 Gracie Masembe, *Infinite Walk* (1989), woodcut print

By 1989 a significant number of students from secondary schools would qualify to join university but could not. Makerere University was admitting a small percentage of students from the many who qualified for university education; competition was stiff. In that same year the number increased as Kyambogo University was created by merging institutions

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who occupy important positions in the local administration, the police and even the presidency. As such they secure their tenure and remain ‘untouchable’ as they illegally occupy all major roads in urban centres like the capital city Kampala. See Kakande (2015).

<sup>4</sup> See Serugo (2015)

which were offering technical, special needs and teacher training education. In 1990 the Islamic University in Uganda was established. And yet the three universities could only absorb 2500 students leaving 6000 out (Mayanja, 2001). This is the number Masembe seems to refer to in his print: they have come close to university education but they cannot have it. They turn to the right of the picture plane where they will exit from the category of the revered African elite that Makerere was designed to produce in the colonial times.

To add to this challenge, during the 1989/90 academic year government abolished all allowances and cut public spending to its two public universities (Makerere University and Kyambogo University) as a result of the SAPs. There were massive uprisings in which the police killed some students.

And yet these two factors became the very incentives that motivated private investors and/or scholars to create many new universities and courses to cater for the high demand for university education. Specifically for MTSIFA, the art school added new courses to its curriculum and improved the old ones placing emphasis on research, experimentation and innovation into new materials and techniques. George Kyeyune was the Dean of MTSIFA in 2007-2011. During our interview he observed that under the structural reforms, art education was not a priority for the government. Government was interested in the sciences. Thus, the school's budget was significantly reduced. He however observed that the reduction was productive: **“we looked inwards, became innovative and improved. Yes indeed it was an opportunity that government withdrew funding”**, he argued.<sup>5</sup> And this is the context in which jewelry-making was added to the curriculum.

### **Jewelry-making at MTSIFA: A Curriculum Decolonised?**

In the conventional sense jewelry would be defined as decorative objects that people wear on their bodies for personal adornment; jewelry-making would relate to the design and fabrication of such objects stressing issues of ergonomics, form, function and technical craftsmanship. However jewelry—and its production and use—can also be unconventional in as far as it can be implicated in political struggles<sup>6</sup>, exploitation and marginalisation of individuals and communities<sup>7</sup>, production of culture<sup>8</sup> and the construction of gender<sup>9</sup>. It is relevant to the construction of class and social hierarchy,<sup>10</sup> identity and culture.<sup>11</sup> Its use in research and production of knowledge can also be rewarding. We argue that at the core of the teaching and learning of jewelry-making at Makerere University is this unconventional approach.

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<sup>5</sup> Emphasis added (Kyeyune, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> For instance the choice of jewelry of a specific colour scheme by the suffragette movement was strategic and political (Goring, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Since it sometimes relies on precious metals, the production of jewelry has also been implicated in the marginalisation and disenfranchisement of individuals and entire populations. It is for these reasons that in December 2009 *The Responsible Jewelry Council* put in place a set of *Principles and Code of Practice* code of ethics to be followed in order to deal with exploitation and protect the human rights of “indigenous peoples” inhabiting parts of the world that produce precious minerals (Council & House, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> See Sandino (2002).

<sup>9</sup> In Buganda jewelry—called *obutiiti*—can only be worn by married women. In a modernised, urban space—where such married women are working in offices—advice is given in the press to such women to keep their *obutiiti* jewelry at home and wear it for their husbands—for example see Musasi wa Bukedde (2013). In this sense the wearing of jewelry taps into a gendered economy in which women's sexuality in Buganda is defined and policed albeit subtly. Interestingly Edward Balaba did an MA(Fine Art) project in which this *butiiti-oriented* power economy is visually productive and can shape ceramic art.

<sup>10</sup> See Galor (2010).

<sup>11</sup> For example see Arnold (2016).

Currently jewelry-making is part of the curriculum leading to the award of the Bachelor of Industrial and Fine Art (BIFA) in which students are instructed in the histories, theories and practices of design, applied and fine arts. The current curriculum is outlined in the *Revised Bachelor of Industrial and Fine Art (BIFA) Degree Programme* (April 2011). It is a three-year programme with each year split into two semesters. However the revisions were technical leaving the bulk of the curriculum in the form it had in 1995 when it was first approved by the Makerere University Senate and Council. It provides good information on the jewelry curriculum since its inception.

