

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

BOOK 1

by

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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: imag[i]ning 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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PREFACE

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:

My special thanks and appreciation go to my promoter Professor Bernadette Van Haute who read and guided several drafts which culminated in this thesis. I acknowledge the input I received from the following artists: Dr Angelo Kakande, Dr George Kyeyune, Dr Kizito Maria Kasule, Dr Lilian Nabulime, Dr Venny Nakazibwe, Mrs Alex Baine Byaruhanga, Mrs Maria Alawua, Mrs

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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

library archive through two kind ladies working with Makerere University's Main Library. I thank Ms Medius Tumuhamyie and Ms Maria Gyezaho who made my life easier and healthier.

I would also like to thank staff at the UNISA library. Although some of the books went missing on their way 'up north', the library staff at UNISA were always expeditious in handling my requests. Gratitude of a different kind is owed to Mr Dawie Malan who made sure I received all the relevant reading material I needed from the UNISA library. I also thank Mrs Elena Swanepoel who often helped with the process of registration.

It is expensive to do research of this nature. I therefore acknowledge and am thankful for the generous contribution I received from Makerere University Staff Development Fund and SIDA-SAREC who funded my study in South Africa and field research in Uganda. I specifically need to mention Ms Roy Twinomucunguzi, Ms Kevin, Mr Ngobi, Mr Stephen Kateega and Mr Agara (RIP).

Once again I owe a debt of gratitude to my family and friends for their assistance and encouragement.

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