ART AND GENDER: IMAG[IN]ING THE NEW WOMAN IN CONTEMPORARY UGANDAN ART

BOOK 1

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY in the subject ART HISTORY at the UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PROMOTER: Prof BMR VAN HAUTE

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Declaration:

I declare that Art and gender: imag[in]ing the new woman in contemporary Ugandan art is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

5th April 2012

Amanda Evassy Tumusiime
Title:

Art and gender: imagining the new woman in contemporary Ugandan art

Summary:

This thesis is based on the belief that representations of women in contemporary Ugandan art serve cultural and political purposes. The premise is that the autonomous woman (seen as the new woman in this study), emerging in Uganda in the mid-1980s, agitated for the social, economic and political emancipation of women in Uganda. It has been demonstrated that the patriarchy attempted to subordinate, confine and regulate this new woman. The press, drama, music and film became powerful tools to force her into silence. This study posits that contemporary Ugandan art was part of this cultural discourse. Adopting a feminist art historical stance, it examines and assesses the gendered content of Uganda’s contemporary art masked as aesthetics. On the one hand, the study exposes the view that some men artists in Uganda use their works to construct men’s power and superiority as the necessary ingredients of gender difference. I demonstrate that some artists have engaged themes through which they have constructed women as being materialistic, gold-diggers, erotic and domesticated. I argue that this has been a strategy to tame Uganda’s new woman. On the other hand, the thesis attempts to show that some women artists have used visual discourse to challenge their marginalisation and to reclaim their ‘agency’ while revising some negative stereotypes about the new woman. This study makes an interdisciplinary contribution to Uganda’s art history, cultural studies and gender studies.
List of key terms:

Art and gender; Contemporary Ugandan art; Domesticity; Representations of women; Eroticism; New woman; Makerere Art School; Women’s emancipation in Uganda.
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The research for this study is based on the premise that in the period 1986 to 2009, the Ugandan new woman negotiated her way into the public domain and challenged established conventions and beliefs about masculinity and femininity. It is my belief that formally trained Ugandan artists responded to the emergence of this new woman. This statement is based on the knowledge that representations of women in contemporary Ugandan art serve cultural and political purposes.

The intention is to demonstrate that representations of women are not merely aesthetic statements but that they are also used as tools to reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes held by society. As such they are implicated in the battle of the sexes and to this extent they are gendered.

The methodology is grounded in a feminist perspective to address various aims pertinent to representations of women created by male and female artists. These aims are discussed in relation to the imaginations of the country’s visual artists. As the research progressed, I analysed the myths, objects, traditions, stereotypes, conventions, ideologies and the politics which artists have invested into a complex visual vocabulary which they have invented to image shared perceptions of, fears for and expectations about the new woman in Uganda.

Although I am particularly interested in the post-1986 new woman, I have traced the debate back to the pre-colonial period of Uganda's history. Such an account, discussed in two chapters, is important because it traces the links between current views about non-conforming women and art production to
precedents which existed at the very beginning of the modern state and formal art education in Uganda.

The research is presented in two parts: Part I contains the text in which I establish the history in which Uganda’s women joined the public sphere and became the new woman unrestrained by traditional mores and patriarchal control. I present and interrogate the shifts and discussions they have provoked and how these have shaped the country’s cultural discourse. Endnotes appear at the end of each chapter commencing with new numbering. The bibliography is given at the end of Part I.

Part II contains the catalogue which presents illustrations of the artworks done by male and female Ugandan artists. Some images by non-Ugandans are also included to clarify or strengthen the claims and argument I make in the text. The catalogue is arranged according to the different themes discussed in the text. Images from the print media and photographs are also supplied to strengthen the argument arranged in themes. The catalogue also contains a list of illustrations and empirical data of the artworks.

The thesis contributes to art and gender studies in Uganda. For this investigation to succeed, I received consistent support and encouragement from individuals and institutions whose contributions I need to acknowledge and appreciate. It is not possible to cite all of them but the following need specific mentioning:

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Material on Uganda’s politics, art and art history is often scattered and requires dedication and hard work to find them. Due to the long hours I spent in the archive searching through old stuffy newspapers, I contracted an allergic infection which almost cost me my life. I therefore had to access the
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Photo credits

Photo-documentation in this research is drawn from artists’ private studios, galleries and catalogues.
List of abbreviations

ACFODE Action for Development Advancement of Women Associations
BIFA Bachelors of Industrial and Fine Arts
CMS Church Missionary Society of the Church of England.
FIDA Uganda Association of Women Lawyers
IMF International Monetary Fund
MTS Maternity Training School
MTSIFA Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts
NAWOU National Association of Women's Organisations of Uganda
NCW National Council of Women
NGO non-governmental organisation
NRA National Resistance Army
NRM National Resistance Movement
TASO The AIDS Support Organisation
UN United Nations
UAUW Uganda Association of University Women
UAWO Uganda Association of Women's organisations
UCW Uganda Council of Women
UPC Uganda Peoples Congress
UWEAL Uganda Women Entrepreneurs Association Ltd
UWESO Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans
UWFT Uganda Women's Finance Trust
UWONET Uganda Women's Organisations Network, founded in 1993
YWCA Young Women's Christian Association