A closer review of the curriculum reveals the thinking behind jewelry at MTSIFA. In year one (semester one) students learn the historical and contemporary trends of jewelry-making with special emphasis on the “local market and cultural environment” (CEDAT-MTSIFA, 2011, p. 240) including issues of “indigenous African body adornment” (p. 240). The student is introduced to the history, theory and practice of studio jewelry-making processes from concept design to the finished product. These issues are revisited and given depth in the subsequent semesters in years one and two until the third year where emphasis is placed on projects for a “local Ugandan market environment” (p. 250). Imported metals, acids and coal gas are used in the jewelry studio. However there is emphasis on materials that are “locally available” including brass, aluminium, papers and bamboo.

Elimo Njau was one of Trowell’s students. He graduated from Makerere Art School in 1958 and embarked on a teaching career at Makerere Demonstration School. He is an ardent supporter of the decolonisation of formal art education in the region. In 1962 Njau exhibited works done by his students at the Uganda Museum in *His Master’s Hobby Exhibition* (1962) to illustrate his point. The works were done using organic locally available materials including banana fibres, red anthill soil, etc. Njau’s strategy was to stop dependence on imported materials. Njau used his exhibition to advocate that teachers of formal art look for local alternatives to imported Western materials. Implicitly, Njau was advocating for the decolonisation of formal art education.

There is no evidence to suggest that Njau’s advice received support until the 1990s. His ideas were not embraced by the new leadership at the Art School under Cecil Todd. In fact one of Todd’s students, Kivubiro Tabawebbula, graduated in the late-sixties before he returned to teach at MTSIFA by 2007 when Kyeyune became Dean. Kyeyune recalls that Kivubiro fondly remembered that during the sixties materials would be imported in plenty. Believing that his job was to teach and it was the Dean’s obligation to find materials, Kivubiro was unable to accept the new environment—left behind by Amin’s “economic war” and later the civil war—“which forced the school to be innovative” (Kyeyune, 2016) find alternative locally available materials. We however argue that coming thirty-three years after Njau’s show, the jewelry curriculum was thus among the first courses to admit the concept of local-availability as a basis for teaching and learning in the undergraduate curriculum at Makerere University.

Kyeyune (2003) explains that this change came at the time of two converging developments: Firstly, the School Board was concerned that the curriculum relied on imported materials “in spite of the abundant raw materials the country had for such products.” As such there was “an enthusiasm to begin a new course which largely drew from local aesthetics.”

Secondly, as early as 1976 there was a plan to expand the curriculum and introduce “craft studies” (p. 163). This term is loaded. Kyeyune relies on the *Minutes of the School Board Meeting* to include in it “Graphic design, Textile Design, Ceramics and Jewelry” (p.

264). This scope is probably too generous considering that it is encompassing ceramics which Trowell left behind in the hands of Gregory Maloba by 1958 when she retired. Maloba taught ceramics together with sculpture and modelling until 1964 when John Francis taught it as an independent course. Graphic design and textile design were not new courses by 1976 either; Trowell left them behind. Nevertheless, the Board (and Kyeyune) articulate an interesting context in which jewelry was required as a new course.

Thirdly there was the ‘politics of survival.’ Given that the SAPs had led to reduced subvention from government, the School Board was under pressure to find alternative sources of revenue through “privatisation” in order to remain open. It started a “privately-sponsored” scheme through which students paid tuition. It had to respond to the threat that all faculties that failed to adjust their curriculum, and introduce what was generally described as “marketable courses”, would be closed. In fact a new characterisation emerged for faculties which wrote new courses and attracted big numbers of students and thus revenue from tuition: they were called the “wet faculties”. Here an assistant lecturer, for example from Makerere University Business School, was earning a bigger salary than the Vice Chancellor and Professor teaching in the Faculty of Science which was labelled “the dry faculty”. As such there “were strong indications that if the School had to survive on the ever-decreasing budget, it had to revise its curriculum in the scope of the existing economic realities.”<sup>12</sup>

There is no evidence to suggest that structurally the so-called “wet faculties” were indeed richer than the “dry faculties”. This was a veiled commercial myth intended to motivate academics to create new curriculums. We say it was a myth because no faculty charged market-driven tuition fees. In fact all so-called “wet faculties” were struggling to pay their part-time lecturers. They were not paying for overheads like water and electricity until the University Council resolved to deduct this money centrally and pay the bills. It has failed.

The problem was as economic as it was political. It was economic in the sense that parents could not afford to pay prices dictated by the market forces. And it is here that politics gained an upper hand. Although initially quoted in US Dollars by 1993, the tuition fees policy remained problematic as government regularly interfered with its implementation until its current state where all funds generated from tuition (among other sources) have been taken over by the Government through the Ministry of Finance. The revenue collection and expenditure for the university has ultimately been centralised and further bureaucratised. That said, clearly the myth gradually evolved from a motivational gesture into an open threat.

However we argue that for MTSIFA the threat was productive. BA(Fine Art) was shelved in 1993 and replaced with a Bachelor of Industrial and Fine Art (abbreviated as BIFA) with an expanded curriculum. Old courses were split to suit the semester system and given new names. New departments were born. Among other “marketable courses” like weaving, marketing, business administration, photography (which had been earlier suspended due to lack of materials) and typographic design, jewelry-making was introduced into the curriculum.

In addition, final year jewelry students are, among other things, required to produce “original and self-initiated jewelry especially in sets for specific purposes such as weddings, civic and private ceremonies...business and working environments” (CEDAT-MTSIFA, 2011, p. 251). It is interesting to see how *originality* and *self-initiated-ness* have shaped specific projects in which students went beyond producing for social, and private ceremonies to explore the political (inscribed the civic angle of the course) to express their transnational African ethnicities and identities.

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<sup>12</sup> Kyeyune (2016).



It is interesting to note that the *SAP-imposed* austerity package forced formal art education at MTSIFA to decolonise. This has been most manifested in jewelry-making. Kyeyune agrees arguing that courses like painting and advertising design are still Eurocentric in material and technique; they still rely on imports. To that extent they are still trapped in a colonial legacy. However, jewelry-making relies on locally available materials. “We scavenge wherever and everywhere” find local alternatives and take them through a “very skilful and systematic process” to produce jewelry. Therefore through jewelry the pedagogy at MTSIFA was “decolonised”.<sup>13</sup>

### **Jewelry as “a Piece of Art that has a Life of Its Own”: Jeweling Beyond accessories, Creating Transnational African Cultures and Identities**

Dorah Kasozi Kalule and George Kyeyune are currently teaching jewelry at MTSIFA. Kasozi Kalule is in charge of supervising the development of the idea; Kyeyune supervises “lost-wax as a process for reproducing jewelry.”

This selection of staff was strategic. Dorah Kasozi Kalule, was among the first graduates of this programme. She offered jewelry among her majors. Upon graduation she was retained as a teaching assistant for jewelry. During that tenure she pursued an MA(Fine Art). She researched into how clay, paper, wood, copper, brass, bamboo, leather and fiber can be invested as locally available materials that can be used in the place of imported precious metals like gold, silver or platinum (Kasozi, 2006). Interestingly her project went beyond addressing technical issues to produce objects that were more than pieces of jewelry as accessories; they became artworks (p.51). In addition she observed that historically jewelry is interlaced into a power matrix in which issues of status, identity and culture, among others, were negotiated. She thus created jewelry in which women reclaimed their social status, personality, individuality and femininity framed as attributes of a modern space and time, elitism and sophistication. She demonstrated that functionality and ergonomics are paramount and must be aligned with an individual’s taste. George Kyeyune is himself a painter-sculptor. He experiments with local materials as alternatives to the scarce imported ones. In July 2015 he mounted the *Our Hidden Treasures Exhibition* (2015) at Makerere Institute of Heritage Conservation and Research in which he showcased works demonstrating his experimental research in lost wax using locally available materials. The two were therefore most suited for teaching this course.

In the period February-May 2016 the two directed their students to use lost wax and cast a jewelry set “drawing inspiration from a cultural artefact of their choice drawn from their “ethnic background[s].” The students were obliged to enhance their works using (i) hammering, (ii) stamping, (iii) drilling, (iv) polishing, (v) inlay and (vi) riveting techniques. Function was prescribed in the brief as follows: “the main cast should be used as a centerpiece for your neckpiece while the remaining two parts are used for earrings.” The final jewelry piece had to be “fully functional”; the project had to be submitted together with detailed “illustrations” using a “human bust” to show how the piece submitted “will function.” Students had to use the locally available materials of brass, copper or aluminium.”

In May 2016 the students presented a set of works responding to the above brief. They submitted detailed sketches attesting to varied degrees of draughtsmanship. Through them they demonstrated that jewelry-making is a creative process informed by a sketching process through which the idea, and process of execution, are visually expressed. This is a requirement in all courses; drawing is a core course for all years. The developmental process,

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<sup>13</sup> Kyeyune (2016).

through sketches accompanied by research notes, is specifically examinable at coursework and final examination levels.

We observe and argue that as seen in the drawings submitted sketching for jewelry has become a liberating form of research. It gives chance for one to develop ideas sequentially while expanding the scope of visualized possibilities and concepts. The works demonstrated that jewelry-making can simultaneously function as a process of art-making, be a medium of instruction and research and “a piece of art that has a life of its own.”<sup>14</sup>

However we observe another intriguing development in the works submitted. Sunanda Sanyal (2000) had argued that the instruction and production of art at Makerere University is informed by knowledge of visual vocabulary, art theory and history. This knowledge allows the artist (Sanyal’s “Makerere artists”) to transform an ethnic object (material or oral) into an artwork whose meaning is distant from the original referent and whose position is new and firmly located on the global art circuit. In the process tradition (and thus indigenous culture if we could use this problematic notion) is relevant to the development of contemporary art in Uganda although only as a form of initial reference since the final work enjoys a life of its own. Among the artworks Sanyal studied to make his point were Richard Kabiito’s and Pilkington Ssendendo’s paintings. In his own Ph.D. Kabiito (2010) did not particularly agree with the loss of traditional meaning which continues to shape the meaning (and therefore identity) of the final artwork. In his Ph.D. Ssendendo made a point similar to Kabiito’s. He relied (as traditional referent) on his civet clan identity to produce a body of paintings whose meaning resided in the clan identity itself. In the context of these two artists contemporary Ugandan art does not lose the traditional/cultural references of its meaning and identity. The jewelry projects presented in May 2016 interrogated and expanded these threads of Uganda’s art history.



Fig. 3 Emmanuel Kalule Ssekitto *Ceramic Jewelry* 2016 unglazed pots

Firstly, the works are contemporary art forms whose meaning is not constrained by any (local) cultures and traditions. For example Emmanuel Kalule Ssekitto did his *Ceramic Jewelry* (2016) an experimental project combining ideas from jewelry, sculpture and ceramics of varied sizes and shapes. He constituted the small pieces into necklaces and earrings which he laced around the necks—and lips—of some of the pots he developed from local ideas. The idea was unprecedented. It gave his compositions a sense of individuality as

<sup>14</sup> Kyeyune (2016).

seen in works like *Simplicity* (2016), *Beads and Wigs* (2016), *Thumbs* (2016), *Mechanism* (2016), *Elegance* (2016) and *Double Circular* (2016).

Secondly, the students referred to local cultures that were not their own; they referred to “African” cultures. For instance Specioza Nalule did her *Punu Mask Jewelry* (2016). She was inspired by the “idealised beauty” in this mask “African mask” inscribed in coiffure. Her style is identifiably expressionist and—far from Kasozi Kalule’s and the set brief—not intended to create a wearable jewelry piece. Yet her work is a statement of research, exploration of materials and technique, and expression of African identity. Since she writes that she chose the mask because it represents elite women. It is also arguable that her choice was gendered. Her jewelry, like Kasozi Kalule’s, is an embodiment of elite women albeit differently.



Fig. 4 Specioza Nalule, *Punu Mask Jewelry*, 2016

Other students went as far as soliciting for ideas from Latin America—for instance Florence Nakyeyune’s *Diablo Mask Jewelry* (2016) from the Diablo masks of the Brunka people of Costa Rica. But most students did a search on the African continent: Ethel Anyu with his *Maasai Head Jewelry* (2016) from the Maasai, Solomon Ouma in his *Makonde Jewelry* (2016) from the Makonde, and Brian Mulya in his *Kwele Mask Jewelry* (2016) from the Kwele, among others. All these students remind us of the tone in novels like Camara Laye’s *African Child* (1954). They engaged a (sort of postcolonial or negritudist) quest for authentic cultures and identity. For them peoples like the Makonde of East Africa, kwele peoples of Gabon (DRC and Cameroon), Buna peoples of Burkina Faso, etc., represented the authentic heritages they celebrated through jewelry. In Uganda this belief is shared in visual art,<sup>15</sup> music,<sup>16</sup> dance, poetry,<sup>17</sup> theatre,<sup>18</sup> and film.<sup>19</sup> However it also serves to *otherise* the communities being constructed as the residual, exotic *others* on the fringes of modernity. But there is another productive way to look at it. Kyeyune explains that it harks back to Francis

<sup>15</sup> Two paintings—J. M. Kasapo’s *My Village* (1960s) and Henry Tayali’s *Village Bar* (1960s)—can be cited here as examples.

<sup>16</sup> Kads Band did their song *Ngenda mu Kyalo* (translated: I must return to the village) looking for the authentic wife in the exotic rural.

<sup>17</sup> For instance Okot p’Bitek’ *Song of Lawino & Song of Ocol* (2001) can be cited here for having constructed Lawino as a traditional, rural authentic wife.

<sup>18</sup> For example the play *Bibaawo*. It was presented by The Ebonies and directed by Ssembajjwe in the theatre and on television.

<sup>19</sup> This reminds of comedies like Jamie Uys’ *The Gods Must be Crazy* (1980).

Xavier Nnaggenda who taught at Makerere University from 1978 and retired in 2003. He is a sculptor and painter who believes that a Ugandan may not be geographically located in the Democratic Republic of Congo. However he/she is connected to the Congolese culture because “all Africans are from the same master stroke”; they have the same culture and any African can claim any African culture as his/her own. This philosophy is productive. It has informed Nnaggenda’s work; it appears to be shaping the works of other generations of artists after him.



Fig. 5 Anna Kangume, *Rasta Head Shape of the Rasta African Mask Jewelry*, 2016

That said, clearly some of the cultures informing the student’s works were invented through conventionalised African motifs that cannot be pinned to any peoples—for example Julian Lwanga’s *African Jewelry* (2016). Lwanga’s was not as problematic as the case for some students who uncritically invented ideas—for example Anna Kangume’s “head shape of the Rasta African mask” and Aine Babra’s “Rasta African Mask”. Aine’s idea merits some discussion. She engaged a mask which for her was representative of the religion through which Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia was “worshipped.” Believing as such, she recreated an emperor Selassie with divine status. Obviously the artist read text from *Wikipedia* on Rastafari or accessed narrative accounts for Selassie’s autobiographies—like John Spencer’s *Ethiopia at Bay: A Personal Account of the Haile Selassie Years* (2006). Whatever her sources were, clearly she missed a body of alternative scholarship critiquing Selassie’s bureaucratic-authoritarianism—for example Haberson (1998) and Binnendijk (1987). Neither was her Rasta African jewelry usable in any Rastafari religious rituals. It thus remains as an idealised art form in which the artist idolised Selassie as the “second Christ”, who originated from Jamaica. She as such invented some kind of Selassian-culture/religion. She reproduced it using jewelry as a medium, using an equally invented “African Rasta mask”.

Also, Kyeyune explained that the works submitted represented four months of continuous trials and errors. This was inevitable: “even the most experienced artists fail sometimes.”<sup>20</sup> However, in order to limit the errors and maximise the gains out of the trials, “all precaution was taken”<sup>21</sup> during the preparation of moulds and the lost wax casting process. This was necessary to ensure that apprentices dealt with the “issues of aesthetics” that would create a “piece that has a life of its own”. This life transformed jewelry from being a mere applied art to becoming an object that “was small but enjoying those terms that can be

<sup>20</sup> Kyeyune (2016).

<sup>21</sup> Kyeyune (2016).

said of sculpture.”<sup>22</sup> Ultimately the line between sculpture, as a fine art, and jewelry as the applied art, collapsed. Final year students made jewelry in the form of “**diminutive sculptures...that would allow the beholder to be impacted in the same way as a large sculpture would do.**”<sup>23</sup> In other words the outcomes of the brief were as much art as they were processes of art-making learned at the art school, but whose position is on the global art circuit and not in an artist’s indigenous ethnicity.

However this outcome had some controversies. First, Kyeyune’s diminutive sculptures led to heavy, un-wearable jewelry. This contrasts sharply with Kasozi Kalule’s view and the set brief. Kasozi Kalule read and believed Untracht (2011) who argued that jewelry is meant to be fine and for personal adornment. As we saw earlier, this idea came through her MA(Fine Art) studio project; it shapes her current practice. The two lecturers however came to a consensus to allow the students to progress with minimum interruption and to avoid having their ideological differences disrupt a rewarding process of research and cultural construction.

Secondly, most students’ did not source inspirations from Uganda’s ethnic traditional artefacts for example the royal regalia, traditional symbols and music instruments, pots, baskets, totems among others. Instead they relied on varied inspirations from cultures across Africa which they accessed through the internet. “Had they exhausted our non-figurative traditions as possible resources?”, Kyeyune asked. Many patriotic Ugandans and ethnic nationalists would raise this question while faulting the students for searching beyond Uganda’s borders. In fact for Kyeyune the students’ attitudes confirm that Margaret “Trowell is still alive.”<sup>24</sup> It was Trowell who first expressed the view that Uganda’s non-figurative arts could not shape the country’s modernism. She thus looked elsewhere for alternatives—especially what she called the “Negro sculptures” (Trowell, 1938).

This criticism would suggest that the pedagogy for jewelry is eclipsed by the shadow of Trowell’s legacy. We however argue that such criticism is conservative. Students had a vast array of choices to make. In fact some looked for home-grown cultural resources. For example Annet Kyomuhendo made *Ankole Pottery Jewelry* (2016) from her Ankole tradition; Agnes Mundwa used a traditional Madi long drum called Timba from Northern Uganda to inform her *Timba Jewelry* (2016). The products show timidity; they do not demonstrate an attempt to aggressively explore the materials. However they succeed as expressions of indigenous cultural identities; they can serve a nationalist duty.

## Conclusion

The IMF and World Bank had enforced the SAPs in Uganda. Government cut funding to Makerere University. As a result there was scarcity of teaching and learning materials. MTSIFA is one of the faculties at Makerere University offering fine art, applied arts and design which are not priorities for the government. It faced a threat of closure that motivated its staff to expand the curriculum and introduce jewelry-making. Turning on *originality* and *self-initiated-ness*, and the professional commitments of their instructors, final year students of the academic year 2015/2016 worked under this curriculum to shape specific projects implicated in transnational ethnicities and identities. Some of the cultures they referenced were uncritical inventions; many *otherised* entire communities and cultures. Contrary to the set brief, all the items produced cannot be worn; they fail in as far as functionality and ergonomics are concerned. However this only confirms the flexibility of the course, the absence of dogma and the Socratic curriculum at MTSIFA. It has allowed, jewelry making to

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<sup>22</sup> Kyeyune (2016).

<sup>23</sup> Kyeyune (2016); emphasis added.

<sup>24</sup> (Kyeyune, 2016)

morph into an art form and a field for research and accumulation of knowledge generated from across ethnic identities. We have demonstrated that this development is not independent of government's decision to withdraw subsidies to the art school under the SAPs. In fact the two are contemporaneous. We thus argue that the withdrawal of government funding from higher education has been the very incentive that has motivated art instructors and students at MTSIFA to overcome conventions of instruction and art-making, national borders and insular ethnic identities while expanding the margins of contemporary Ugandan art Uganda into a *new* form of transnational identity. In the process they have transformed jewelry-making into a form of art, research and knowledge accumulation relevant to the articulation of transnational ethnic identities.

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